Fighting the Stereotypes: How Black-White Interracial Couples

Strengthen and Maintain their Relationships

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Table of Contents

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Abstract

Despite increased numbers of intercultural couples in the United States, data shows that the

pairing of non-Hispanic Black-White interracial couples falls short on all scales (Pew Research

Center, 2012). The number of cohabitating interracial couples is almost double the number of

married interracial couples; however, they have the lowest rates of marriage and are more likely

to divorce when compared to all other intercultural couples. To determine what non-Hispanic

Black-White interracial couples must do to strengthen and maintain their relationships, this study

interviewed seven cohabitating couples. The qualitative analysis revealed five themes: Culture,

Secure Attachment, Communication, Authenticity, and Humor. The themes and implications for

couple therapy and future research are also discussed.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Ay, to me;
She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted
By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;
For nature so preposterously to err,
Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,
Sans witchcraft could not (Shakespeare, 1993, p.13).

The mixing of cultures, ethnicities, and races has occurred for centuries. And just as

Brabantio opposes his daughter's marriage to Othello in Shakespeare's famous play, *Othello*,

society continues to make judgments about and around the topic of interracial dating. Interracial

couples were, and continue to be, a taboo topic in society. Although the definition of an

interracial couple has changed time and time again, the response from society has not changed

nearly as much.

Previous sociological research attempted to understand why people intermarry, as

interracial marriage fell outside of "normal" behavior (Bystydzienski, 2011; Childs, 2005; Root,

2001; Rosenblatt, Karis & Powell, 1995). Prior to the abolishment of anti-miscegenation laws,

the stereotypical American thought was '*marry within your own race.*' Today, some of the states

with the highest rates of interracial marriages (California, Florida, Texas, and Oklahoma) are

those states that were last to abolish the anti-miscegenation laws (Root, 2001).

Regardless of the growing population of interracial dating and interracial marriages, the

belief remains that these individuals and their children will have greater difficulty due to the

difference in race, ethnicity, and culture, and so their marriages are "fraught with problems"

(Troy, 2006, p. 76). Therapists and academics anticipate that the experiences of these couples

make them unique, and more difficult to treat due to the discrimination that they face. It is often

assumed that the high rates in separation and divorce for interracial marriages, particularly that of Black-White interracial marriages, is due to the negative experiences and complications brought on by the couple's cultural divide. Although a psychological perspective of interracial couples has been overlooked by many academics, research argues against these stereotypical beliefs (Bratter & King, 2008; Root, 2001; Troy, 2006). Interracial couples, including Black-White interracial couples, experience attachment, distress, and coping in many of the same ways as their intraracial counterparts. Any cultural divide seems to stem more from different experiences with their friends, families, communities, and general support network, which can lead to excess stress in the relationship.

Non-Hispanic Black and White individuals remain the least likely to intermarry, and black women have the lowest percentages of intermarriage. Black-White interracial relationships have the highest separation and divorce rates when compared to all other interracial marriages; they also exhibit the lowest income and education levels (Pew Research Center, 2012). Interestingly, the percentage of non-married Black-White cohabitating couples in 2010 was almost double the percentage of married Black-White cohabitating couples (Pew Research Center, 2012). Although more research now exists on interracial couples, much of the research specifically targeting Black-White interracial couples is at least ten years old; as a result, many of the predictions based on this research may no longer hold true. For all these reasons, this researcher intends to specifically examine healthy Black-White interracial cohabitating couples who show relationship strengths.

This study examines how Black-White interracial couples process stressors that are based on their experience of cultural difference. Using John and Julie Gottman's Sound Relational House model, couples who have developed the first three levels of a sound relationship are

expected to process their specific relational issues in such a way that the content of the issue is less important, and the way the couple connects to one another while working through the issue matters most. Ultimately, this study seeks to find what John and Julie Gottman call the "Masters" in Black-White interracial relationships.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Meanings of Words

As social beings, we notice difference in others, and in doing so, we are able to categorize and differentiate those around us. As individuals, we have unique personalities and characteristics that often provide us membership in groups based on shared customs, as well as privilege based on shared values, beliefs, and traditions (Schwarzbaum & Thomas, 2008). The categorization of others allows us to both connect to people we perceive as like us, and separate from people we perceive as different from us. The process of categorization has also led to centuries of separation, oppression, and value judgments about difference.

The culture of the United States thrives on the categorization and the separation by difference, and it does so by naming and dichotomizing its members. By naming groups of people, Americans have created difference, and difference always denotes "difference from" (Rosenblum & Travis, 2008). Historically, individuals who came to America were European; "contemporarily, they are white Americans" (Rosenblum & Travis, 2008, p. 16). As white Americans became the group with the most power in American society, they also became the group who defined all other groups; they became the "non-defined definers of other people" (Frankeberg, 2008, p. 16). To further define individuals in America, society dichotomizes individuals. Race, sex, class, and sexual orientation are examples of contemporary dichotomous categories. By definition, dichotomizing "is not only to divide something into two parts; it is also to see those parts as mutually exclusive and in opposition" (Rosenblum & Travis, 2008). Thus, regardless of being a "melting pot," Americans managed to categorize and create difference in the United States by both naming difference and dichotomizing it. Comprehending

difference and separation in the United States is important in understanding what separates and defines "interracial" couples.

It is important to understand that the literature on interracial couples defines the term "interracial" in a myriad of ways, making it difficult to compare the results and outcomes of the research. Regardless, by simply defining and researching interracial couples, we inherently discriminate against these couples by defining them as separate, and worthy of study given their unique or different qualities (Childs, 2005; Karis, Powell, & Rosenblatt, 1995). Therefore, it is imperative that the definitions provided be seen as specifically defined for the purposes of this study, and guidelines only. Nonetheless, even with clear terms for this study, it is important to note that many interracial couples do not define their relationship as "interracial," "multicultural," or "intercultural," or by any other term often used within academia (Bystydzienski, 2011; Childs, 2005; Karis, Powell, & Rosenblatt, 1995). As a result, no matter how clearly we define our research terms, they will still fall short of a complete and accurate description of the experiences of these couples.

The Words

Although race is a biological construct, from a constructionist perspective, race is created by society as a term that defines perceived human characteristics that differentiate between categories of people. In the United States, it generally refers to the dichotomous categories of black and white; although, in the 19th century there were three racial categories – white, Negro, and Indian (Rosenblum & Travis, 2008). This is an outdated definition that is not normally used within the field of psychology, and is recognized as a very limited view of human nature. The American Anthropological Association (AAA) notes that "Racial beliefs constitute myths about the diversity in the human species and about the abilities and behavior of people homogenized

into 'racial' categories" (AAA, 1998, para. 8). Still, due to the effects on social life, as created by this social phenomenon, the AAA suggests that research should continue to collect data on experiences based on race (AAA, 1998).

Childs (2005) explains that in the culture of the United States, race is a complicated construct. "The concept of race is not based simply on skin color or ancestry; it also has social, political, and economic meanings and consequences specific to different racial groups" (Childs, 2005, p.3). *Race* is one of the primary areas of difference within the United States and is referred to as a master status by sociologists (Rosenblum & Travis, 2008). A master status refers to a place in the social structure that supersedes all characteristics or qualities of the individual. Individuals can hold multiple master statuses at one time. These statuses overpower or dominate all other statuses when interacting in social situations, and often influence all aspects of an individual's life, including their identity (Rosenblum & Travis, 2008). For example, an African American male who is a vice president at a major corporation attends a networking event with other vice presidents who are predominantly Caucasian males. In this social situation, race and ethnicity are the master statuses that affect the individual most. If a Caucasian female vice president attended the same event, her master status would be her gender. Still, it is important to note that because we hold multiple master statuses at one time, they often interact in a complex way (Rosenblum & Travis, 2008).

For the purposes of this study, *interracial couple* will be defined as a heterosexual couple consisting of one individual of a dominant status and one of a subordinate status. The terms *dominant* and *subordinate* have come to replace the terms "majority" and "minority" in multicultural literature (Schwarzbaum & Thomas, 2008). Dominant and subordinate are used to highlight the social identities of individuals, some of which are dominant and carry more

privilege, while others are subordinate and carry less privilege (Rosenblum & Travis, 2008; Schwarzbaum & Thomas, 2008). These words replace the terms "majority" and "minority" as a "minority" status may be held by a group regardless of the size of the group. Specific to this study, the dominant status will refer to non-Hispanic "White" or "Caucasian" individuals interchangeably. The subordinate status will refer to non-Hispanic "Black" or "African-American" individuals. Furthermore, interracial couples are not, by definition, heterosexual. This study is limited to heterosexual couples due to the added complexities which occur when a racial subordinate status coincides with gay and lesbian subordinate statuses.

The statuses were created to highlight the distinctions allocated by power and social privilege (Schwarzbaum & Thomas, 2008). Schwarzbaum and Thomas (2008) identified white individuals as those with a dominant status and black individuals as those with a subordinate status. As Childs (2005) explained, the oppression of Black-White couples still exists and is often based on the belief that interracial couples violate a social taboo and invisible boundary. The social taboo and invisible boundary are in part created by the different statuses held by the partners in Black-White interracial couples. By identifying interracial couples as a combination of partners from different statuses, this study gives greater credence to the possible cultural differences experienced by both the couple and each partner individually. By crossing into another status, these couples appear to be crossing an invisible boundary that is often not discussed until an individual takes part in an interracial relationship.

Although other interracial couples experience the crossing of invisible boundaries, the combination of partners who are part of separate but subordinate statuses likely leads to different experiences. For example, a Black-Hispanic interracial couple may share experiences of discrimination and power struggles not afforded to White individuals because White individuals

predominantly experience the privileges of being within a dominant status. There is a greater likelihood that Black-White couples experience the same situation from different perspectives, solely based on their experience of being from a dominant or subordinate status.

This study could examine White-Asian, White-Hispanic, or White-Native American interracial relationships, but instead it is focused on Black-White interracial relationships. The literature on interracial couples is often unclear in how researchers define "interracial" and often groups Blacks and Hispanics or Whites and Hispanics into one category. Regardless, the research on non-Hispanic Black-White interracial relationships is deficient, and statistics on non-Hispanic Black-White interracial relationships reflect poorer relational outcomes, including separation and divorce compared to other interracial pairings (Pew Research Center, 2012).

History of Interracial Couples

Interracial couples existed long before sociologists and academics attempted to give them names. As countries around the world made war against each other, traded with each other, and collaborated to survive, the crossing of cultural boundaries was inevitable. Historically, marriages between different cultures and ethnicities occurred as a sound strategic political or economic move (Smedley, 2008). Although the United States has its own history of cultural boundary-crossing, Americans have been tentative to accept individuals who were perceived as having any other skin color than white. America's long-standing history of slavery was wrought with stories of interracial mingling, although it was both frowned-upon and often hidden. The root of the problem with interracial couples in America stems from the history of racism and ethnocentrism which continues to thrive in America today. A primary example of America's

history is the controversy over Thomas Jefferson's relationship with a family slave, Sally Hemmings (Works, 2010).

Some of the research on the history of interracial couples has been biased by the prejudices of the authors, who sometimes portrayed statistics in a positive or negative light, and sometimes contradicted earlier statements by other researchers. Qian (1997), for example, highlighted a 1.5 percent increase in overall interracial marriages over the course of a 22 year period (1970 – 1992) as being a remarkable step forward. While this may have been a notable rise for the timeframe, The Pew Research Center (2012), identified an 8.3 percent increase from 1980-2010, but reported the increase as only a small percentage of the overall marriage rate in the United States. Although one would hope the increase would be larger during the later timeframe, it also highlights the discrepancy in the literature on perceived substantial difference.

The data on early interracial marriages remains unclear. Many authors may speculate on the number of early interracial marriages, but it is unclear how many interracial couples truly existed prior to 1967. The year 1967 marked a poignant stride in the lives of interracial couples, as anti-miscegenation laws were finally abolished in every state. Still, Bell and Hastings (2011) referenced a 1991 Gallup Poll which identified 45 percent of Americans as feeling continued disapproval towards Black-White interracial marriages. As recently as 2001, Jackson and Lewandowski found that White-American undergraduate students viewed Black-White interracial couples in a negative light.

Interestingly, Black-White interracial marriages were, in the past, perceived from a social status perspective. That is to say that the marriage was not seen as an exchange of love; instead, it was seen as an exchange of social statuses and privileges. Marriages, within the exchange theory, consist of partners exchanging one master status for another. In other words, white

women were thought to exchange the privilege and social status based on their race for the higher socioeconomic and educational status of racially subordinate men (Qian, 1997). Therefore, the black men gained status due to their partner's race, while white women lost status due to their partner's race but gained a partner who was more educated than themselves and had a more stable socioeconomic status. Qian's study on the impact of education on interracial marriage shows a more modern viewpoint, in that higher education is positively correlated to a higher likelihood of interracial marriage among whites, Hispanics, and African Americans (1997). Furthermore, Qian's 1997 study points out that racial minorities who are highly educated are more likely to intermarry to maintain "educational compatibility" with their spouse, instead of exchanging their education level for the higher racial status (p.594).

Demographics of Interracial Couples

It should be noted that much of the past research only identifies interracial marriages and gives short shrift to unmarried interracial couples, due in part to the U.S. Census Bureau data and the stigma surrounding interracial dating. Just as many individuals prefer not to identify or label their ethnicity or race on Census forms, couples often do not identify their relationship when asked to do so.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census data, 56.5 million people lived with their spouse and 7.7 million people lived with an unmarried partner. Of those 56.5 million people, only 7% of couples identified as interracial. Nationally, the percentage of unmarried interracial couples almost doubled that of married interracial couples; as of 2010, 14.2% of unmarried, cohabitating opposite sex couples were interracial (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The Western U.S. and Hawaii had the highest percentages of unmarried-cohabitating and married interracial couples, while the

Midwest had the least. In Illinois, 5% of married households were interracial, while 11.7 % of households were unmarried cohabitating interracial partners (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Past data and research also identified the Midwest region in the United States as the least likely to have interracial couples due to the lack of racial diversity (Bratter & Zuberi, 2001). Bratter and Zuberi (2001) reviewed 30 years of census data in order to find trends in interracial marriage and determine whether Americans tend towards assimilation or stratification. Within the Midwest, Blacks were the least likely to marry interracially, and were the least likely to marry outside of their race when compared to Whites, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. Illinois was identified as the most diverse state within the Midwest, but reported the lowest number of interracial marriage (Bratter & Zuberi, 2001). Minnesota, Nebraska, and Kansas had the highest levels of Black-White interracial marriages (Bratter & Zuberi, 2001). Outside the Midwest, Maryland, D.C., Virginia, Texas, and Oklahoma were identified as the states with the highest levels of Black-White interracial marriage (Bratter & Zuberi, 2001).

The term assimilation as it was used by Bratter and Zuberi (2001) meant that cultures, ethnicities, and races would naturally merge as individuals lived together because they would inevitably cross paths. Qian (1997) cited a 1964 book by Gordon that identified interracial marriage as the final stage in assimilation. Gordon's book explained that America's history of growing diversity should naturally lend itself to the concept of assimilation. However, Bratter and Zuberi's (2001) study provided evidence for the stratification within America. The data collected by Bratter and Zuberi (2001) showed that instead of assimilating, Americans have become more stratified. Within the Midwest and Illinois in particular, stratification can be seen in the physical separation based on ethnicity; that is, ethnicities remain geographically separated which may make them less likely to date interracially (Bratter & Zuberi, 2001).

The Pew Research Center (2012) of the Pew Research Group took the 2008-2010 U.S. Census Data and identified the most recent findings about interracial couples in the United States. This included percentage of interracial couples in the U.S.; percentages based on regions, divorce and separation rates, education and earnings statistics; as well as public attitudes towards interracial couples. The Midwest continues to be the region with the smallest number of interracial marriages, with only 11% of all new marriages being interracial, compared to 22% of newlyweds in Western states, 14% in Southern states, and 13% in the Northeast (Pew Research Center, 2012). Of the ethnicities represented by the Pew Research Center (2012) study, Whites and Blacks remain the least likely of all ethnic groups to date and marry interracially, with only 9.4% of White newlyweds marrying someone of a different race or ethnicity and17.1% of newlywed Blacks marrying someone of a different race or ethnicity. Asians were identified as the most likely to date and marry interracially with 27.7% in 2008, which was a 3% decrease from 2008 (Pew Research Center, 2012). As of 2010, Black-White couples represented the smallest portion of approximately 275,500 newlywed interracial couples at 11.9% (Pew Research Center, 2012).

