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# BLACK AND WHITE, FROM RACE TO HAPPILY EVER AFTER: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF RACE ON BLACK-WHITE INTERRACIAL MARRIAGES

Christine Ross 9807219

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**BLACK AND WHITE, FROM RACE TO HAPPILY EVER  
AFTER: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF  
RACE ON BLACK-WHITE INTERRACIAL MARRIAGES**

**By**

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2007

M.S., Family and Consumer Sciences, New Mexico State University,  
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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy  
Family Studies**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2017**

### **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my father, Carl Ross, Sr, who tried his best to survive ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) to see my defense and completion of this work. Although he succumbed to the disease on May 10, 2013, I praise God every day for giving me a father who instilled the power of belief in Christ, an ethic of hard work, and the confidence to speak up for myself. Additionally, I dedicate this work to my mom, Carol Ross, who was married to my father for 31 years and poured her life into loving, caring and supporting him throughout his life and illness. Moreover, I thank my sister and brother, Carmen and Carl and nephews Cerron and Godson for their on-going support of me through these years. I further dedicate this work to Dr. Virginia Shipman, who went over and beyond to be supportive, of me and my research through this process. Dr. Shipman's number one goal was to be an advocate for her students and to instill new knowledge and a new way of thinking. Her support will always be missed; she helped to support me during both good times and bad.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to all who fought, both in the past and in the present, for racial equality around the world. It is because of all who went before me, that a Black girl can have the opportunity to reach for the stars.

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**BLACK AND WHITE, FROM RACE TO HAPPILY EVER AFTER: A  
QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF RACE ON BLACK-WHITE  
INTERRACIAL MARRIAGES**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study is an attempt to capture the influence of race in spousal relationships experiences within Black-White multiracial marriages. Using phenomenological methodology, qualitative analytical techniques are used to answer the research questions: How does race and racial identity impact the relationships among individuals within Black-White interracial marriages? And, what role does race play in the inner working of Black-White interracial marriages? This study examines the lived experiences of five Black-White interracial marriages through the understanding of each individual's racial identity and the role of race within the marriage. Understanding the lived experiences of these Black-White interracial marriages, revealed three themes: 1) Connection/disconnection with racial group; 2) Marital identity and; 3) Personal identity. In this study, each theme is defined and exemplified using the illustrations of each participant.

*Keywords:* Black-White relationships, discrimination, Interracial marriage, prejudice, marriage, race, racism

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

In the United States, the rate of interracial married couples increased from three percent in 1980 to nine percent in 2010 (Wang, 2012). Most recently, in 2013, 12% of all newly married individuals wed outside of their own racial group; and 6.3% of all marriages are interracial (Wang, 2015). Although the increasing trend in interracial marriages is expected to continue, very little research has been conducted to understand the cultural underpinnings of their married lives. Historically, Black-White interracial couples have endured unprecedented amounts of personal, social, and legal issues (Foeman & Nance, 1999; Wang, 2012; Wong, 2009). This research will focus on understanding internal racial discourse in Black-White interracial marriages in the United States through the investigation of their personal challenges, communication, and knowing one's partner through the lens of race. This research will address three objectives to better understand how race is situated within the Black-White marriage. The first objective is to determine each individual's stage in racial identity development through the understanding of her/his personal narratives. The second objective is to describe how race has impacted the inner workings of the couple's relationship. The third objective is to analyze a partner's societal view of race and its impact on his/her understanding of his/her partner's racial being.

Although racial identity is generally defined by membership in a particular racial group, in the current study, I will define the term as the individual psychology of belonging to a group (Carter & Goodwin, 1994). In the past, psychological belonging to a racial group was held together by over a century of ingrained racial principles of power that were enforced by law and are now perpetuated by habit and knowing one's perceived

‘place’ within society based on the standards of past racial differences (Carter & Goodwin, 1994). This approach is expected to help us understand a person’s racial sense of feeling and its associated meanings in a family relationship. It will also help us understand the difficult social context of racial identity and human interactions such as racism, prejudices, and segregation.