The Pew Research Center (2012) also looked at divorce rates of couples who "marry-in" and "marry-out." Couples who "marry-in" are those in which both members are from the same ethnic background, whereas couples who "marry-out" are those in which the members are from different ethnic backgrounds. In The Pew Research Center's (2012) article, they explained that an analysis completed a decade-ago reported that all interracial couples had a 41% chance of divorce or separation after 10 years of marriage, compared to a 31% chance for couples who married within their race. They also found that interracial marriages involving non-white males and white females were most vulnerable to divorce after 10 years of marriage. While White

men-Black female couples were "substantially less likely" to divorce after their tenth year of marriage when compared to White-White couples (Taylor et al., 2012, p.14).

Other research reported general instability within interracial marriages, with Black-White marriages being the least stable and Asian-White marriages being more stable than White-White couples (Pew Research Center, 2012). This same study, as cited in The Pew Research Center (2012), stated "the results failed to provide evidence that interracial marriage per se is associated with an elevated risk of marital dissolution" (p.14). Regarding education and income, newlywed Black-White couples are more likely to be college educated and have a higher combined income than Black-Black couples and Hispanic-Hispanic couples. All other intercultural couple combinations have a higher combined income and have a higher percentage of college education than Black-White couples (Taylor et al., 2012). Of note, 20% of Black-White couples married prior to 1980 who are still married are college educated, compared to only 18% of White-White couples. In other words, Black-White couples were as or slightly more likely to be college educated than White-White couples. However, about 17% of Black-White couples married between 2000 and 2010 are college educated compared to 26% of White-White couples who married in the last decade (Pew Research Center, 2012). This shows a surprising change in education level of Black-White couples. In other words, Black-White couples are now less likely to be college educated than White-White couples.

Research on Interracial Couples

More researchers have studied interracial couples in the past thirty years, following the abolishment of anti-miscegenation laws; however, much of the literature remains outdated and biased. By making the choice to study interracial couples, researchers inevitably fall into the role of discriminating against these couples. A vast majority of the literature on interracial couples is sociologically based, and revolves around the question of why people from different races and ethnicities intermarry. By focusing on this question alone, the researchers label these couples, compare and contrast them to intraracial couples, and thus emphasize that the decision to marry such partners violates some accepted norm.

There are a plethora of sociological theories to explain interracial marriage; most of these theories evolve from the idea of assimilation. Much of the sociological research stems from Gordon Milton's famous novel *Assimilation in American Life*, published in 1964. While his idea of interracial relationships and the theory of assimilation may have been groundbreaking at the time, it appears both outdated and culturally inconsiderate today. This is not to say that newer theories have not evolved, but that these theories continue to stem from Milton's original work. Childs (2005), Root (2001), and Rosenblatt, Karis, and Powell (1995), for example, examined the couples ~~themselves~~ to better understand their experiences in the world, and how those experiences may or may not differ from the average intraracial couple. Rather than trying to theorize why these couples came together, Childs (2005), Root (2001), and Rosenblatt, Karis, and Powell (1995) attempted to redefine interracial couples' experiences as both average and part of their growth as a couple.

Despite the body of information gathered by sociologists, couples therapists are left with a mix of conflicting sociological data and preconceived notions about the general experiences of

Black-White interracial couples. For psychologists, a number of questions remain. For example, while there is an increase in Black-White interracial marriages and relationships in some parts of the country, why do so few cohabitating Black-White couples proceed to marriage and why are they statistically more 'unstable' when compared to intraracial and other interracial couples?

Exploring this difference in cohabitation and marriage rates, Schoen and Weinick (1993) hypothesized that when partners cohabitate, they are not as committed and do not seek the similarities (age, ethnicity, race) that married partners seek. Data specific to interracial couples shows that those who marry are more likely to divorce and separate. As a matter of fact, Black-White interracial couples are more likely to divorce than Hispanic, Native American, Asian, other white interracial couples, and all intraracial couples (Pew Research Center, 2012). Past researchers have stated that Black-White interracial couples are prone to separation and divorce because their relationships are unstable and characteristically unhappy (Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006). Bratter and King (2008) and The Pew Research Center (2012) reported that, of marriages within the past decade, 41% of interracial couples divorced by their tenth year of marriage. In comparison, only 31% of intraracial couples divorced within the same timeframe. This could also be due, according to Gaines and Liu (2000), to the fact that many interracial marriages tend to be second marriages and second marriages are more likely to end in divorce.

Bratter and King (2008) found race, ethnicity, and gender variations when studying the separation and divorce rates of interracial couples. The greatest risk of divorce was found when individuals crossed racial boundaries. Divorce rates for homogamous, intraracial marriages amongst both Hispanic White/Hispanic couples and Non-Hispanic Asian/Asian couples were lower than even homogamous Non-Hispanic White/White couples. Despite the lower divorce

rates for homogamous Hispanic couples, the research demonstrated that just by crossing ethnic boundaries couples' likelihood for divorce increased (Bratter & King, 2008).

Bratter and King (2008) also found that, not only did racial and ethnic differences increase divorce rates, but the gender of the spouse mattered. In Non-Hispanic Black/White marriages, the divorce rate doubled in comparison to White/White couples when the White spouse was female (Black husband/White wife). Furthermore, Non-Hispanic Asian husband/White wife couples showed a 59% higher divorce rate compared to White/White couples (Bratter & King, 2008). In contrast, when the gender of the spouse was swapped, the statistics reversed. Therefore, Non-Hispanic White husband/Black wife couples were 44% less likely than White/White couples to divorce and White husband/Non-Hispanic Asian wife couples were almost just as likely to divorce as White/White couples (Bratter & King, 2008); a significant change from when the wife was the White spouse.

One hypothesis, offered by Bratter and King (2008), is that interracial divorce rates are higher than intraracial ones because the individuals in interracial relationships have characteristics that are often associated with higher divorce rates; thus, the couple's divorce or separation has little to do with the difference in race. In particular, Bratter and King noted that when they controlled for background factors, the risk of divorce for Black male/White female marriages was explained (2008). They also hypothesized that Hispanic White/White couples may experience lower divorce rates because their ethnic differences may not be as outwardly noticeably; thus they did not face the same social stigmas faced by Black/White couples (Bratter & King, 2008). Black-White coupling is more likely to be perceived as interracial because the crossing of cultures and races is more visual than the coupling of Asian/Non-Hispanic White for instance. It should also be noted that Bratter and King (2008) found that marriages involving

spouses of mixed race showed completely different and inconsistent divorce rates; thus, there was not enough data to identify the divorce rates for these marriages.

Finally, four specific attributes were found by Bratter and King (2008) to be consistent over time and correlated with marital dissolution: Age/cohort-specific influences, premarital experiences, socioeconomic resources, and couple-level characteristics. Researchers have clearly established younger age at marriage as a significant factor contributing to divorce (Bratter & King, 2008). In the case of first marriages, 48% end within the first 10 years if the woman was under the age of 19 when married, while only 25% end within the same timeframe if the woman was 25 years or older when married (Bratter & King, 2008). Bratter and King (2008) also noted that Black males were more likely to marry at a younger age, which may account for some interracial marriage divorce rates based on the association of age and divorce. Premarital experiences include those experiences that occur before the marriage and shape each spouse's outlook on marriage. For example, experience of a parental divorce is established as increasing risk for relationship instability and divorce (Bratter & King, 2008). Bratter and King (2008) also included "premarital family formation," like having a child or cohabitating prior to marriage, as part of the premarital experiences category (p.162).

Socioeconomic status in the form of income or education is consistently negatively correlated with marital disruption. Although, Black-White interracial couples have lower income and education levels when compared to all other interracial couples, it is unknown whether there is a causal relationship between socioeconomic status and the dissolution of interracial relationships (Bratter & King, 2008). Couple-level characteristics include differences within the couple such as age and ethnicity which are thought to be associated with divorce (Bratter & King, 2008). As discussed by Bratter and King (2008), for interracial couples, research on the

impact of couple-level characteristics is mixed. Some research points to ethnic and racial differences as being correlated to marital instability and dissolution but other research, like one study by Zhang and Van Hook (2009), was unable to find evidence that marital dissolution was caused by interracial marriage. In other words, out of the four factors proposed by Bratter and King (2008), only two (age/cohort specific influences and premarital experiences) have some support, while socioeconomic resources and couple-level characteristics may not be supported by other literature.

Still, Bratter and King (2008) explain that interracial couples do have a higher risk for divorce and argue that this higher risk may not stem from their interracial status, but rather from a combination of other risk factors as discussed above. Furthermore, Bratter and King (2008) and The Pew Research Center (2012) found that a higher divorce rate after 10 years was not the case for interracial cohorts who married before 1980. Of those who were married before 1980 in the Bratter and King (2008) study, same race couples divorced slightly more often when compared to interracial couples (51.1% vs. 46.3%). Interracial couples who married before 1980 were more likely to encounter the continued racial segregation sentiment, as the final anti-miscegenation laws were not considered unconstitutional until the Loving v. Virginia case in 1967. Yet, based on this data, interracial couples who married before 1980 were no more likely to divorce than same race couples.

Knowing that divorce rates for interracial couples increased over time, the question that follows is what, if anything, occurred to increase the separation and divorce rate of interracial couples? Of note, it is difficult to determine whether or not the turning point of 1980 is a statistical artifact in terms of divorce rates for interracial couples. According to Bratter and King (2008), those who were married between 1985 and 1989 showed the largest disparity, as

interracial couples divorced more often when compared to same race couples (55% vs. 35.6%).
The differences in divorce rates, according to the Bratter and King (2008) study, have evened out
over the years and more closely reflect the statistical differences of the 1980 cohort. Interracial
couples who married between 1995 and 1999 had a divorce rate of 20.7% after 10 years of
marriage and intraracial couples had a divorce rate of 13.2%, about a 7% difference.

Bratter and King (2008) provide two hypotheses for the gender interaction found in their
study. Black men/White women couples are more prone to divorce due to their entrenchment in
history. Interracial marriage historically and predominantly consisted of Black men marrying
white women; thus it may be that Black women/White men couples choose their partner more
carefully and have a higher degree of commitment which makes them less prone for divorce, but
Bratter and King noted that this hypothesis was beyond the scope of their study (2008).

Since their first hypothesis does not account the for higher risk rates for White females
who intermarry with other ethnicities, Bratter and King (2008) proposed a second hypothesis.
They offer that interracial marriages encounter greater stigma regardless of the ethnicities of the
partners. Multiple studies show that as a result, White female/Non-White male interracial
couples experience more stigma, decreased familial support and are even more likely to isolate
themselves (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006; Childs 2005; Hill & Thomas, 2000; Killian, 2003;
Yancey, 2003). Community support is strongly associated with relationship satisfaction and
stability (Cox, Wexler, Rusbult, & Gaines, 1997). A lack of community support can
significantly affect the couple's external systems making it more difficult for the couple to
thrive. Furthermore, Bratter and King (2008) add that White women are often seen as a "threat"
to marriage opportunities for Black women and are perceived as "unqualified to raise and nurture
their… non-White offspring" (2008, p.170). Due to these experiences, Bratter and King (2008)

argue that it is possible that White females may experience more of an 'unwelcome context' (p.170). Again, although research shows more overall stigma, the research does not show a direct causal relationship between increased experiences of stigma and divorce for interracial couples.

Zhang and Van Hook (2009) studied the dissolution rates of interracial marriages. They found a strong correlation between ethnicity and race and marital dissolution but "the results failed to provide evidence that interracial marriage per se is associated with an elevated risk of marital dissolution" (Zhang & Van Hook, 2009, p. 104). Although Zhang and Van Hook attempted to control for multiple couple-level variables, their study was unable to fully identify which, if any factors substantially impact marital stability or dissolution rates for interracial couples (2009).

Lastly, it is important to note that a 2011 study by Fu and Wolfinger, which used data from the National Survey of Family Growth determined that the increased divorce rate of Black-White marriages was *not* due to the fact that they were interracial marriages. Instead, Fu and Wolfinger's (2011) statistical analysis determined that Black-White interracial marriages have a higher divorce rate because the divorce rate of Black individuals is higher Fu, Tora, and Kendall's (2001) study which used married university students in Hawai'i found that couples from the same culture but different races were more satisfied than couples from the same race but different cultures. It should be noted that the rate and statistics for interracial and intercultural marriage in Hawai'i is high due to how the islands came into being (Birschoff, 2005). Thus, Fu and Wolfinger (2011) and Fu, Tora, and Kendall's (2001) studies provide support that race may not be the only factor that increases interracial divorce rates. Although these are important findings, they do conflict with some past research which ruled out individual

and characteristic factors. Thus, it is difficult to determine the actual cause of the increased divorce rate for Black-White couples.

It was also hypothesized that interracial couples would more frequently use coping behaviors due to perceived negative interactions resulting from their status as an interracial couple (Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006). This hypothesis was not supported by Troy, Lewis-Smith, and Laurenceau's (2006) findings. Interracial and intraracial couples used equal amounts of coping behaviors and did not appear to experience more conflict or require the use of extra coping skills. This data conflicts with the research findings of many, including Killian (2003), Yancey (2003), and Bratter and Eschbach (2006) all of which identified increased stressors due to negative interactions or lack of community or familial support. The lack of increased coping behaviors may be attributed to the questionnaires utilized by Troy, Lewis-Smith, and Laurenceau (2006), as the questionnaires assessed for general coping and conflict in relationships and did not highlight experiences that are unique to interracial couples. Although interracial couples experience more stressors, it does not mean that they cope more; rather, they may cope in different ways. These different ways of coping, as identified by Foeman and Nance (2002), would not be easily identified using the standardized questionnaires in Troy, Lewis-Smith, and Laurenceau's (2006) study.

Regardless of the mixed literature on interracial couples, the stereotypical view that is often accepted by researchers and the general public is that interracial couples are unhappy and have more difficulties as a direct impact of their cultural and racial differences (Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006). As Troy, Lewis-Smith, and Laurenceau (2006) point out, there is little consistent literature showing that interracial couples are more unhappy than any other type of couple. In fact, Troy, Lewis-Smith, and Laurenceau (2006) found that interracial couples had

a higher satisfaction rate than the intraracial couples studied. They also found that conflict

patterns were no different than their intraracial counterparts and that attachment style was similar

across all couples. This data was consistent with the findings of Gaines and Liu (2000), whose

research also supported satisfaction in interracial couples.

Ultimately, society and clinicians assume and accept that interracial couples break up as a

result of the cultural differences they experience. However, not all interracial couples are at a

higher risk for divorce. The social shift in 1980 and the gender variation identified by Bratter

and King (2008), followed by the findings of Fu and Wolfinger (2011) do not seem to support

the assumption that interracial couples' problems stem from internal causes and cultural

differences. Perhaps external factors are stronger than some past research expected and internal

factors may be things successful couples *do* rather than fail to do.

Chapter 3: Couple Theories

The following chapter provides two current, empirically validated models of couples'

functioning. Although these models provide the groundwork for understanding the difficulties

couples face and how to work through them; they do not specifically reference interracial or

intercultural couples. This does not mean that the theories are missing something but that how

the theories are applied to interracial couples may differ. The final theory provided in this

chapter is specifically about interracial couples. A second section of this chapter is specifically

dedicated to the literature and theories on the impact of cohabitation on interracial couples. By

reviewing these models and theories, we are able to see where, if at all, they overlap and discuss

the implications of these theories for interracial couples in later chapters. The impact of the

results of this study on the following theories will also be discussed in later chapters.

Sound Relational House Theory

Like the idea of a solid house, a solid relationship is built upon a firm foundation; without

this foundation, it is likely to crumble as it grows and experiences the pressure and forces of the

outside world. John and Julie Gottman, using this analogy, have developed the Sound Relational

House model (SRH). SRH proposes that the foundational requirements for a good relationship

are like the foundation of a house; creating cognitive space, getting to know one another and

building trust are the foundation and first floor of a house. Built on this foundation are

communication and conflict management skills, like the first and second floor of a house.

Finally, aspirational life goals for the couple are built above these requirements and skills, like

the roof of a house. The model itself is well-supported as an efficacious model of couple

therapy, and has excellent long-term predictive validity. It can be used to diagnose a couple's

specific weaknesses, and then target those areas with specific skill-building exercises to increase relationship satisfaction. In total, SRH includes seven levels—Love Maps, Fondness and Admiration, Turning Towards or Away, Positive Sentiment Override, Managing Conflict, Life Dreams, and Creating Shared Meaning (Gottman & Gottman, 2011). The first three levels (Love Maps, Fondness and Admiration, and Turning Towards or Away) build a couple's friendship, the foundation for building a lasting relationship (Gottman & Gottman, 2011).

Love Maps are templates based on one partner's knowledge of the "inner psychological world" of the other (Gottman & Gottman, 2008, p.153). The idea is that partners get to know each other and understand one another's likes and dislikes through positive interaction. This often occurs through showing interest in what a partner has to say or feel, and continuing open communication and data-gathering for the duration of the relationship (Gottman & Gottman, 2008). During the formation of the relationship, couples create cognitive space within their own minds for their partner and the relationship, just as they make space in their dwelling (e.g., a drawer, closet, or medicine cabinet for their significant other). The creation of Love Maps is like creating space in a drawer of one's mind. This takes a very basic level of commitment, but allows each partner to show they are investing in the relationship by learning about their partner's day-to-day life and inner world. Love Maps often must be readjusted during a couple's relationship, as things like life transitions can change an individual's inner psychological world. Love Maps also allow each partner to accurately predict things about the other, such as which stressors will be most difficult and which life priorities are most important. As a result, accurate Love Maps can significantly improve feelings of connection and support in the relationship.

On the second level, couples work to build Fondness and Admiration through expressing respect and appreciation. This is not done in large, grand gestures; rather, it is accomplished in

day-to-day interactions. It means that the each partner is able to see and be seen by the other as showing their investment in the relationship. Each individual notices and highlights things their partner is doing well. Highlighting what a partner is doing incorrectly, could lead to contempt, a communication the Gottmans say is so damaging to the relationship that they refer to it as one of the "Four Horseman of the Apocalypse" (Gottman, 1999). Small gestures can also contribute to what Gottman terms the "Emotional Bank Account," something in which a couple can invest during good times, like a savings account, so that during stressful times and negative relational interactions, the couple can better withstand the cost of such draining interactions. Because they have strong and available memories of rewarding interaction to draw upon, the cost of stressful times is easier to pay (Gottman & Gottman, 2008).

The next level in the SRH theory builds upon Fondness and Admiration and is referred to as Turning Toward bids (Gottman & Gottman, 2008). "Bids" refer to a partner's attempt to communicate their needs and wants to their significant other, while "turning" refers to the other's response. "Turning toward" the partner means attending to the bid for connection, while "turning away" from the partner means ignoring the bid for connection. Bids involve both verbal and nonverbal signs to indicate a desire to connect. For example, one partner may make a bid by voicing a comment on a television show that they are watching. The other may acknowledge the comment, satisfying the desire for some connection in that moment, and "turning toward" the partner. Nonverbal bids for attention can include showing affection, simply sharing a funny cartoon without comment, or making a partner's favorite food. Overall, the benefit of Turning Towards bids is that partners react in a way that shows interest and respect for the other's needs by having conversations, sharing humor, providing emotional support, and offering empathy (Gottman & Gottman, 2008).

According to Gottman and Gottman (2008) when a partner ignores or rejects bids for connection (turning away), it can lead to fewer bids over time, although this theory has yet to be tested. Still, one study by Driver and Gottman found that in a 10 minute period, the number of bids for couples can range from 2 to 100 with a "significant relationship between turning toward bids and the quality of repair during conflict" (Gottman & Gottman, p.153, 2008). In other words, the more often that partners make bids and turn toward each other, the more likely they are to repair relationship damage after conflict, and sometimes even prevent damage. Again, this highlights the importance of turning toward bids, as this behavior leads to added investment in the Emotional Bank Account – something that can be done 100 times over the course of 10 minutes for some couples.

The next part of the SRH model includes two levels related to managing conflict. Like all the levels before them, both of these levels are built on the successes of the prior levels. The two levels in the middle portion of the house are The Positive Perspective and Managing Conflict. The Positive Perspective is about getting a couple to a point where they experience positivity rather than negativity, even during conflict. The Gottmans use the term "Positive Sentiment Override" (PSO) to describe the experience they expect couples to have at this level. PSO is the opposite of Negative Sentiment Override (NSO), a state in which an individual is so overwhelmed with negative feelings that even a neutral or positive conversation can be heard as negative. In other words, individuals are primed to receive negative messages and are unable to hear positive or neutral one (Gottman & Gottman, 2011). Furthermore, Gottman and Gottman (2011) argue that NSO cannot be changed into PSO without the secure foundation created by the prior three levels. As couples add to the Emotional Bank Account during those first three levels,

they are more likely to experience PSO, as a "freebie" or natural outcome of Love Maps and Turning Towards (Gottman & Gottman, 2011).

The next level of the house, Managing Conflict, looks at couples' problems from two sides – Solvable Problems, and Perpetual Problems (Gottman & Gottman, 2011). In this level, couples are able to work towards conflict resolution. With problems that are resolvable, couples learn to communicate and effectively manage and resolve the conflict.

The second side manages Perpetual Problems. Perpetual Problems are identified as those problems for which a couple can find no agreeable long-term solution. Gottman and Gottman note that only 31% of couple's problems are resolvable and the other 69% are perpetual (2011). In order to manage Perpetual Problems, the couple needs a strong friendship base and to experience significant PSO. Rather than continuing to argue about Perpetual Problems, at this level, couples learn to communicate about the problem and come to a temporary 'solution.' The problem is not actually resolved, nor will it ever be. Instead, it is expected that couples dialogue about the problem and recognize that there is a difference of opinion. Sometimes couples will create a temporary solution or make a compromise with the knowledge that they will have to continue dialoguing the problem during their relationship and later revise or renegotiate a new temporary solution. Because dialoguing about a Perpetual Problems can stir many negative emotions, The Gottmans argue that the couple must experience significant PSO at this point (2011). They offer a minimum ratio of 5:1; that is that for every five positive emotions, they only experience one negative emotion (Gottman & Gottman, 2011).

The final portion of the house is made up of two levels: Make Life Dreams and Aspirations Come True and Create Shared Meaning. Essentially, the top of the house is about developing a meaningful relationship. The sixth level in the Gottman model, Make Life Dreams

and Aspirations Come True is about expressing and sharing values, beliefs and dreams. At this level, individuals work towards helping their partners realize and reach their life dreams (Gottman & Gottman, 2011). At this level, couples also begin to understand what dreams reside beneath their perpetual problems (Gottman, 1999.)

The seventh and final level of the house is the attic, and it is where Creating Shared Meaning begins. The attic of the house is about the culture of the relationship (Gottman, 1999). Couples "either intentionally create, or do not create, a sense of shared meaning in their life together" (Gottman & Gottman, 2011, p. 1-35). The attic houses the individuals' beliefs, values, dreams, myths, metaphors, history, legacy, and more. The couple shares all of these with one another and they create their own world of meaning. Gottman and Gottman (2011) share that "photo albums and memorabilia" live here and are reminders of their shared beliefs and vision of life together (p.1-36).

Gottman's "Masters" and "Disasters" of Relationships

In multiple studies, Gottman and Levenson studied over 700 couples, following some couples over the course of 18 or more years (Gottman & Gottman, 2008; Gottman, 1999; Gottman & Levenson, 2002). It was at this time that they identified what they termed the "Masters" and "Disasters" of relationships. The "Masters" of relationships were those couples who were able to remain together and happy through the years, while the "Disasters" of relationships were those couples who remained unhappily together or separated (Gottman & Gottman, 2008). The Gottmans explain that a clear and accurate understanding of healthy and adjusted couples cannot be based on therapeutic work with distressed couples (Gottman, 2011; 1999). As a result, many elements of the SRH model are based on their findings about "Masters" of relationships, or happy and stable couples.

One can apply Gottman's SRH theory to interracial couples to better understand the high rates of divorce, separation, and general instability. While past research has speculated and studied "disaster" characteristics of interracial couples, researchers have given little attention to "master" characteristics. For example, we could discover whether there are some areas of relationship functioning in which Master couples invest more time and attention, and develop skills and resources to overcome later stressors. This knowledge might be very helpful to therapists who work with interracial couples.

Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy Model

Emotion Focused Couple Therapy (EFT) is an empirically based model for couple work that was created by Sue Johnson and Les Greenberg. As research on the theory grew, Sue Johnson remained as the primary individual who continued to shape and adapt the theory to what it is today. Johnson's model of couples is based on Bowlby's work on adult attachment (Gurman, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Johnson, 2004). EFT is both intrapsychic and interpersonal, as it focuses on how an individual responds to a partner based on attachment needs and how individuals organize their reactions into cycles and patterns (Johnson, 2004).

Johnson (2008) argues that we are neurologically and evolutionarily wired to emotionally connect with others. The single most adaptive thing we have is our ability to turn to one another in a time of need. Bowlby and Ainsworth's work on attachment tells us that due to early interactions with caregivers, this ability is sometimes inhibited or redirected (Johnson, 2004). EFT helps couples identify their patterns and the emotions that underlie those patterns, and helps couples to communicate those emotions effectively. Because sharing emotions can be a very vulnerable experience, this is often difficult for couples, especially when an individual comes

into the relationship with something other than a secure attachment style (Gurman, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Johnson, 2004).

Thus, EFT works towards helping couples create a secure attachment because this framework views healthy couples as those with a secure attachment bond (Gurman, 2008). Hazan and Shaver's (1987) study based on the work of Bowlby and Ainsworth found that individuals who are securely attached experience the following things: They are better at both giving and receiving support. They are less likely to attribute being hurt by their partners as a malicious intent. Individuals are more empowered, open to new experiences and more flexible. Finally, the more an individual can reach out to their partner, the more individual and separate they become (Johnson, 2008; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Four Stages of Communication for Interracial Couples

Given the number of interracial couples that exist in the United States today, it is important that psychologists understand the experiences of interracial couples and how those experiences shape each couple's relationship. Gurman (2008) states "Multiculturalism has provided the base for couple therapists' broader understanding of the diversity of couples' experience as a function of differences in race, ethnicity, religion…" (p.10). Despite this statement, clinicians' understanding of the difficulties and strides made by interracial couples remains deficient and full of half-truths. Still, there is some guidance offered in the form of theory and Foeman and Nance's (2002) model is one that could be beneficial.

In 1999, Foeman and Nance presented a model by which Black-White interracial couples commune. This model addressed the racial and cultural differences experienced between the partners and between the couple and others. In 2002, Foeman and Nance extended the model. The revised model consists of four stages of communication: Racial Awareness, Coping, Identity

Emergence, and Maintenance. The reader will likely notice that much of Foeman and Nance's

work overlaps the Gottmans' Sound Relational House model.

Racial awareness begins with the awareness of attraction to the other individual, and the

potential for an intimate relationship. Foeman and Nance identify *attraction* as both an

interpersonal and a cultural experience which requires each individual to address *social frames*

and, borrowing a term from the gay and lesbian literature, how to "*come out of the closet*" to

their significant other (2002, p.239). *Social frames* are created by stereotypes. These frames can

include such as that a white man thinks a black woman is "exotic," or that a white man is only

thinking about sex. In another case, a black man who expresses that he likes a white woman's

hair may be thought to reject black beauty and possibly hate himself for his skin color. The

recognition and internal awareness of one's own race places individuals "in the closet." In order

to move forward, each partner must "*come out of the closet.*" This process creates an

examination of feelings, beliefs, and values in each partner which they may never have

recognized, and promotes a deeper understanding of the self. Much like gay, lesbian, and queer

individuals, the process of entering into an interracial relationship often brings up the same

feelings and fears as it does for those who stereotypically "come out of the closet" (Garnets &

Kimmel, 2003).

As the partners interact with their friends and family, and present their significant other, a

range of emotions and experiences often occur depending on individual reactions. This may

pressure the couple to create a completely new *social frame* (Foeman & Nance, 2002). Facing

and challenging these *social frames* with family and friends may be seen as a stepping stone

towards *sensitivity.* Each partner creates an internal awareness of their partner's racial identity.

This means that even when not with their partner, they may think "What would my partner think

if they heard this conversation?" (Foeman & Nance, 2002). The partner becomes aware of status differences and often offers loyalty to the different racial and status groups with which their partner identifies (Foeman & Nance, 2002).

This internal *sensitivity* to a partner's race can be seen as part of the Love Maps, which each partner creates in the Gottmans' model. For partners who can form an accurate and sensitive model of their partner's experience, this kind of *sensitivity* can lead to feelings of acceptance and understanding, as well as safety and some freedom from stereotypes and frames, at least within the relationship. In this same way, Love Maps allow partners to predict one another's behaviors or reactions. Love Maps often include understanding how a partner manages or responds to financial stressors in the same way that *sensitivity* creates an understanding of how a partner may react to a culturally insensitive comment. Furthermore, when a partner learns about their partner's identity, they create Fondness and Admiration. Gottman (2011) states that part of Fondness and Admiration is to "actively build a culture of appreciation and respect" (p.30). Both of these models clearly stress the importance of building trust and friendship, which are the primary elements of the first level of the SRH.

In the second stage, *Coping*, couples come together to decide how to integrate their new understanding of one another and their own culture in their relationship. Foeman and Nance (2002) add that some couples may be forced into this stage due to negative responses from their primary support circles or community; thus, the couple becomes closer than they may have anticipated, and at an earlier stage than they otherwise would have, had they not experienced such a reaction. In order to cope with their new knowledge, the couple *insulates* or *negotiates*, both of which can be proactive and reactive. *Insulation* is a way for the couple to protect themselves from outside influences. This may mean that the couple avoids situations in which

they would anticipate problems. *Negotiation* is a way for the couple to buffer themselves from unavoidable situations or experiences. Negotiation is often proactive, and involves agreeing on ways to interact with the other's racial group. Both *insulation* and *negotiation* are learning processes, and may need to be adjusted as the relationship grows. Foeman and Nance (2002) point out that it is important that the couple not use insulation and negotiation to create an "us against the world" mentality, as it could completely undermine the relationship development (p.245).

Foeman and Nance (2002) offer that the creation of a more fluid identity may help couples overcome obstacles that require *insulation* and *negotiation* because these coping mechanisms are "partially dependent upon how the couple sees itself" (p.245). A fluid identity was used by Harris (2000) to explain the experience of biracial individuals who often feel forced to choose one cultural identity or the other. Although Harris (2000) described biracial individuals, Foeman and Nance (2002) argue that interracial couples can create a fluid identity as a couple by responding to the experience based on the context, rather than based on a static response set. The attempt to change and adapt to different situations may help the interracial couple supportively discuss new experiences, enhance their communication, and strengthen their bond (Foeman & Nance, 2002).

The final quality of Foeman and Nance's (2002) Coping stage (stage 2) is *turning to each other*. Rather than turning to others for assistance in understanding and creating an ideal image of themselves and their relationship, the individuals turn towards one another. This may include affirming a partner's understanding of their own cultural identity or of their everyday interactions with others. Prior research by Gaines (1995, 1997) showed that many individuals in interracial relationships felt that their partners were more understanding and more accepting of

their identity than other people from their own race or culture. Foeman and Nance (2002) stated "In fact, many of the interracial couples we interviewed speak of gaining insight into their own as well as the other's background and behaviors because of their interracial status" (p.245). Foeman and Nance argue that when a couple is unwilling or unable to come together to discuss their difficulties satisfactorily, they are more likely to have issues with their relationship (2002).