### **Social and Historical Contexts**

Social scientists observe that the status of Black-White race relations in the United States has been improving since the Emancipation Declaration in 1863 (O'Donoghue, 2004). After the ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment of United States Constitution in 1865, Blacks and Whites were granted the privilege of learning in the same schools, sitting where they chose on the same bus, the ability to vote, and the right to marry anyone regardless of her/his racial background. However, even after the constitutional amendment ending slavery and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the social context of race relations between Blacks and Whites has remained in limbo (Lewis, 1960; Mack, 1969). It seems that the citizens of the United States have come to a belief that racism no longer exists. Due to this, American society has equated the ‘end of racism’ with the ideal of ‘colorblindness’ that can be considered an overall neglect in opening a conversation about continued racism. Additionally, researchers and the media have stretched the meaning of an increase in the existence of interracial marriages and equated it to a decrease in racism (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010). At times, the general consensus on race in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that race does not exist. An increase in interracial couples does not automatically mean that race-linked biases, thoughts, and ideologies have changed significantly in American society.

In contemporary society, it is important to understand that cross racial interactions do not necessarily equate to a change in personal or societal thought (Blakeney, 2005; Kleinpenninig & Hagendoorn, 1993). Just because a White individual has minority friends, has a Black boyfriend, and listens to hip hop music, does not make that person void of racial ideology. The communication of anti-racial sentiment is more than just hollow verbiage; it should reflect reality as it has been enacted in the United States culture. Changing the conversation of race, from word to action, must start with the acknowledgement that the foundation of American society was built on the assumption of racial superiority and inferiority which was and is now an inner working of society (Bonilla-Silva, 1996; Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001). Societal beliefs may not have necessarily changed in thought despite having been changed in the avenues of how race is communicated in society. Seemingly overt changes in societal communication may not always be viewed as change at all when viewed through a racial lens (Aberson & Ettlin, 2004; Blakeney, 2005). For instance, these overt differences in opinion about the racial climate may cause conflict when these differences in ideas and experiences are interpersonally communicated and possibly misinterpreted by Blacks and Whites (Peterson, 1995). Specifically, when interpersonal communication about race occurs in the context of Black-White marriages, there may be a misinterpretation or even oversight of the impact of race and how racial identity impacts the marriage (Ramaraju, 2012). Based on the societal trend of colorblindness, we may feel the desire to eliminate racial biases even if this occurrence is only in our thoughts.

## **Marriage**

The stability of marriage in the United States has remained a growing topic of research due to high divorce and declining marriage rates. Findings suggest that the marriage rate has fallen five percent from 2009 to 2010 (Cohn, Passel, Wang, & Livingston, 2011). Marriages within the United States are typically mono-racial (Kyle, 2003) or between same race individuals. Although there has been an increase in diversity in marital partners in recent years, this type of change has grown at a sluggish pace as compared to the consistency in mono-racial couples (Kang Fu & Wolfinger, 2011; Wang, 2012). The most typical interracial marriages are those of Asian and White individuals whereas Black-White interracial marriages are the least common (Batson, Qian, & Licher, 2006; McDermontt & Samson, 2005; Wang, 2012). Although the occurrence of Black-White relationships has increased, last reported at 14% of all interracial couples in 2013, these relationships often endure stigmatization (Forry, 2007; Wong, 2015) as Blacks and Whites are seen as racial polar opposites in society (McDermontt & Samson, 2005).

Both Black-White and other interracial marriages have a higher average divorce rate than the general population. It has been reported that the divorce rate is ten percent higher within the first 10 years of interracial marriages as compared to same race marriages (Wang, 2012). It is important to note that though there are differences and difficulty in all combinations of interracial marriages, all interracial marriages are not created equal (Forry, 2007). This exists due to the long historical disenfranchisement that Blacks have experienced in American society. Moreover, when an individual sees a Black-White married couple, society knows that these individuals are in an interracial

relationship solely based on the visual appearance of the couple. Because of the obvious outer differences in Black-White partners, these couples may experience difficulties that other interracial marriages do not face (Wong, 2009). This scenario may often signal a psychological message of the outsider who is telling the Black-White couple to ‘stick with your own kind’ and calling White partners ‘nigger lovers.’