Coping builds on *racial awareness* and *sensitivity* in the same way that Fondness and Admiration and Turning Towards build upon Love Maps in The SRH model. *Negotiation* and *insulation* encourage the couple to communicate, learn more about one another and create an identity as a couple. Communication, trust, and creating an identity as a couple are all created through the first three stages of The SRH model. *Negotiation* and *insulation* requires the couple to turn towards one another for support just like Turning Towards in SRH. The work to create a fluid identity would similarly provide contributions to their Emotional Bank Account. On the one hand, couples who are forced to insulate too quickly may experience more difficulties because they did not have sufficient time to bond and build Love Maps, which include *racial awareness* and *sensitivity*. On the other hand, couples who invest the time and energy needed to face their own stereotypes in a way that strengthens them and brings them closer together as a couple, at their own or at an accelerated pace, they may feel greater fondness, admiration, and trust in their partner.

The qualities of the *Coping* stage can also be seriously taxing for couples. Conversing about known and unforeseen stereotypes, as well as external racism or discrimination can be a challenging experience, even without being in an interracial relationship. However, progressing through this stage can mean the couple learns to bid for support and turn toward each other during very stressful experiences. As a result, they may find it easier to turn toward each other

during normal couple experiences. Further, the experience of learning to turn toward each other under such conditions likely adds a significant amount to the Emotional Bank Account which becomes important, as racism would be considered a Perpetual Problem.

Up until this point, the couple has created what Foeman and Nance (2002) consider a "defensive position." The couple created a sense of closeness and bonding through the prior stages, but the *Identity Emergence* stage is where the couple *rethinks* and *reframes* their identity as a couple. In *rethinking*, the couple moves from a position of working proactively and reactively to defend their relationship to a position of creating thoughts and metaphors to sustain the relationship. They no longer feel weighed down by the labels applied by society because they have proudly created their own label. "Their own stories will define them; their metaphors will sustain them" (Foeman & Nance, 2002, p.246). *Reframing* at this stage is an ongoing maintenance management of others' obsession with racial makeup. The support of friends and family, as well as confidence challenging others and their views, can help the couple during this stage. During *Identity Emergence* couples create shared dreams.

The final stage, *Maintenance*, occurs when the couple creates effective outcomes from each of the above stages. At this stage, the couple may feel open to sharing their unique experience with society at large (Foeman & Nance, 2002). In this final stage, couples take their shared dreams and find support and comfort in Creating Shared Meaning with one another. It is important to note that Foeman and Nance's model is not a strictly linear process, but rather a set of stage couples go through at their own pace and time, which may require revisiting one or more of the stages. Each life transition brings new questions about the couple's identity and awareness; thus, a couple may cycle through the stages multiple times during their relationship.

Foeman and Nance's (2002) stages for interracial couples denote both a positive perspective of interracial dating and a model specific to the experiences of interracial couples. This model identifies how interracial couples navigate negative and positive experiences and create their own identity. The creation of a new identity helps the couple strengthen their bond and cope with the pressures and stereotypes presented by society. Furthermore, Foeman and Nance highlight the strengths of interracial couples in a way that few researchers have done.

Understanding and using current couples' therapy models, along with Foeman and Nance's 2002 model can help us understand the experience of interracial couples. The Gottmans' model identifies building blocks that intend to help couples feel bonded and securely attached. The model creates a structure for the relationship. Johnson's EFT model helps couples first build a secure attachment as the base of their relationship, with the expectation that if couples can turn towards one another when vulnerable, their relationship will thrive. Foeman and Nance's model identifies stages specific to interracial couples which can be correlated with The Gottman's structure. If interracial couples are able to fulfill or build a relationship with the structure provided by at least one of these models, it can provide us with a way to identify additional things that interracial couples do to strengthen and maintain their relationships. Conversely, if they get "stuck" at one point in these structures, it could be that couples who thrive, do so by doing something different at that same point, which would be a strength.

Literature Review of Cohabitating Couples

The following section reviews the literation on cohabitation. It provides a history of cohabitating unions and societal expectations that cohabitating couples be married. Past and present research on relationship quality and marital dissolution as it relates to cohabitation is discussed. Furthermore, this section highlights many of the discrepancies which exist in the

current literature. A review of how the cohabitation literature relates to interracial couples is included, as it is important to note that there are more cohabitating unmarried interracial couples than there are cohabitating married couples.

Cohabitation

History is rife with different stories and reasons for cohabitating couples. In ancient Egypt, couples moved in together to declare their unions, as there were no marriage rituals (Solot & Miller, 2002). Unmarried cohabitation was also the norm in medieval Europe (Solot & Miller, 2002). For some time, unmarried cohabitation was frowned upon by society, although the number of unmarried cohabitating couples did not decrease. Today, cohabitation prior to marriage is very popular. Unmarried cohabitating couples continue their popularity and the rates of unmarried and non-engaged cohabitating couples have risen (Cherlin, 2010). The demographics for unmarried cohabitating couples include a range of age, race, class, and familial make-up (Cherlin, 2010; Sassler & Miller).

Research from the past decade shows some discrepancies; however, the general finding is that cohabitation prior to marriage is negatively correlated with marriage stability (Jose, O'Leary & Moyer, 2010; Murrow & Shi, 2010; Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). This association between divorce, relationship quality, and marriage stability was deemed the 'cohabitation effect' (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). Most of the research differentiated couples by their reasons for cohabitating such as financial savings, lifestyle convenience, or evidence of commitment prior to marriage (Cherlin, 2010). Murrow and Shi (2010) studied reasons for cohabitating—precursor to marriage, trial marriage, and coresidential dating—and their correlation with relationship quality. Precursor to marriage was defined as couples who feel confident in their relationship/partner and believe that their relationship will result in marriage.

Not all couples who fall in the precursor to marriage category were engaged. The Murrow and Shi study validated past results for the precursor to marriage category; they found a strong positive effect between marital quality and cohabitation as a precursor to marriage (Murrow & Shi, 2010). The other two categories (trial marriage and coresidential dating) did not result in statistically significant results. The positive correlation between precursor to marriage and relationship quality is one of the few results that does not align with other research which correlates pre-marital cohabitation with decreased relationship quality. Also unlike past research, Murrow and Shi (2010) found no other significant correlations between reason for cohabitating and relationship quality.

Rhoades, Stanley and Markman (2012) found cohabitating couples showed more commitment, but lower satisfaction, and more negative communication than couples in dating relationships. Furthermore, in a longitudinal study, unmarried cohabitators showed a decrease in relationship quality, as well as in interpersonal commitment, after cohabitation began (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2012). When the impact of cohabitation on first marriages was examined, one study found couples who cohabitated before becoming engaged were more likely to report negative interactions and consider divorce after marriage when compared to couples who cohabitated after engagement or marriage (Stanley, Rhoades, Amato, Markman, & Johnson, 2010).

Although the data continues to show decreased relationship quality and stability for cohabitating couples, researchers continue to study the specific causes of distress for couples who cohabitate prior to marriage. As Solot and Miller (2002) point out in their book *Unmarried to Each Other*, there are couples who choose to cohabitate rather than marry, and it is difficult to believe that couples remain together but unmarried for such a long time if they experience

decreased relationship quality. For the purposes of this study, it should also be noted that Cherlin (2010) found significant differences in class factors for cohabitating couples.

Cherlin (2010) found that middle-class cohabitating couples, on average, were four years older than working-class couples. They had higher education levels and were less likely to have children. They listed convenience as their main reason for cohabitating, and were less likely to cohabitate within six months of dating. Conversely, working-class couples, on average, were four years younger than middle-class couples (Cherlin, 2010). They had lower education levels and were more likely to have children. They too listed convenience but also housing as primary reasons for cohabitating. They further listed "to be together" as a primary reason to cohabitate, and were more likely to live together within six months of dating (Cherlin, 2010).

In summary, researchers have not reached consensus to explain the links between cohabitation and relationship quality. Cohabitation may decrease relationship satisfaction, but individuals who choose to marry and then cohabitate may be different from those who choose to cohabitate and then marry. Social class and resources also may play a role in the timing and decision to cohabitate. Based on these findings, it would be reasonable to conclude that individual couple processes, as well as social support and stressors, may also affect satisfaction in cohabitating interracial couples.

The Study of Couples: The Sound Relational House

At this point, a plethora of research on couples is available. Further, the body of knowledge on interracial, interethnic, and intercultural couples has also grown. However, the research on interracial couples remains focused on relationship instability and weaknesses (Bratter & King, 2008). Some research has begun to highlight the strengths of these couples, but to date we still do not understand why they are less likely to marry and stay married.

Society's conceptualization of romantic couples has changed dramatically over the last 60 years. For example, gay and lesbian couples slowly gained recognition and now have marital equality in some states. As a result, from society's perspective, who couples, when they couple, when society recognizes a couple, and how couples are expected to function have all changed significantly. From the couple's perspective, the options for coupling, the demands of coupling, and the support for couples have all changed significantly as well. Gurman (2008) states "Divorce and marital problems are among the most stressful conditions people face" (p. 3). These stressful conditions are likely exacerbated because the processes and expectations for couples have changed so much.

While models of family therapy were developed, couples therapy was largely ignored through the 1940s and 1950s (Gurman, 2008). In 1965 one of the first models specifically designed for the treatment of couples was published. The approach, relying on what was thought to be a cathartic release of anger, required couples to hit each other with foam-rubber bats (Gottman & Gottman, 2011; Gurman, 2008). As it turns out, this "cathartic" release actually built more resentment (Gottman & Gottman, 2011). A number of other theories and approaches evolved over the years by Don Jackson, Virginia Satir, Murray Bowen, and Jay Haley (Gurman, 2008). However, most remained rooted in models of family and system functioning, and were not developed specifically for the treatment of couples. Further, most were developed based on treatment of problematic couples, rather than healthy couples. As a result, the field's understanding of normal and healthy couple functioning has been biased and incomplete. Gottman (2011, ch. 1) explains very clearly how models of healthy couples based on unhealthy couples have been shown to inaccurate or incomplete.

As cited in Gottman (1999), a large study published by Cookerly in 1980 showed that only 11-18% of couples were able to maintain clinically meaningful results one year after receiving what was thought to be "some of the best" marital therapy (p.5). Today, thanks to the research of Gottman, Levenson, Jacobson, Johnson and more, couples therapists have a better understanding of the predictors of divorce or separation, as well as what is required for healthy and rewarding relationships (Gottman, 1999; Gurman, 2008; Johnson, 2004).

Regardless of the accomplishments by many authors, researchers, and therapists, the experiences of interracial couples is understudied. As a result, our understanding of the predictors of relationship dysfunction, as well as the requirements for healthy relationships, for interracial couples is based on a variety of sources from within and outside the field. McGoldrick and Hardy published *Re-Visioning Family Therapy* on the implications of race, culture, and gender within the context of therapy (2008). Mixed-race families are discussed, as are Asian-White couples, but there is nothing that specifically speaks to the experience of Black-White couples. In *Swirling: How to Date, Mate, and Relate Mixing Race, Culture and Creed,* two African American journalists attempt to create a "how-to" guide for dating outside one's race with data they accumulated from blogs and surveys (Karazin & LittleJohn, 2012). Maria Root's *Love's Revolution,* published in 2001, adds a clinical psychology perspective. Although Root's focus is not specifically on Black-White interracial couples, her perspective offers a different and optimistic view of the coupling of all interracial couples. Rosenblatt, Karis, and Powell's (1995) book, *Multiracial Couples,* particularly looks at Black-White interracial couples. Although it uses the history and interviews of Black-White couples to explain the experiences of interracial couples, this approach has not been adapted to clinical work. As well, the publication

is now more than 15 years out-of-date and does not speak to the experience of a younger generation of interracial couples.

Childs published *Navigating Interracial Borders: Black-White Couples and Their Social Worlds* in 2005. Despite the title, she did not separate individuals by ethnicity (African American, European American, Hispanic, Non-Hispanic), but rather grouped her subjects by race (Black or White). Like many other authors, Childs adds an experiential perspective to understand the lives of Black-White interracial couples. However, she did not specifically study healthy couples and what they were doing well in order to maintain their relationships.

In the end, clinicians still cannot explain the higher divorce and separation rates for Black-White couples. Root (2001) hypothesized that interracial couple divorce rates would be no greater than that of intraracial couples. This is not the case, perhaps for many reasons. We know that these couples experience unique challenges, but research shows that it may not be the unique experience of being an interracial couple that inhibits their relationships. It could be that couples are unable to cope with discrimination against their relationship. Or, when these couples experience decreased social and familial support, they are less likely to develop the friendship and thus strong relational bond that the Gottmans identified in the SRH model. What we do know is that Black-White interracial couples are more likely to experience conflict around gender, class, culture, social, and personal differences (Root, 2001). Root (2001) also notes that interracial marriages experience the same kinds of irreconcilable differences or perpetual problems that intraracial couples experience. Therefore, interracial couples may not be more likely to divorce because of interracial issues in the relationship. Rather, they may be more likely to divorce because the stressors associated with an interracial relationship deplete their coping resources and emotional bank account. This leaves them vulnerable to the normal

relationship problems that intraracial couples are able to overcome. Similarly, they may not be more likely to divorce because of reduced support, but the reduced support may be more costly given their increased demands. Rather, the reduced support of community and family requires the couple to spend more of their resources to cope with the stress of discrimination. This leaves them vulnerable to the common relationship and life stressors that intraracial couples are able to overcome.

If these arguments are true, then couple therapists may have to find ways to help interracial couples "do more with less," or make better use of their resources because they face greater demands. This would require therapists and researchers to better understand how interracial couples approach conflict. Do they have a base from which they approach their communication and processing of issues, differences, and experiences regardless of any racial undertones? Or have they created a space within their relationship that maintains an understanding of their racial differences, allowing them to communicate and process their experiences in the same way as intraracial couples?

The Gottmans' SRH model and Johnson's EFT model are not only clinical models for couples therapy, they are also effective models of couple formation and functioning specifically built on research of couples who show stability, duration, and good adjustment. Both the Gottmans' model and Johnson's model are used in couple's workshops to strengthen healthy couples too, and have been replicated for gay and lesbian couples. Thus, we can reasonably expect that these models would apply for heterosexual and diverse couples. By using SRH and EFT the interracial couple model presented by Foeman and Nance (2002) can be linked to the more clinical models created by Sue Johnson and the Gottmans. Thus, by utilizing all three models to understand the masters of Black-White interracial relations, we may be able to create

the building blocks of a bridge to help Black-White interracial couples form happy and stable

relationships. These building blocks can also help clinicians guide interracial couples away from

dissolution and toward stability and adjustment.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Given that the prior approach to research on interracial couples highlights their

weaknesses, particularly their difficulties and instability, this study used a qualitative approach to

understanding the strengths of Black-White interracial couples in a way that few have done

before (Bratter & King, 2008; Childs, 2005; Foeman & Nance, 2002; Sehadri & Knudson-

Martin, 2013). More specifically, this study sought out cohabitating Black-White interracial

couples to better understand how these couples bond and address their differences and move

towards long-term partnerships rather than dissolution. Since this study sought to understand the

experiences of Black-White interracial couples, a qualitative method was chosen.

Participants

The study recruited seven couples who met the following criteria: (a) Couples identified

as monogamous heterosexual, non-Hispanic Black-White interracial couples, (b) both partners

grew up in the U.S., (c) couples were together for at least two years, (d) couples had been

cohabitating for at least six months, (e) both partners were at least 23 years-old when contact

with the researcher was made, (f) the couples must have lived in the Chicago area for at least one

year, and (g) the couple was not in couples therapy at the time of participation. Due to the nature

of phenomenological studies, Creswell (2013) notes that it is best to limit the number of

participants, normally ranging from 3-15. Thus, more in-depth interviews occur in order to

understand the participant's experience of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

By choosing a minimum age for participants, the researcher intended to include couples

who had completed college or have experience in the work-force. The couples were limited to

the Chicago land area in hopes of addressing the low percentages of interracial relationships in

the Midwest in comparison to other areas in the United States. Further, the researcher hoped to identify experiences that are specific to a large Midwestern city which continues to be highly stratified today. The two-year minimum set for the length of the relationship was set with the hope that the couples were more committed to their partner and dependent on their relationship. Zeifman and Hazan (2008) studied attachment in adult pair bonds and found that couples who had been together for at least two years were more likely to express the four defining features of attachment bonds: "Proximity maintenance," "separation distress," "safe haven," and "secure base" (p.437).