The difficulties that Black-White interracial couples experience have been linked to racial and ethnic differences. The racial differences often become intruding forces specifically in the area of racial identity (Foeman & Nance, 1999; Wang, 2012; Wong, 2009). In connection with racial identity, African American partners in the marital relationship tend to be questioned about racial inclusion and identity within the Black community by friends and family members. On the other hand, White partners go through a process of questioning themselves and their own Whiteness, which challenges the perceptions that they have of themselves (Kyle, 2003; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004). Unfortunately, the Black-White marital relationship is not only plagued by racial differences from outside of the relationship due to the stigmatization of Black-White couples in society, but these couples may also experience racial discrimination within their own relationship due to the neglect of racial and cultural conversations. This is illustrated through a partner saying ‘Never let a White boy touch your radio’, referring to her partner, or even through the statement, ‘You people are always loud!’ (Wong, 2009). Does this type of racial sentiment arise from people’s unique sense of racial identity? We need empirical research on Black-White interracial couples to address this inquiry.

Although we recognize the importance of factors such as tradition, parenting style, beliefs about sex and sex roles, and expression of affection that impact discourse in

the Black-White relationships (Wong, 2009), scholars need to design and undertake in-depth research in order to specifically understand internal racial intruders. Most research on Black-White interracial marriages discusses the effects of how society views these couples and differences in overall life experiences and expectations (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004; Wong, 2009). Therefore, it is also important for researchers and practitioners to look at internal factors that influence the dynamics within that marriage. The experience of how racial thought is communicated in order to understand how race is expressed and communicated in the marriage is an important topic in this regard. A deeper understanding of how racial identity impacts the longevity and the quality of the marriage will allow practitioners to better educate individuals who may want to commit to a Black-White interracial marriage. This understanding will also provide comprehensive information to grasp how race and racial identity may facilitate or skew relationships within an interracial marriage.

The theoretical viewpoint of the Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used in this research as the conceptual framework for the study. This research does not conceptualize race as something that can possibly intrude on a relationship; instead, this research overtly states that race does have an impact on Black-White interracial marriages. CRT provides the ability and the research base to classify race as a societal structure that affords some individuals power and suppresses the power of others. In line with this argument, CRT provides the theoretical foundation of addressing the central questions of my research. In sum, the CRT perspective helps to explain how the construction of racial identity and the experience of race impact complex interracial marital dynamics within Black-White couples in the United States.



## **Research Questions**

1. How does race and racial identity impact how individuals within Black-White interracial marriages relate to one another?
2. What role does race play in the interactions within Black-White interracial marriages?

## **Purpose**

The primary purpose of this research is to understand how racism affects the internal structure of the spousal relationships by looking at the lived experiences of each couple in regard to racial identity and the role of race in their relationship. In other words, this research relies on the belief that race plays a role in all structures of society. Therefore, the question, ‘Does race play a role in the relationships of Black-White interracial marriages?’, will not be posed in this research. Rather, the question will be, ‘What role does race play in the relationships of Black-White marriages?’ Cross’s Nigrescence model and Helm’s White Racial Identity model will be utilized from a conceptual point of view. These models will help clarify racial interactions which help shape each individuals understanding of race for Black-White interracial marriages (Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001). As a preface to presenting these models, it is important to understand that the models will not be used as a theoretical lens to interpret or even analyze data. Instead, the models will be used to demonstrate how race affects each individual at a personal level, interpreted through socialization and the belief system of how individuals view and filter the world in which they live. Of equal importance, this research will discuss racial identity from the perspective of the individual as elaborated in CRT (Closson, 2010). This research will address the matter of

race not through prescription but through the personal self-report of the participants who are native born U.S. citizens and are currently in Black-White marriages. This is not to say that foreign born individuals who identify themselves as being in a Black-White marriage cannot make meaningful contributions to research on interracial marital relations. However, this study assumes that the racial experiences of U.S. native born Black and White individuals may be different from non-natives because of the difficult history of slavery and inequality that has shaped Black and White racial relations in the United States for centuries.

In addition to looking at the racial development of Black and White individuals, this research will also discuss how race impacts communication among Black-White interracial couples. Interpersonal communication is made up of not only verbal communication but also non-verbal communication such as body language. Within interpersonal communication, couples gather meaning from interactions based on personal knowledge that they have in communicating and understanding the individual with whom they interact. Furthermore, this research will discuss the experience of discrimination within the Black-White marriages. Discrimination is pivotal to understanding the experience of racial interpersonal communication within the marriage.

### **Significance**

This topic is important because it specifically addresses discrimination that is based on race, which impacts multiracial relationships. The term discrimination has a direct connection to the word racism especially for Blacks in the United States. The terms discrimination and racism will be used interchangeably throughout this research. The experience of discrimination or racism is a complex social construct that is embedded

within the fabric of U.S. society (Lee, 1994; Ponterotto et al, 2001). In the context of this research, racism will continually be conceptualized as an expression of discrimination (Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001), and therefore, the experience of discrimination within the Black-White marriage will be defined as each partner's interpretation of the role race plays in the interracial marital relationship. This research seeks to inform individuals in Black-White interracial marriages of the resiliency factors which impact the longevity of their marriages. This research also seeks to inform couples of some of the challenges that are endured as individuals within Black-White marriages.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Miscegenation

The concept of miscegenation is an important term in the field of Black-White romantic relationships. Miscegenation refers to the intermarriage between people of different races; coming from the Latin, “*miscere*,” which means to mingle and “*genus*,” referring to kinds or categories (Cruz & Berson, 2001). Though forms of anti-miscegenation existed all over the world, the laws against intermarriages mainly existed in the United States. Anti-miscegenation laws had not existed in any form in England where the American colonies began; however, anti-miscegenation was created and heavily enacted in United States in order to combat the interactions and relationships between Blacks and Whites (Cruz & Berson, 2001).

Forty states in the United States enacted policies of anti-miscegenation within their political structure (Cruz & Berson, 2001). Laws against miscegenation were not equal among minority groups at the time. These laws varied from state to state and they did not treat Black individuals the same as other minority groups, such as Native Americans (Cruz & Berson, 2001). History shows that the first of the laws forbidding interracial marriages was put into effect during the 1660s for economic gain. Some Whites who supported the induction of anti-miscegenation did so in order for Whites to maintain ‘racial purity’ (Cruz & Berson, 2001). In the second half of the 1600s, Europeans began to see Black slavery as a solution to the labor crisis of the 1840s (Von Dassanowsky, 2000). Africans were said to be strong, cheap and at a seemingly endless supply. The Europeans felt that the Native Americans were not strong workers and indentured servants were not meeting the manual labor need of the time. As the author of

*The Shaping of Black America*, stated, “The race problem in America was a deliberate invention of men who systematically separated Blacks and Whites in order to make money” (Bennett Jr., 1975, p. 62).

The dark skin of the Africans made them easy to pick out in the White majority population and this would decrease the chance of Africans trying to escape (Von Dassanowsky, 2000). The labor of the Africans became an essential part of the agriculture of the New World. Now that the standards of discrimination were changed from social class to skin color, White and Black servants were soon separated and slave codes were put into effect for African slaves.

In Maryland in 1661, anti-miscegenation laws allowed for the reproduction and maintenance of the slave population (Cruz & Berson, 2001). Laws against interracial marriage deemed that any child born of a free woman and a slave father was therein property of the father’s slave master. In previous laws against interracial marriage, children of White women and slave men were privy to the freedom of their mother. Through the anti-miscegenation legislation, slave owners gained the ability to force marriages between White indentured servants and Black slaves to allow for an increase in the slave population. Overall, anti-miscegenation laws were put in effect during a time in history in which White superiority had become a universal way of thinking in American society demeaning Blacks to merely property (Cruz & Berson, 2001). The rejection of marriages and children between Black and White couples made it so that Blacks would never gain access to the assets and power to which Whites were privy. Laws supporting anti-miscegenation remained a way of life in American culture until 1967.

In 1967, the Virginia Supreme Court deemed anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional during the case of *Loving vs. Virginia* (Cruz & Berson, 2001). The court ruled that anti-miscegenation laws were unconstitutional because the law infringed on an individual's right to marry. The rulings in the case of *Loving vs. Virginia* become a transition point in American history because after the ruling, the 40 states that enacted laws against interracial marriage were repealed.