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, flyers, Facebook, and word of mouth. A website with basic information about the study and participant criteria was created so participants could read about the study before deciding to contact the researcher. Initially, the researcher sought unmarried cohabitating couples. Although research shows that married couples are more committed and stable overall, cohabitating couples also represent a proportion of couples with strong commitment, often with the intention of marrying (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2012; Jose, O'Leary & Moyer, 2010; Murrow & Shi, 2010; Manning & Smock, 2005). More importantly, the most recent Census data (2010) showed there are almost twice as many unmarried cohabitating interracial couples as married interracial couples (Pew Research Center, 2012). Despite several attempts to recruit unmarried cohabitating couples, the researcher was unable to find couples willing to participate in the research. This may have been due to the specific participant criteria, the limited geographic location, or the limited time available to recruit participants. Given time restraints, the researcher chose to include married cohabitating couples. Of note, only one unmarried cohabitating couple participated in the research and they were also the only couple who had previously been divorced. More information about the

couples can be found in the Results section of this dissertation (Chapter 5) and the Couple

Profiles (Appendix A).

Materials

Prior to meeting with the researcher, each couple confirmed that they met the

requirements for participation based on the flyer or website. As a part of the interview, each

partner was asked to complete a basic demographic questionnaire, which included items like

occupation, income level, and information on prior relationships. The questions contained in the

demographic questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

At the time of the interview, each partner was also asked to complete the Dyadic

Adjustment Scale (DAS) which is a measure used to assess the level of adjustment and quality of

married or unmarried cohabitating couples (Spanier, 1976). The measure is a 32-item scale with

four subscales; dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, and affectional

expression. The DAS has shown acceptable validity and reliability, with a strong correlation ($r =$

.86 for married respondents and $r = .88$ among divorced respondents) to the Locke-Wallace

Marital Adjustment Scale, a previously frequently used measure (Spanier, 1976). A meta-

analysis of DAS reliability scores showed a strong reliability with a mean score of .91 (Graham,

Liu, & Jeziorzki, 2006). Couples whose combined scores are 107 or less on the DAS are shown

to be more distressed. This assessment will solely be used to compare the couples' verbal report

of relationship quality in relation to a valid and reliable measure of relationship quality.

To further assess the first level of John and Julie Gottman's SRH model, partners

completed a 20 item, true or false questionnaire created by the Gottmans and used in their basic

assessment of a couple. Test-retest reliability is not reported for the Turning Towards or Away

questionnaire but it has been validated on 130 couples whom the Gottmans followed for four

years (Gottman & Gottman, 2011).   As a result, this questionnaire is used more as a source for further investigation to assess a couple's strengths and weaknesses. The Gottman's suggest that it be used more as a clinical tool rather than as one in which an interviewer scores and interprets responses (Gottman & Gottman, 2011). Therefore, the tool will be used in combination with the information provided in the interview in order to better understand how couples relate and interact at this stage of the Gottman model. Although there are a number of other assessment tools created and used by the Gottmans, it was expected that the more advanced stages of the relationship would be better understood through the interview and by watching the couple interact.

Sue Johnson's EFT model of couple therapy does not use specific assessment tools in the same way that the Gottmans' model does. Instead, EFT focuses on getting to know the couple and identifying "landmarks" and "incidents;" stories that come up in the couple's interactions that may or may not be understood by both partners (Johnson, 2004). How partners respond to these incidents can provide insight into a couple's attachment style, cycle, and level of distress. Given that some of the open-ended questions used for this study could highlight attachment injuries or incidents where partners might use one another as a secure base, it is expected that the interview and interactions noted during the interview will be helpful in understanding the couple's attachment style.

Interview

It was anticipated that interviews would last approximately 90 minutes. Most interviews took 60-90 minutes with the exception of two; one only took about 45 minutes, and another took about 180 minutes. The length of the interviews depended on how verbose the couple was and how many experiences they had to share. For instance, one of the couples of increased age had

more life experiences to share with the researcher. The shorter interview may have been a product of the researcher's lack of experience or the couple not being as interested in the research. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conducted by the researcher, who is in an interracial relationship; past studies have stated that this may have helped with rapport of the interviewees (Childs, 2005; Rosenblatt, Karis & Powell, 1995). The relationship status of the interviewer was reported to the clients prior to the interview and the interviewer requested that all questions about her experiences wait until the end of the interview. All participants signed an informed consent form at the start of the interview and all of the questionnaires were filled out once the interview was completed.

Analysis

Prior to the analysis, the researcher made every effort to bracket their biases, which can be found in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. Interviews were transcribed by the interviewer/researcher and outsourced to a transcription service. The researcher reviewed all transcriptions for accuracy and corrected errors as necessary.

A qualitative thematic analysis of the interviews was completed. The researcher began the analysis by reading each interview and making notes in the margins. The interviews were then read again and coded for themes. No specific framework was used when reading the interviews; instead, the researcher attempted to find words that fit the experiences and stories told by the couples. Themes were narrowed down based on how many couples expressed the experience. Some theme names were changed to better encompass broader experiences expressed by most or all of the couples. All themes were checked multiple times by the researcher to ensure the quotes were placed within the best-fit theme.

The demographic questionnaire was used to better understand and identify the participant sample, as well as to assess for possible confounding variables. The DAS was scored and the mean and standard deviation of DAS scores for the sample are provided in Chapter 5. The Turning Towards or Away questionnaire was used as a clinical tool to help in assessing the first level of the Gottman SRH model and the mean and standard deviation scores are also reported in Chapter 5.

Ethical Considerations

Due to risk of harm that may be caused by providing couples with their DAS scores, individual DAS scores will not be provided. The researcher explained to the couples how the demographic information and the questionnaires would be used in conjunction with the other data gathered. As there are no specific scores given on the Turning Towards or Away questionnaire, the couples will not be provided with their responses to this questionnaire. The couples were provided with $20 gift cards after the initial interview for their participation in the study. Further, couples can request and receive an electronic copy of the dissertation upon its completion.

Chapter 5: Personal Reflections

"It's just going to be more difficult and what about having children? Have you thought about them?" These are common expressions heard by many interracial couples, including myself. Couples experience all sorts of hardships, but when you tell someone that you are dating someone of another race, the immediate response is that you will experience more difficulties than the average couple. The people who provide these "thoughts" are normally in monogamous, heterosexual, intraracial relationships. I always presumed that the thought that interracial couples have more difficulty with their relationships came from the experiences of individuals who lived through decades of racism and strict racial divides. As I began my research, the reasoning behind interracial couples' difficulties became more complex and less clear. While a history of racism mediated the experiences of many interracial couples, there was little explanation as to why interracial couples continue to experience higher divorce rates and other relational difficulties.

Hearing the above stereotype is an experience of many non-Hispanic Black-White interracial couples, even those who live in a big city. I also heard that I would experience more difficulties, although I am originally from a rural area. When looking at Chicago, I realized that despite Chicago's diverse population, it is apparent to many of the city's residents that there are significant cultural divisions. The city has a long history of neighborhoods divided by ethnic background. Furthermore, the north side of the city is known for housing a predominantly "white" population, and the south side of the city is known for housing the city's "black" population. With such strict racial divides, and in a culture that deems interracial relationships "more difficult," interracial couples have few models of positive interracial relationships.

I had difficulty finding participants for this study, and after discussion with my partner, we realized that we had no friends who are also in interracial relationships. As a result, I also realized that I knew only of my own experiences; because I knew no other interracial couples like mine, I could not generalize what I knew to other interracial couples. We discussed this with friends, who admitted that we were the only couple they knew who fit my participant criteria. Many friends knew interracial couples with on Hispanic and on non-Hispanic partner, but none knew of a single couple with one white and one black partner. In a city of almost three million people, I could not find *one* couple who fit my criteria. During my study, I sometimes noticed a couple out in public who would appear by looks alone to fit my criteria, but I was unable to approach and recruit these couples. I realized then that it was only when I was specifically looking for non-Hispanic Black-White interracial couples for a study that I ever noticed such couples in public. It made me wonder, in such a large city, if these couples go unnoticed, and perhaps experience less discrimination. My own experience as an individual in a non-Hispanic Black-White interracial relationship in Chicago was the most difficult experiences came from our families rather than from strangers.

Keeping a more positive mindset about my own relationship helped me move in the direction of a strengths-based research approach. What, exactly, were we doing *right*? After stumbling upon Foeman and Nance's 2002 article, I was floored. In particular, I recall trying to thoroughly explain the model of intercultural couples to my partner the next morning. My excitement was palpable. I finally found something which not only identified strengths, but was also a model that truly fit my own personal experiences. It highlighted the things my partner and I did, unknowingly, to strengthen and maintain our relationship. Thus, I anticipated that other interracial couples would also do things in their relationship that reflected Foeman and Nance's

research. If the difficulties experienced by interracial couples are truly based on their racial and cultural differences, then it makes sense that working through the cultural differences would ease the difficulties experienced by interracial couples.

On another positive note, it was through my search for participants that I found Chicago's Bi-racial Family Network. The nonprofit network was created in 1980 and supported many interracial and intercultural families during a time where there was little support. Today, the network hosts events, promotes research relevant to intercultural families, and educates individuals on many topics including adopting and raising biracial or intercultural children and disseminating information about intercultural couples. At this time, the network connects with members predominantly through social media, like Facebook, but meetings and other events happen around the city and are promoted through the social media page.   Not only did I find support for my research through the network, but many individuals offered to forward my study on to others that they knew.

Post-Analysis Reflections

My experience in sitting with the participants and hearing their stories was both inspiring and uplifting. I learned that my partner and I were not the only couple who did not have interracial couple friends but I also met couples who found significant support in other interracial couples. Most of the couples expressed enjoyment in participating in my study and some even wanted to know more about my experiences, which I offered to share after we completed the interview. The most unexpected response I received was regarding responses of family and friends. Due to my own experiences, I anticipated that couples may have experienced more difficulty and possible prejudice from families. Instead, the majority of couples had not experienced much prejudice at all. I wonder if part of the couples' positive experiences with

families was due to the age at which they became involved with their partners. Perhaps, their families were less concerned about their life choices with age.

Still, despite my different experience, many of the couples provided great insight into their experiences and how they thought through their choices. In both hearing couples' experiences and conducting the analysis, I often found myself feeling validated in my own experiences with my partner. Furthermore, many of the stories the couples shared were very moving and displayed a sense of togetherness that I had not anticipated seeing. The interviews with my participants spawned conversations with my own partner about our own future and how we might incorporate our cultural backgrounds when raising future children or how we might incorporate it into our own wedding ceremony. Overall, the results of the study are far more uplifting than I could have anticipated and I hope that my study can further research on intercultural couples and families and validate the experiences of other interracial couples.

Chapter 6: Results

Participants

The study recruited seven non-Hispanic Black-White interracial couples who fit the criteria described in the methodology (Chapter 4). Only one of the seven couples was unmarried and cohabitating. This couple was also the only couple where both partners had previous marriages and were divorced. The remaining six couples were all married and had no previous marriages. Prior experiences to living with a significant other varied and is described in more detail in the couple profiles (Appendix A).

The Gottman and Gottman (2011) Turning Towards or Away questionnaire was administered to couples. The questionnaire is based on the SRH model and couples' ability to turn towards their partners in times of need. The questionnaire consists of 20 questions and each partner's responses are simply summed. The sample mean for the questionnaire was 18.14 with a standard deviation of 1.56.

DAS (Spanier, 2001), a standardized assessment tool used to better understand the quality of the dyadic relationship was also administered to each couple. It is composed of four subscales: Dyadic Consensus, Dyadic Satisfaction, Dyadic Cohesion, and Affectional Expression. The scores are totaled to create the Dyadic Adjustment score. The DAS can be administered to one or both partners. If administered to both partners, the Dyadic Adjustment scores for each partner can be summed to create an overall score. All scores are converted into T-scores. The mean for the *combined* Dyadic Adjustment T-scores for the sample was 103.86 with a standard deviation of 3.71.

Although the combined scores for all couples fell within the typical range for couples (Spanier, 2001), meaning that there were no evident concerns, the individual Dyadic Adjustment

score for one male partner fell in the slightly atypical range. This meant that there may have been a possible concern for that couple in particular. That same couple had significantly different scores on all scales except for Affectional Expression. It is possible that the difference was due to cultural variables, difference in understanding the questions on the assessment, or actual differences in the dyad. Another couple also showed greater differences in their scores on Dyadic Consensus and Dyadic Cohesion. Again, there could be multiple reasons for the differences. For that couple in particular, the male partner's Dyadic Consensus score fell in the mildly atypical range (Spanier, 2001).

All other partner's scores differed by less than eight points and fell within the typical range on Dyadic Consensus, Dyadic Satisfaction, and Affectional Expression. Four of the seven couples differed by 10 points or more on the Dyadic Cohesion subscale which assesses the "common interests and activities shared by the couple" (Spanier, 2001, p.14). Again, it is unclear why the couples' scores differed so much on this particular scale. Spanier (2001) warns that ethnic and cultural differences should be taken into account when interpreting the results and determining the factors impacting the relationship dyad. Furthermore, Wong (2009) warns that many marital and premarital inventories are not good tools for assessing the difficulties and experiences of non-Caucasian individuals.

Finally, regarding the demographics of the couples, in five of the seven couples, at least one partner worked in the social sciences or healthcare field, meaning six individuals. The remaining occupations varied and are further explained in the Couple Profiles (Appendix A). Seven of the 14 individuals had some graduate education and all of the 14 had at least some college education. All individuals were employed at least part-time and the average income range for individuals was $50,000 - $75,000 per year. The ages of the participants ranged from

33-64 and the range for the length of relationship was 4-39 years. Four of the seven couples had children together and one couple was discussing the possibility of having children in the near future. One couple had children from previous marriages.

Analysis

A qualitative analysis of the data revealed five prominent themes that couples spoke about in relation to strengthening and maintaining their relationships: *Culture, Secure Attachment, Communication, Authenticity,* and *Humor.* The first three have subthemes which will be discussed in detail below. Overall, the themes revealed were rich and interwoven. Many of the quotes and narratives include multiple themes or subthemes. Furthermore, some of the themes overlap and could interact for a couple.

All couples discussed finding a "balance" within all five of the themes. Although each couple spoke about some themes more than others, no one theme seemed to predominate the experience of the couple, or to take priority over other themes for the couple. Furthermore, their experience of a theme was woven into their individual and couple lives in a way that made it seem like just another aspect of themselves. Finally, couples were also asked about their experience with couple therapy and what they thought couple therapists should know in order to help interracial couples. Their responses are discussed in more depth after the themes.

Culture

Culture was the most prominent theme that couples spoke about during the interviews. Each partner seemed to have an intrinsic cultural sensitivity, which was expressed as a personality characteristic of each individual. There are four subthemes that emerged*: Enrichment and Fulfillment, Recognizing the Impact of Culture, Respect,* and *Protection/Concern for the Partner.*

Enrichment and fulfillment.

The first subtheme of *Culture* was *Enrichment and Fulfillment.* All couples expressed a sense of enrichment and fulfillment that they experienced being in an interracial relationship. As a couple and as individuals they appreciated diversity and sought opportunities to learn about other cultures. They also expressed a deep sense of fulfillment after learning about other cultures, and this was not limited to their partner's culture. This was expressed when "Elizabeth" and "Charles" stated:

Charles: Don't be afraid.

Elizabeth: Don't be afraid. Your comfort zone, get out of your comfort zone and find out about… because there's just so much that we're getting to know [about] different people. It enriches your life. You know different cultures, it enriches who you are.

"Kim" and "Travis" spoke about their experiences as an interracial relationship, and how they may have never had those experiences had they not married someone of another race:

Kim: I think my whole experience in life is different because I met and married [my husband], than it would have been if I met and married the Jamaican man my dad wanted me to marry… The people I socialize with could be different, my children could be different, and probably how I spend my time would be different, perhaps where I lived would be different. And it would be sort of along the same path of how I grew up, which is not bad… people do that. But I think it's been a positive to say that I have drunk beer out of a boot in Wisconsin, right before I danced the Polka with my husband. You know it's like I would have never and maybe that's not what I want to do every Friday night, but I have done it and I have experienced it…and I just think it's enriching.

"Robyn" and "Adam" discussed the feeling that there are always new things to be learned:

> *Robyn: It's never boring… I never tire of like, you know, like hearing different things about [my husband's] family or like, people's experiences or like where they lived and why or, and I mean that's just so different from me. … There's always something like, new to think about or consider.*

"Lilly" and "Marshall" in particular celebrated the diversity of their relationship as a part of their wedding ceremony:

> *Marshall: One of the parts that I wrote, and then we both, you know, wanted to include was an acknowledgement of the fact that, um, you know, just 50 years ago it would have been illegal in … where we were married, to be publically surrounded by our friends and loved ones and to legally be a couple. And so we actually had [our officiate] speak about the, you know, Loving, Loving v. Virginia case.*

"Kim" and "Travis" discussed how they engage and immerse themselves in one another's culture and how they celebrate culture:

> *Travis: I think we're both very engaged in each other's cultures, and we're both willing to try going places, foods, music, dance, all the things that make cultures wonderful. And I think we've, we've done a good job of sort of immersing ourselves in each other's culture so, yea, we celebrate.*
>
> *Kim: Yea, we talk about that, we talk about a whole lot, we tease each other about our cultures and…*
>
> *Travis: Try to teach our daughter about both.*
>
> *Kim: Yeah.*

Other couples, like Lilly and Marshall, talked about how much they learn through experiencing

their partner's culture:

> *Marshall: Just being able to spend time with people, like spend time with the other*
>
> *person's family. You just learn a lot about how their lives are different from you and it*
>
> *helps you understand, I guess, I feel like it helps me understand other stuff, other people.*

Recognizing the impact of culture.

The second subtheme of *Culture* is *Recognizing the Impact of Culture.* All couples

discussed the cultural differences within their relationship and particularly noted how they made

efforts to recognize and understand how those differences might impact their partner's life and

their relationship. Each partner was able to hear their partner's experience in a more neutral

way. There was also a general awareness that the differences experienced based on culture were

simply differences rather than value based judgments:

> *Vanessa: And learning differences, different preferences or ways of growing up because*
>
> *his upbringing is different than mine. You know, I understand the differences and that*
>
> *it's not wrong, it's just different. Sometimes very different.*

"Elizabeth" and "Charles" discussed how culture impacted physical and verbal communication

styles:

> *Elizabeth: That's when I learned that you can't hint with my husband. He's a very direct*
>
> *person. He doesn't get all the subtleties and stuff.*
>
> *Elizabeth: One of the things with him was his family was German, period. And you*
>
> *know what I'm talking about? German, period, and very not hug-y, bear-y, kiss-y face.*
>
> *And my family, we should have been Italian like grabbing on you, kissing on you… But*
>
> *he, I think that's probably one of the things that I brought to his family, I love using the*

hugs and the kisses and he was very – this is a man who would not kiss me in public when

we got married. Now he will kiss me in public.

Some couples, like "Lilly" and "Marshall," talked about how they looked for a partner who not

only recognized the impact of culture but was also open to discussing how different forms of

oppression impacted individuals:

> *Lilly: I appreciated being with someone who could like, talk about race, class, and*
>
> *gender issues with a sense of humor, as opposed to… I want someone who understood*
>
> *white privilege… to really like see how issues of privilege and things affected our day to*
>
> *day lives and you know, I was interested in education issues, especially public education,*
>
> *and so, um, that was something we bonded over.*

Respect.

The third subtheme of *Culture* was *Respect.* Five out of the seven couples specifically

identified respect as something they experience from or towards their partner. *Respect* differed

from *Recognizing the Impact of Culture* in that the partners display respect for the culture and for

the person who has dealt with prejudice or had a difficult time being a member of a certain

culture. Furthermore, *Respect* also included a sense of getting to know what it is like to be in the

other person's shoes. The couples did not just speak about respect in a general sense, but also as

it specifically related to the culture of their partner or others. For example, "Robyn" and

"Adam" discussed their differing views about whether children should address adults as "Mr. or

Ms.," or with the adult's first name:

> *Robyn: I feel like we were talking to someone recently or recently saw some film or*
>
> *something but it was talking about how, um, like a lot of black folks in the country, they*
>
> *had to like fight a long time to earn that, earn that respect to be spoken to as Mr. or Mrs.*

and so that's like one, that, that alone is one reason to kinda like honor that, that way of

speaking to someone or addressing someone.

"Lilly" and "Marshall" talked about honoring and respecting the experiences of their partner:

Lilly: I feel like I listen to him more and maybe I take his opinion more seriously because

I feel like [he] has a different perspective where, I don't know, where I feel like I need to

be respectful of the fact that he has a different way of moving through the world and

different things that he's experienced that may not be my experience and I need to like

slow down and be… and think about that more.

"Robyn" and "Adam" spoke about how their partner's experiences keep them humble:

Adam: It just keeps me humble, just like that like, there are so many differences I'm still

not going to be able to understand or uncover, you know?

Furthermore, partners also spoke about experiencing difficult conversations and scenarios on the

topic of race. Rather than running from these scenarios, couples sat with the discomfort, and

thought about the experiences their partner may have had:

Lilly: There have been a few things like that that have been awkward and [my husband]

has not been around and things like with the whole group of black women that have had

awkward moments and especially when we're enjoying pop culture things together

because I feel like, you know, there's that moment in every Tyler Perry movie where the

white sales clerk follows these unbelievably affluent women around and accuses them of

stealing and I'm just kind of like, awkward. But then I think of it on the flipside, like how

many times has [my husband] been with my family when there's been a negative

portrayal of, you know, -totally racist – African American man and he just has to sit

through it…

Protection/Concern for the partner.

The fourth subtheme of *Culture* was *Protection/Concern for the Partner*. All couples spoke of protecting their partner and relationship from unnecessary adversity. Both partners reported protecting the other even when they were the cultural minority. In trying to protect their partner, individuals and couples discussed an awareness of topics, individuals, and pop culture that might offend their partner. They also spoke about experiencing an enhanced awareness of cultural surroundings, and seeking neighborhoods or vacation locations where they as a couple would feel safe, and where their partner as an individual could also feel safe.

Couples were asked for examples of what they did, specifically as members of an interracial couple to be happy. One partner spoke about the impact of pop culture and a prominent female R&B artist who created a controversy by making comments in an article about her views on interracial relationships:

> *Kevin: I think it does make me a little bit aware like, if just thinking of certain movies and such like where I might look at something and say, 'That'd be offensive to my wife.' Or, 'That'd be offensive to us as a couple.' That's not something that I'm going to partake in even though it's like wow, I like, like 95% of it but the there's this little bit of it that's bothersome…. [Things I'd be sensitive to before] take on a little bit more of a personal um, personal feeling for me… Going back to Jill Scott, it's like yeah, great singer, but her attitude. Kind of feeling like yeah, you sound like someone who would have issues with my wife. Doesn't make me want to listen to your music.*

Multiple couples spoke about their awareness of the racial and ethnic make-up of the neighborhoods in which they lived. For some couples, they experienced a sense of finding others who were like them, while other couples were concerned because they wanted their

children to experience diversity and other children who were like them. When one couple spoke about their experience of moving to a new neighborhood, one partner spoke about her awareness of the fact that her partner was singled out:

> *Lilly: …I think it was weird when we moved here a little bit, like I think we felt a little bit more self-conscious because when we lived in [a certain neighborhood], [my husband] was the only black person in like, a five block radius.*

Another couple spoke about how they feel comfortable in their neighborhood because there are people that reflect them:

> *Robyn: …When we think about what kind of neighborhood we want to live in, you know, we like this neighborhood because we just feel like we see a lot of people that look like us… We like [our neighborhood] because there are lots of like young families, lots of senior citizens, and I think like a fair number of interracial couples too. It's not out of the ordinary to see.*

> Other couples spoke about an awareness of the cultural surroundings when taking their

partner to visit family:

> *Marshall: When I took [my wife] home to [my hometown] where I had lived in a completely black world, you know, like, I was worried it would be a little weird… I felt like I had to protect her.*

Many of the couples discussed travelling and how they were aware of and made decisions based on perceived safety as it related to the acceptance of culture or race:

> *Travis: …When we're travelling, [safety and our relationship] is always in the forefront of our mind. If we're going to an interstate, we look at a gas station and say, 'Do we feel comfortable, both of us, getting out of the car? Both of us?'*

Another way couples showed protection and concern for their partner in unknown situations was through anticipating reactions or doing something to counteract the reactions of others. One partner spoke about purposely paying for the check at restaurants:

Elizabeth: … I'm always grabbing the check even though the money is our money and we have the same cards and all of that. I grab it because people are going to assume that he's going to pay for everything and so I pay for it… That's why I do it, because I don't want people to think that it's, - he's taking care of me, you know. Even though he's taking care of me… I mind that they think that the only reason I'm with him, is because he's taking care of me.

Another partner stated the following:

Adam: Honestly, sometimes it's having to navigate how other people are gonna, going to deal with [race and our relationship]. Whether that means a family member or stranger or a co-worker or acquaintance…

Adam went on to share a funny story about meeting a man at a gas station in rural Michigan. Both partners noted being on guard when the man began to speak with them. At one point the man commented, "What's that relationship like?" As Robyn began to respond defensively, Adam stepped up to engage the man; recognizing that the stranger was not speaking about their relationship, but instead about Robyn and Adam's rival college football teams. When they got back in the car, Robyn expressed frustration about the man's perceived stereotypes and Adam reported helping Robyn understand the man's intentions, which were not race related. Regardless, both partners were prepared to respond to the stranger's comments about their relationship, although it proved unnecessary in that instance.

Secure Attachment

The second theme that couples revealed was *Secure Attachment. Secure Attachment* is a more complex theme, and couples often experienced or expressed this theme in both subtle and overt ways. Two subthemes were identified: *Couple Identity* and *Closeness & Connection.* Each subtheme is comprised of multiple aspects which are explained and illustrated with quotes below.

Couple identity.

In explaining this first subtheme, couples shared a sense of having both an individual identity and an identity as a couple. They spoke about providing space for one another to enjoy their own individual interests while finding time to come together and enjoy the company of one another. For some couples, their couple identity centered on their identity as an interracial couple and for other couples, it centered on the culture they had created together that may or may not have included their identity as an interracial couple. One partner described his experience in the following way:

> *Adam: I think in a way, it's kind of our own culture in that sense, of like, you know, just certain traditions that we've created and you know, there's definitely certain pieces that where you would be like, like a weird Eastern European, Southern, Low Country [couple].*

One of the most important aspects of the couple identity is how partners turned towards one another. There was often a sense of "us vs. them" for these couples. 'Them' was identified as people in general, family, or the outside world. Regardless of how the word 'them' was used, the partners turned towards one another for strength in times of difficulty. More importantly, couples spoke about prioritizing their relationship:

Anna: We've had to, I mean there have been a number of points along the time that we've known each other that we've had to make the decision to prioritize each other…And however deeply we want to get into things, and fertility issues and parenthood and all of that and facing that and deciding, 'Are we going to stay together and ride through this?'…That was a question mark for a little while but we came out on the other side. Both agreeing that we, we're prioritizing the relationship and each other…

Another couple spoke at length about how they made a conscious decision to choose themselves over others:

Elizabeth: …We made a conscious decision in the beginning that it was us, you know, it's us and we are going to take care of things that we want (later)…We like them, but we like us. We decided that we like us as much as anybody else that we're going to take care of us (later)…We always externalized – we kept it where it belonged, it is, those are other people's problems. Internally, we did not have problems.

Other couples discussed how they faced adversity and discrimination by choosing their relationship:

Elizabeth: Remember that it's you, that you married, or got involved with that other person. Remember that's the person you love, and that's the person you care about. And there're things in that person that you saw that, that you wanted to be a part of. And to share your life with that person, and the rest of people can really go to hell in a hand basket.

Robyn: I was like, they're either going to be okay…

Adam: Or not be okay. And like, we can't control either… so it's just gonna be what it's gonna be.

Couples also came together to create joint resources to support their couple identity. Joint resources included supportive family members and friends. One couple told a particularly heartfelt story about an Aunt who passed away and who loved her niece's husband unconditionally. They laughed together at the shared memory of the Aunt and at the end of the story, the husband had tears rolling down his face and the wife reached over to console her husband. They came together in that moment to share a story about a family member and to share in the loss that they felt over the Aunt's death.

Other couples relied more on friends as sources of support. Some couples noted looking for other interracial couples as a way to create shared friendships and a support network for having biracial children. In general, couples noted that the friendships they maintained were both diverse and culturally sensitive. The couples felt they had individual friends and friends as a couple who they could turn to and discuss race or culture related concerns with in a safe environment.

Closeness & connection.

The second subtheme of *Secure Attachment* was *Closeness & Connection.* Couples experienced *Closeness & Connection* in many forms. One of the things that couples spoke most about was having a solid foundation of friendship which created a safe space to experience vulnerability. One couple, who were friends for many years prior to starting a relationship, discussed the male partner's identity development and how his wife was there as a friend during that time:

> *Adam: I was just starting to be aware, like, I'm a black man and what does different mean and how much am I okay with different? And, so, I feel like we were friends during that same time…* [turns to his wife] *you were knowing me… as I was on that journey.*

Almost all of the couples discussed experiencing long standing friendships prior to dating, and how connected they felt from those friendships. Many couples talked about their intimate relationship as a friendship. They often referred to their spouse or significant other as a friend, but also as a partner or teammate.

Some of the other things couples identified as ways in which they felt close and connected included physical touch or verbal proclamations of love:

> *Elizabeth: What makes couples stay together is the care. It's the touching, 'Hi honey, how was your day?' It's the hugs, sitting next to each other. It's the silence, being able to be silent for each other. It's very sexy to me and really, you feel loved because this person wants to just be with you.*

All couples spoke about the ability to be silent in the presence of their partner. Another couple described the following experience for how they felt close and connected to their partner:

> *Kevin: I think for me, part of it is just waking up next to each other in the morning. That's a huge huge thing and just, I think knowing that the other person is there. It's a very comforting thing to feel.*
>
> *Anna: ...Most nights, we take a moment to, and it's hard to describe, it's more than just a, hey, goodnight kiss, turn around and go to sleep. It's a, you know, spend a minute or two kissing or just, you know, whatever. And it's the same thing in the morning... you're not just going to yell goodbye, you're going to come up and say goodbye and kiss and say I love you and see you later and we take a moment to do that and I know for me that's a, you know, connection thing.*

Finally, couples also identified examples of small gestures and thoughtfulness that made them feel close and connected to their partners. Some couples stated that gestures came in the

form of cards, flowers, and gift cards given for no reason. Other couples identified

thoughtfulness as a partner bringing dinner to them when they had to stay late at work or doing

chores in the home when they know their partner is stressed or had a bad day. *Closeness &*

connection for these couples reflected what any healthy and happy couple would do and there

did not appear to be any cultural differences that impacted them. Knowing their partner and their

partner's cultural identity may have impacted how they expressed closeness and connection but

it did not change how it was received or that it was done.

Communication

   Communication is important in all relationships, and the interracial couples interviewed

for this study reported engaging in significant communication in their relationship. All of the

couples actively communicated when things were going well and when they were not going well.

Three subthemes emerged: *Conversations about Culture, Conversations about Parenting,* and

Communicating as a Way to Resolve Relationship Difficulties.

   Conversations about culture.

   The first subtheme of *Communication* was *Conversations about Culture.* All couples had

on-going conversations about culture. Couples did not always make intentional decisions to

bring culture into their discussions; instead, culture was specifically intertwined with their daily

lives, and thus, it often became a topic of discussion. These couples in particular were not only

willing to ask about their partner's experience, but they were also not afraid to make mistakes

and clarify stereotypes with their partner. Sometimes, couples engaged in lengthy

communication around particularly sensitive topics. Couples reported how important it was that

they spoke about sensitive topics and that they were unsure if their relationship would have

continued without those conversations. In other words, had they not spoken about those topics,

they may have been more likely to end their relationships due to the lack of communication around a cultural difference or concern.

One couple discussed an incident where the black male felt like his wife was trying to control how he dressed:

Adam: …That was a really difficult thing for both of us to talk about and it was a very emotional conversation and… it was one of the first times I explained to somebody that I love about how one of the few things that I feel like I can control is how I present myself to the world… that has such a cultural piece to it…

In response to Adam sharing this, his wife Robyn reported feeling as though she understood something that she never would have known before. It provided them the opportunity to see an experience through one another's view and share what clothing meant for each of them. Robyn expressed feeling that it was an opportunity for them to grow and learn from one another. Adam added that he also learned what Robyn's intentions were, which were not meant to control him at all.

Conversations about parenting.

The second subtheme of *Communication* was *Conversations about Parenting.* All but one couple discussed their conversations about raising biracial children. Even those couples who did not have children at some point, had conversations about what it would be like to have and raise biracial children. For some couples, the conversations included discussing and expressing fears with their partner about the problems they might face when being alone with their child. Partners particularly noted what others might think if they were seen with their child without the presence of their partner. In one couple, the black female often experienced people thinking she was her daughter's nanny. The couple came together to have discussions about those scenarios;

thus, the couple experienced *Communication* and *Closeness and Connection*. Engaging in conversations about parenting was raised often enough during interviews that it became a subtheme of its own; still, it is one area where it was clear that the subtheme overlapped and interacted with other themes and subthemes.

Other couples discussed having a conversation about how the world would perceive their children. In particular, the black partner often felt the need to educate their partner on the experiences their child might have and how they, as parents, might be able to navigate those experiences:

> *Elizabeth: I think he had – he had no clue. I had to sit down with him when our kids first started going to school… And just said to him, "These are not black and white kids, these are black kids. The world sees them as black kids. They're half you and half me, but the world sees them as black kids." And so when the kids come home from school and people are saying things, you need to understand what's going on so that you can help them, because to find out here, they need to be able to have – you know one of us needs to be able to communicate with them and tell them that people are just stupid, that you know, or how you feel about that, or walking them through the conversation.*

Communicating as a way to resolve relationship difficulties.

The third subtheme of *Communication* was *Communicating as a Way to Resolve Relationship Difficulties*. Five of the seven couples had meaningful dialogues when they experienced difficulties in the relationship, and actively used those dialogues to change things that were not working. Some couples spoke about learning how they argue and actively seeking to change that. Many couples noted the cultural differences in how each communicated, and

worked towards explaining their communication style to their partner. Couples often worked towards finding a middle ground between their communication styles. For example, if one partner was very direct and the other partner was not, the indirect partner might feel hurt by the direct partner, and the direct partner might not notice 'hints' provided by the indirect partner.

One couple spoke about "fighting to understand" so that they could resolve any misunderstandings:

Elizabeth: I would fight for that understanding because I would not want us to be mad or alienated from each other because of a misunderstanding. I want it to be clear, why – like I would ask him, "Why does that bother you?" You know, you make this like kind of off-hand comment, "What is it about what I said that bothered you?" you know. And he would have a totally different reaction than I meant, you know, and I would not have known that if I had not fought to find that understanding.

Four of the seven couples also stated that they had used spiritual or couples counseling at some point to help them identify areas where they struggled and identify how to better communicate. Like the prior subtheme, this subtheme also overlapped and interacted with other subthemes. Although this type of communication and understanding can be expected in many healthy and happy couples, these couples also had to communicate well about many more topics.

Authenticity

The fourth theme was *Authenticity*. Every couple also talked about the authenticity they expressed and they experienced with their partner. When asked what advice they might give to other interracial couples, many couples began their answers with two words: "Be yourself." Individuals reported seeking partners who were authentic, and who respected the authenticity

they saw in others. Authenticity was not just seen in the way a person spoke, or in their beliefs and values; rather, it was also expressed in how the individual discussed their own culture.

One partner described why she thought authenticity was so important in the following statement:

Elizabeth: My Godmother told me to start it out like you plan to finish. Be honest. Be yourself. Don't try to be some, you know, phony – I'm going to adjust to whatever they want to do – because it's not who I am. And then they'll be shocked and surprised, 'Well, she wasn't like that when they first got married.' I was exactly like that.

Another individual talked about how being yourself and being genuine created a space for him to cross cultural boundaries, especially in a large city:

John: Just be who you are. I think in the inner city in particular, like… I was able to cross borders, divides, especially in the south side. I could be up and down like black neighborhoods because I was still myself the whole time. They knew who I was and that was respected… It's not genuine and people don't respect that, so just be genuine.

One couple, when discussing authenticity and feeling comfortable in being who you are, also mentioned how they anticipate it will impact their children. They spoke about having a child who will be different culturally, but also who may like "weird stuff." The couple spoke about how it is "okay to be different." Another couple talked about how important it was to be able to be authentically themselves with their partner:

Adam: I feel like I could show the most sides of myself… how you can present multiple parts of yourself in the world and that that's okay – you're not lying, you just need to make sure you have people in your life where you can present all the parts of yourself to… And so I feel like I can show the most parts of myself to my spouse.

Although *Authenticity* was a separate theme, it was a piece of how individuals chose their partner. They chose someone with whom they could be authentic and who respected their own authentic self. Neither society nor culture changed who the person was or how they reacted. They appeared to have a firm sense of who they were as an individual and felt comfort in presenting that person to the world and to their partner. Like the quote from the above couple, it is also a way that couples may have felt close and connected because their partner created a safe space to be authentically themselves.

Humor

The fifth and final theme was *Humor*. *Humor* also surfaced as a theme that helped couples strengthen and maintain their relationships. When couples were asked what they do in general to be happy, many couples responded with a statement related to mutual humor. Couples found humor in one another and in different scenarios. *Humor* became not just part of their daily interactions with one another but also as a part of protecting themselves as individuals and as a relationship in the face of adversity or discrimination. Although humor can be used to deflect and defend against hurtful experiences, these couples appeared to both own their feelings of hurt but find ways to come together and use humor as a way to feel better. When one partner experienced a hurtful scenario, the other partner not only validated the hurt, but found a way to insert humor into the scenario, which sometimes helped the partner view the scenario as something external rather than something wrong with their relationship. At other times, couples actively sought to find or instill humor in otherwise dry or difficult scenarios. One couple laughed as they reminisced about a joke they had to counteract stares and slurs:

>*Elizabeth: So people used to stare at us and curse. And remember when we said we*
>*were going to get photographs?*

Charles: Yeah.

Elizabeth: And then I was going to get one of those like a, those bow and arrows with the suction cups on the end and so then people would stare at us and go, 'Hey George, guess what I saw today on the street?' And they would have a picture and I would just… take my little suction cup bow and arrow and attach a picture to it and send it to them, so that they can have it.

In general, couples identified humor as a way they connect to their partner and have fun with one another. During the interviews, couples often told stories about family members or scenarios that were framed in a way to provide 'comic relief' to humorous situations, and often had both partners laughing. Again, although *Humor* was a separate theme, it was also a way that couples experienced *Closeness and Connection* with one another, as well as a way couples approached cultural differences. When asked what advice they would give to another interracial couple, one couple stated the following:

Adam: Laugh… Just recognizing that you know, without humor, it can just get real serious all the time and it's a level of pressure that couples of the same race probably don't have to deal with, so why make yourself have to put in more work than, you know, a, any other couple. You deserve to have just as much mental space and emotional freedom as any other couple.

Thoughts on Couple Therapy

As part of the interview, couples were asked about any prior experience with couple therapy and what they thought clinicians should know to be of help to interracial couples. Some couples discussed how culture, or race specifically, may not be the most prominent concern for couples. Furthermore, they added that race may not be impacting the couple's presenting

concerns at all. All couples agreed that clinicians must be sure not to shy away from asking questions about race and culture, and how these might affect the couple and their presenting concerns.

Some couples also spoke about the importance of a clinician who is aware of their own biases and "baggage." One couple noted that they also believed it was important for clinicians to seek opportunities to experience other cultures, and look into their own social circles and recognize how diverse they were. Understanding how race and ethnicity uniquely impact each partner's family of origin was also a way one couple described what they thought was important.

Interestingly, there seemed to be an overall sense that there is a fine line clinicians must walk when working with interracial couples. While couples expressed the need for clinicians who actively seek to understand the impact culture and race play for each couple, they also did not want clinicians who expect the couple to educate them about their race or ethnicity. As "Megan" and "John" stated, *You have to really be a sociologist at that point just as much as you are a therapist/counselor.* Robyn bluntly described it as:

> *…It's kinda along the existing lines of like, not, like expecting the client to educate you*
>
> *on something, but to just always sort of look for multiple reasons why someone might be,*
>
> *like presenting a certain way or why they might be struggling with a certain thing.*

The above description is reminiscent of literature on working with trans* identified individuals (Brown & Rounsley, 1996). When working with trans* identified individuals, clients should not be expected to educate the clinician. Ultimately, according to the couples who were interviewed, clinicians need to actively talk about the impact of race and culture, but already have a general understanding of how different forms of oppression impact the couple's experience.

Conclusion

Five themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: *Culture, Secure Attachment, Communication, Authenticity,* and *Humor.* In general, the themes were interconnected and couples shared experiences that often fit into more than one category. Some themes or subthemes were representative of what we might expect to hear from happy and healthy couples. In other instances, those same themes or subthemes were also impacted by the cultural context of the couple. For example, although all healthy and happy couples engage in good communication, these couples have to engage in good communication around difficult and sensitive topics that intraracial couples may never discuss. In conclusion, interracial couples invest in significant work to strengthen and maintain their relationships. Although they experience many of the same stressors as intraracial couples, they also experience added stressors, and the couples interviewed for this study expressed five unique ways that they mediate those stressors so that they continue to grow, and love themselves and their relationship.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

This study was proposed to fill the gaps in the literature on interracial couples. Rather than identifying the difficulties which interracial couples experience, the study used a qualitative method to identify how Black-White interracial couples strengthen and maintain their relationships. This chapter discusses the results of the qualitative analysis, the themes as they relate to the theory and practice of couple therapy, the limitations of the study, and implications for future research.

Summary of Themes

The following is a summary of the themes found after a qualitative analysis of interviews with seven non-Hispanic, Black-White interracial couples:

1. *Culture:* Partners were identified as expressing an intrinsic cultural sensitivity. Not only was cultural sensitivity a personal value, it was also a personality characteristic of the partners in Black-White interracial couples. There were four subthemes that comprised *Culture: Cultural Enrichment and Fulfillment, Recognizing the Impact of Culture, Respect, and Protection/Concern for the Partner.*

   Couples spoke directly about experiencing a sense of enrichment and fulfillment from their interactions with others, including their significant other. Participants noted times where they made an effort to celebrate the culture of their partner. Couples made the effort to discuss their differing cultural views and how those views might impact their relationship. As individuals, partners noted how they thought about scenarios from the viewpoint of their partner and recognized that it may not fit their own views or experiences. In some ways, this subtheme highlighted the partners' ability to walk in the others' shoes. Partners not only

showed a respect for their partner, they also showed respect for their partner's individual

cultural identity and were willing to discuss that identity which led to more awareness and

recognition of cultural differences. Couples and partners as individuals wanted to ensure that

they would be accepted and respected as a couple, and that their partner did not feel like the

only person of their ethnic background.

2. *Secure Attachment:* The second subtheme identified elements of a secure attachment style.

   This theme was comprised of two subthemes: *Couple Identity and Closeness & Connection.*

   Couples expressed a strong sense of identity as both individuals within the relationship and

   as a couple. They noted creating their own identity as a couple, which included bringing

   their cultures together and creating traditions. They also expressed how important the

   relationship was for them and made their relationship a priority, particularly when faced with

   adversity. Couples shared how they turned towards one another in times of crisis, happiness,

   and sadness. As interracial couples, they also turned to one another to share and bear witness

   to experiences of adversity. The majority partner in particular often heard their minority

   partner's experiences of prejudice and was able to respond to the partner in an affirming way.

   The minority partner, in turn, was able to feel heard, respected, and closer to the majority

   partner.

3. *Communication:* Three subthemes were found: *Conversations about Culture, Conversations*

   about Parenting, and *Communication as a Way to Resolve Relationship Difficulties.* Couples

   were not afraid to make mistakes and clarify their meaning or understanding of culture. They

   spent significant time discussing what it would be like to have children, how they would raise

   them, and how culture would play a part in their children's development. The couples in this

study noted taking the time to discuss communication styles and work towards actively changing how they communicate and resolve disputes.

4. *Authenticity:* The fourth theme emerged as something couples sought in their partners and others. Couples discussed the importance of each partner's ability to be authentic which allowed partners to more easily cross cultural boundaries and interact with those who were culturally different.

5. *Humor:* Couples found humor in one another and in difficult scenarios. Couples not only used humor when they experienced difference in one another, but also as a way to minimize the impact of hurtful experiences regarding their race or relationship.

Theory and Practice of Couple Therapy with Interracial Couples

This study highlighted two of the most current and well-researched theories of couple therapy; the Gottmans' *Sound Relational House* model and Sue Johnson's *Emotion Focused Therapy.* All of the themes that emerged fit well with the theories; some themes are what would be expected based on the theory, like *Communication*, while other themes add a layer of complexity to the theories, like *Culture*.

Sound Relational House

Based on the first three levels of the Gottmans' model, all of the themes would be expected to emerge as the couple begins to get to know one another. Without *Authenticity,* couples likely would not have the opportunity to develop Love Maps, and without *Communication* and discussion about *Culture*, they would not have been able to take advantage of the opportunity to develop Love Maps. Thus, learning about one another's internal world was a complex process involving at least three of the themes from this study. Because partners

valued *Cultural Enrichment* and showed *Respect* for each other, they likely were able to overcome cultural differences and express Fondness and Admiration for each other.

Deposits in the Emotional Bank Account typically have been described as coming primarily from Turning Toward a partner after a bid for connection. However, for these partners, their efforts recognize cultural experiences and protect each other, as well as their repeated choices to choose their partner and relationship over others likely also serve as deposits in the Emotional Bank Account. Finally, *Respect* for cultural differences, as well as the use of *Humor*, likely also strengthened each couple's experience of Positive Sentiment Override. Further, as they found ways to minimize the effects of discrimination, sometimes with *Humor* or focused *Communication*, they also created new patterns of connection or what the Gottmans call, Rituals of Connection (Gottman, 1999). As would be predicted from the Gottmans' model, the couples were able to develop a strong sense of *Attachment*.

Still, the first three levels of SRH do not cover the depth of the themes that emerged for Black-White interracial couples. Based on the experiences of the couples in this study, I argue that the last four levels of SRH are more important, in the long run, than the first three levels. This is not to say that these couples do not *need* the first three levels. The intimate conversations and decisions Black-White interracial couples have, impacts their experience of Positive Sentiment Override, Managing Conflict, Life Dreams, and Creating Shared Meaning. It is possible that these partners approach their relationship with a mindset that it takes work to create a relationship, particularly one where they Create Shared Meaning and Life Dreams. Instead of ignoring minor breaks in connection, which would cause a withdrawal from the Emotional Bank Account, these couples appear to take the time to discuss breaks or moments of disconnection. They invest the time to discuss what happened, what it meant, and why it may have caused hurt

or disconnection; thus, they not only *not* withdraw from the Emotional Bank Account, but also make a deposit leading to Positive Sentiment Override. Managing Conflict for these couples is more of a journey than a stop on the road. With each conflict, they gain more insight into their partner's internal world and work towards Creating Shared Meaning. It is possible that Black-White interracial couples experience more impasses than other couples, due to cultural differences. While this could be a reason many Black-White interracial couples deteriorate, based on the experiences and themes presented in this study, it could be that rather than feeling that they cannot move past a culturally based impasse, these couples may understand the impasse differently. They may take the time to consider the cultural implications of a conflict and feel understood rather than unheard when there is an impasse.

Couples also discussed cultural differences and values which are entwined in what the Gottmans termed as Life Dreams. The *Secure Attachment* displayed by the couples in this study allows them to feel that there is space to discuss their individual goals and values, as well as their goals and values as a couple with *Culture* woven into the discussion. For example, when deciding on how they will raise their children, their conversations involve communicating about parenting and raising biracial children. These parents likely spend significant time discussing what they expect the experience would be like until their expectations are aligned and their priorities, fears, and hopes are understood by each other. Finally, Creating Shared Meaning for these couples is very important as they begin to create their own cultural identity as a couple. Creating Shared Meaning may come before Managing Conflict or Positive Sentiment Override. If Creating Shared Meaning were the equivalent of the *Secure Attachment* theme, then couples could use their *couple identity* to better manage internal and external stressors leading to Positive Sentiment Override, an ability to Manage Conflict, and discuss Life Dreams.

Emotion Focused Therapy

EFT, as a theory, also fit well with the themes that emerged. The second theme identified for these couples was *Secure Attachment*. From an EFT standpoint, it makes sense that couples would need a secure attachment to feel comfortable with turning to their partner in times of need and in feeling heard and understood by their partner regardless of cultural or racial differences. The most important information gained from this study was how culture played a part in attachment needs and injuries.

Culture was significantly intertwined in everything Black-White interracial couples experienced and did, whether it was overtly discussed or not. Therefore, it was critical that partners understood one another's cultural world and felt their own experiences were heard. This appeared to be a part of their attachment needs. On a basic level, like all couples, Black-White interracial couples want to feel heard and understood, but on a more complex level, they want to feel culturally heard and understood. When partners responded to those needs, the receiving partner was better able to turn to their partner in times of distress, particularly about cultural variables. For example, a wife turned to her husband after being called a 'nanny' of her own child due to her skin color. She can turn to her husband and know that she will feel heard and understood despite the fact that her husband has never had the same experience. It is important to note that partners will not respond the right way every single time. Ed Tronick found that in securely attached mother-infant relationships, the mother missed a child's bid for attention seven out of ten times (Johnson, 2013). Thus, securely attached partners only need to respond to their

partner's bids 30% of the time. It is possible that Black-White partners also have to respond to cultural bids from their partner in order to feel securely attached.

Attachment injuries are difficult to work through for any couple because they experience the disconnection in such a way that it "disproportionately influence[s] the quality of an attachment relationship" (Johnson, 2002, p. 181; Simpson & Rholes, 1994). For Black-White interracial couples, culture also emerges as another factor that disproportionately mediates a couple's ability to work through the injury. In this study, couples spent a significant amount of time discussing culture. It was a powerful theme and thoroughly overlapped with the other themes. Although they were not coded as such, some couples discussed what may have been attachment injuries that were specifically related to culture. Couples discussed having to explain difficult internal and external world views of what it meant to be a person of their race and how something their partner did reminded them of a negative experience. Individuals in this study were able to hear their partner, respond, and work towards moving past the injury. It may be that many Black-White interracial couples have difficulty working through culturally provocative attachment injuries. For example, if a couple were to form a secure attachment but they did not have the depth of *Culture* as it was presented in this study, they may find it difficult to work through an attachment injury related to culture because they would not have the same cultural understanding and inherent cultural characteristics that the couples in this study presented with. To further explain, if one or both partners did not experience the same *Cultural Enrichment and Fulfillment* and the same ability to communicate *Respect* in the way that the couples in this study did, they may be able to form a relationship but it may not make it. For the couples in this study, it may be that they see words and interactions as having multiple meanings and complex layers. Thus, they may be more aware of the impact of their words or react quickly when there is a

perceived injury. It is not that these couples do not experience hurt or injuries from their partners, rather, they may be in a place where they can handle the injury in a non-defensive and mindful way in part due to the strength they find in *Culture, Communication,* and *Respect* as a couple.

Limitations & Recommendations for Future Research

The primary limitation of this study was the number of participants. More participants could have yielded different themes or expanded on the themes brought up by the current couples. While the participants displayed secure attachments, a larger sample size might have included couples who were not securely attached, which would have allowed the researcher to compare the two groups.

Although age did not factor into differences experienced by the couples in the current study, a larger sample size might yield differences based on either the age of the partners or the age difference between the partners. Furthermore, a larger sample size would have allowed for some comparisons across gender, meaning that the researcher might have noted different experiences in black female partners versus white female partners. It is important to note that as a qualitative study, the sample size falls within the average range. The current sample size allowed for a deeper understanding of the experiences of the couples who were interviewed, something that might have been more difficult with more couples.

Another limitation of this study is the geographical location of the couples. This study recruited couples who lived in a large metropolitan area, which may have limited the experiences of the couples available to the researcher. The themes that were highlighted for the couples in this study may not be the same for couples who live in more rural or less culturally diverse areas. The data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) highlights that married Black-White interracial

couples are found in more abundance on the east coast. A larger sample size could have

included a more geographically diverse participant pool which might have yielded different or

more comprehensive themes. An original aim of this study was to identify the experiences of

unmarried cohabitating couples due to data which identifies a significant number of Black-White

interracial couples who live together but are not married (Pew Research Center, 2012). The

study only included one unmarried cohabitating couple, which was another significant limitation.

There is significant research on interracial couples but the majority of it is older, focused

on the struggles these couples face, and not separated by the ethnic combinations. Black-White

interracial couples continue to be a minority amongst intercultural couples. While the themes

that emerged in this study likely represent themes that other intercultural couples experience, as

interracial couples continue to build families and have biracial children, it may be important to

specifically study Black-White interracial couples separately. Due to the discrimination that

black Americans continue to experience, Black-White interracial couples face decisions and

choices that other intercultural couples may never have to explore, such as teaching their

children about both of their races while noting that the world sees them as black. It is important

that future research recognize the impact of raising biracial children on interracial couples.

A larger study that included other pairings of intercultural couples might yield more of

the same themes expressed by the couples in this study, or add to new themes. Future research

could also compare the experiences of couples who live in large metropolitan areas versus those

who live in less culturally diverse regions. Of note, most of the couples who participated in the

current study were in their late 20's or older. Future research may benefit from finding younger

couples to see if age plays a factor in how couples work through cultural differences, and

whether age and experience mediate some of the struggle interracial couples experience. Finally,

future research should expressly look at the attachment styles of partners in interracial couples and how culture impacts the way partners express their attachment needs. Therapists could use the research as a basic "road map" to help interracial and intercultural couples navigate attachment messages.

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APPENDIX A

Couple Profiles

Couple 1: "Vanessa" and "Jay"

"Jay" and "Vanessa" had been together for four years at the time of the interview and had lived together for three. They were not married or engaged and both were divorced from a former spouse. "Jay" identified as black and was age 55 at the time of the interview. He had a bachelor's degree and worked 40-50 hours per week. He lived with his ex-wife for 23 years and had four children from his marriage. "Vanessa" identified as white and was age 51 at the time of the interview. She completed some college and was also working 40-50 hours per week. "Vanessa" lived with her ex-husband for thirteen years and they had three children.

Couple 2: "Megan" and "John"

"Megan" and "John" were together for nine years at the time of the interview. They were married and living together for five years. They also had one newborn child at the time of the interview. "John" identified as white and was age 43. He was a student and had some college education at the time of the interview. Prior to his marriage, he lived with one other partner. The relationship lasted four years and they moved in together after 10 months. "Megan" identified as black and was age 39, had a Master's degree, and worked 40-50 hours per week. She had not lived with a significant other prior to her marriage.

Couple 3: "Elizabeth" and "Charles"

"Elizabeth" and "Charles" were together for 39 years and were married and living together for 38 years at the time of the interview. They had two children during their marriage. Charles identified as white and was age 64. He had an Associate's degree and worked about 20 hours per week. He did not live with a significant other prior to his marriage to "Elizabeth."

"Elizabeth" identified as black, was age 62, and had attended some graduate school. She did not identify how many hours per week she worked. Prior to her marriage, she lived with one significant other. She and her prior significant other moved in together after six months and the relationship lasted three years.

Couple 4: "Kim" and "Travis"

At the time of the interview, "Kim" and "Travis" had been together for 12.5 years, married for eight years, and living together for 11 years. They had one child together. Kim identified as black and was age 38. Travis identified as white and was age 40. Both had lived with a prior significant other but neither had been married or engaged before their current relationship. Travis had moved in with a past significant other after one year and their relationship lasted three years. Kim moved in with her prior significant other after six months and their relationship lasted two years. Kim had a college degree and worked about 60 hours per week in the healthcare field and Travis had some college and worked 40 hours per week in a special trade.

Couple 5: "Anna" and "Kevin"

"Anna" and "Kevin" had been together for nine years, lived together for six years, and married for five years at the time of the interview. They did not have any children and had no previous marriages. Anna was age 39 and identified as white. She worked about 40 hours per week in the social sciences/non-profit field. Kevin was age 40, identified as black, and also worked 40 hours per week. He did not identify his field of employment. Both Anna and Kevin had master's degrees. Neither of them had lived with a previous significant other.

Couple 6: "Robyn" and "Adam"

At the time of the interview, "Robyn" and "Adam" had been together for eight years, living together for two years, and married for 11 months. This was the first marriage for both of them. Robyn was age 33 and identified as white. She worked about 40 hours per week in public health. Adam was also age 33 and identified as black. He worked about 40 hours per week in the social sciences field. Both Adam and Robyn had master's degrees. They did not have any children and neither of them had lived with a prior significant other.

Couple 7: "Lilly" and "Marshall"

"Lilly" and "Marshall" had been together for seven years, lived together for six years, and married for five years at the time of the interview. It was the first marriage for both partners and they had one child together. Lilly identified as white and was age 36. She had a master's degree and worked about 40 hours a week in the field of social work. Marshall was also age 36 and identified as black. He had a bachelor's degree and worked about 40 hours per week in museum conservation. Neither partner had lived with a prior significant other.

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Interview questions marked with a * have been directly quoted from Rosenblatt, Karis, and Powell's qualitative interview (1995). Interview questions marked with ** are modified versions of questions from John and Julie Gottman's Oral History Interview (2011). :

1. Out of all the people you could have dated, why did you choose your current partner?**

2. What do you do to be a happy couple?

3. What have your experiences been as part of an interracial relationship?

4. How do you experience connection and love for one another?

5. Are their experiences specific to being an interracial couple that have shaped what you do to be happy?

6. How did you introduce your partner to family and friends? Did the culture/race of your partner play a part in the introduction?

7. Cohabitation can be a major transition for many couples. How did you experience this transition and were there specific cultural variables you had to work through?

8. When you look back at your relationship since it started, has your view of yourselves as an interracial couple changed over time? (Has your view about whether or not being an interracial couple matters changed over time?)*

9. How did you get to know one another and did being an interracial couple impact that process?

10. What kind of concerns, if any, have been raised by your family or friends about your interracial relationship?*

11. What kind of support, if any, have you received from your family or friends for your interracial relationship?*

12. Have you experienced prejudice, discrimination, or racism as an interracial couple? If so, what have you experienced? How have you responded to these situations?*

13. Have you experienced either internal or external pressures as an interracial couple that have made you consider splitting up? If so, what have the pressures been and how did you move past them?*

14. What mistakes have you made in your relationship and how did you learn from them? Where any mistakes specific to being in an interracial relationship?

15. Is there anything in particular that you think you do not do well as an interracial couple?

16. What advice would you give to other interracial couples?

17. Have you ever been in couple therapy? If yes, what was the experience like for you and did your cultural differences play a role? If no, would you consider it? Why or why not?

18. What should therapists know about interracial couples to be of help to them?

19. What are your positive experiences specific to being in an interracial relationship?

APPENDIX C

Demographics Questionnaire

Gender:

Date of Interview:

(1) What is your level of education?

(2) What is your employment status?

    (a) What is your career field? If you are a student, in what field are you pursuing a degree?

    (b) On average, how many hours per week do you work?

    (c) What is your income range?

        $0 - $25,000

        $25,000 - $50,000

        $50,000 - $75,000

        $75,000 - $100,000

        $100,000 & Above

(3) What is your age?

(4) How many, if any, children do you have with your current significant other?

    How many children, if any, do you have from a prior relationship?

(5) Are you currently married? If yes, for how long?

    If yes, is this your first marriage?

(6) Are you currently engaged? If yes, for how long and when do you plan to marry?

    If no, do you think you might become engaged?

    If you do not think you plan to become engaged, are you seeking a life partner/using

cohabitation as a form of marriage?

(7) Have you lived with someone in a prior romantic relationship? If yes, how long before you moved in with that significant other and how long was the relationship?

(8) Have you been married before? If yes, how long were you married?

(9) How long have you been with your current significant other?

(10) How long have you been living with your current partner?

APPENDIX D

Copy of Informed Consent

TheChicagoSchool®
of Professional Psychology

Informed Consent

Title: Fighting the Stereotypes: How Black-White Interracial Couples Strengthen and Maintain their Relationships

Investigators: Michelle Kalnasy, M.A. and Richard Niolon, Ph.D.

We are asking you to participate in a research study. Please take your time to read the information below and feel free to ask any questions before signing this document.

Purpose:

This study is being conducted to gather information about the experiences of non-Hispanic Black-White interracial couples. We hope to gather information about couples' positive and negative experiences, both within their relationship and with their friends and family. We also hope to better understand how Black-White interracial couples navigate cultural differences in adaptive and healthy ways to maintain a satisfying relationship. The insight gained hopefully will help both clinicians and Black-White interracial couples better understand how Black-White interracial couples work through differences and stressors, and manage situations particular to their experiences as an interracial couple.

Procedures:

You will be asked via e-mail to confirm that you meet the criteria for the study. After this confirmation, you and your significant other may be asked to meet with the researcher for 90 minutes to two hours. During this time, the researcher will explain the study and, if you consent,

will interview you and your partner. You will be asked open-ended questions about your relationship, including experiences particularly related to being in a Black-White interracial relationship. Additional questions may be asked to clarify details or better understand your opinions and experiences. The interviews will be audiotaped. At the end of the interview, you and your partner will also be asked to complete two forms related to your opinions about your relationship, as well as a demographic questionnaire. These forms should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. In total, you and your partner will spend 90 minutes – 2 hours with the interviewer. If you or your partner decline to be interviewed, audiotaped, or take the questionnaires, you will not be eligible for the study. The interviews can be held in your home or in an interview room at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology's campus. The researcher will provide compensation in the form of a $20 Target Gift Card after completing the interview and questionnaires to thank you for your participation. Should you wish, you will also receive an electronic copy of the dissertation, which will include the results of the study as a whole.

Additionally, you and your partner will be asked to return for a group meeting where you will meet and interact with other participants of the study at a meeting room at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology's campus. During this meeting, the researcher will provide the group with the preliminary results of the study and ask the group if the results generally reflect your experiences as Black-White interracial couples. Participation in this group meeting is completely optional.

Risks to Participation:

You will not be exposed to physical risk by participating in this study. However, you may be at risk for emotional or psychological distress, as you may feel vulnerable and/or upset if some

painful past experiences are discussed in the interview. The researcher will provide a list of

mental health referrals for you at the time of the interview in case emotional or psychological

distress does occur.

Benefits to Participants:

You may not directly benefit from this study; however, you may gain insight into your

relationship and your own culture. We also hope the information learned from this study helps

mental health professionals better understand the strengths of Black-White interracial couples.

Alternatives to Participation: ***Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from***

study participation at anytime without any penalty*.*

Confidentiality:

The interview data will be recorded using a digital audio-recorder. Recordings will be

transferred to an external encrypted hard drive which is password protected and will be kept in a

locked drawer in the home of the primary researcher (Michelle Kalnasy). We will remove all

identifying information, such as names or dates, from the transcripts in order to protect your

identity. As a result, any excerpts from your interview that we may quote in the final study will

not be connected to you in a way that identifies you. A research assistant will be used to help

transcribe the interviews. They will not have access to any identifying information and the

primary researcher will ensure that the research assistant understands confidentiality and

maintains your confidentiality. As per the American Psychological Association guidelines, the

recordings and transcriptions will be kept for a minimum of five years, after which they will be

destroyed.

Questions/Concerns:

If you have any study related questions, please contact Michelle Kalnasy by phone or email at: xxx. You may also contact Dr. Richard Niolon by phone or email at: xxx. If you have questions concerning your rights in this research study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is concerned with the protection of subjects in research projects. You may reach the IRB office Monday-Friday by calling 312.467.2343 or writing: Institutional Review Board, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, 325 N. Wells, Chicago, Illinois, 60654.

Consent

    Subject

    The research project and the procedures have been explained to me. I agree to participate in this study. My participation is voluntary and I do not have to sign this form if I do not want to be part of this research project. I will receive a copy of this consent form for my records.

    Signature of Subject: _____

    Date: _____

    Signature of the Person Obtaining Consent: _____

    Date: _____