Trends in interracial marriage in the United States have grown since 1970, and continue to grow in the present day (O'Donoghue, 2004). In the 1970s, interracial marriage existed for only 500,000 couples; in 1990, it rose to two million marriages (O'Donoghue, 2004). In 2010, the U.S. Census reported that interracial marriage had grown to 10% of marriages as opposed to seven percent in 2000 (Lofquist et al, 2012). The growth of these interracial marriages specifically occurred within the western regions of the country (Lofquist, Lugaila, O'Connell, & Feliz, 2012), 12-14% of these interracial couples being of Black-White pairings. Although there is no difference in interracial marriage in regard to gender for White individuals (approximately 9.5%), there is a difference for Black individuals. Black men are more than twice as likely to marry outside of their race at 25% than Black females at 12% (Wang, 2015). In comparing all racial groups, Native American's are the most likely to marry outside of their racial group, with 61% of female and 54% of male newlyweds being involved in interracial marriages (Wang, 2015). Though the acceptance of interracial couples has begun to increase in the United States, there has continued to be stigmatization associated with the unions of Blacks and Whites (Forry, 2007).

### **Race and the Black-White Couple Relationship**

Racism has been a large aspect of American society as well as a barrier for Black-White interracial couples to experience an intimate relationship that is not centered on the idea of race (Bonilla-Silva, 1996). Racism has been defined in a myriad of ways throughout history.

Racism can be looked at through many perspectives (Bonilla-Silva, 1996). Orthodox Marxists believe that class is the foundation in which society is structured and racism is a strategic move to divide the working class. Racism has also been defined as the partnership between both prejudice and power that provides a platform for the dominant race to establish superiority over society. The internal colonialisms perspective on race describes it as a societal issue systematically put into place in order for the White majority to elevate its social position, through the avenue of power and control, in the hopes to exert White superiority. Unfortunately, none of these definitions provide a framework or conceptualization which allows critical analysis of a racialized society. For the purpose of viewing race and the interaction in Black-White interracial couples through a critical lens, Bonilla-Silva's view of racism will be employed, which is defined as the illustration of racial principles as a part of a larger racialized social construct (Bonilla-Silva, 1996).

Research on Black-White interracial couples have shown that 64% of these couple's experience discrimination from external forces (Foeman & Nance, 1999). The experience of discrimination exists within the structure of race, perceived racial superiority and inferiority can possibility be experienced within the actual relationship. Discrimination based on racism is an intruding force, which causes difficulty within the

Black-White relationship. Much of the racism within the couple relationship can be due to a variety of factors such as parenting, household chores, and expectations during sexual encounters (Foeman & Nance, 1999).

Many interracial couples insist that there is no difference in their relationship compared to the same-race couple relationships; however, research shows some differences in life experiences and marriage (Forry, 2007). For example, African Americans see the characteristics of masculinity and femininity as aspects of both males and females, while Whites are more likely to see their children in gender specific roles. Furthermore, White partners are more likely to experience difficulty in regard to communication with their family of origin due to the individual's choice of partner (Forry, 2007). In addition, interracial couples are more likely to score low on tests which evaluate levels of self-esteem as compared to same-race couples (Forry, 2007).

It seems that all factors which show the difference between interracial couples and intra-racial couples fit under the umbrella term of race (Bonilla-Silva, 1996). Blacks organize their homes and lifestyles differ from the White majority culture because these attitudes are rooted in a racial foundation. The all-inclusiveness of gender roles within the African American culture is largely due to how Blacks had to situate themselves within the context of slavery. Blacks did not subscribe to the White majority's standard of sex roles because slavery did not allow for it. Blacks did not have the privilege to categorize themselves in society by sex roles because there was an uncertainty of how the Black household would be run due to death and the slave trade. Because of this, Blacks had to learn to play all roles within the family system (Von Dassanowsky, 2000).



On the other hand, Whites had the privilege to delegate tasks throughout the household not only to lighten the burden on household members, but it also provided the basic framework on how Whites would situate themselves in a racialized society (Lewis, 1960). Men would be the head of the house as well as control the structure of the home life and the structure of the workings of society. Women in the White household would take care of the emotional needs of the home as well as keep the home in manageable condition (Von Dassanowsky, 2000).

This structure of White men leading society and White women providing emotional support has been the foundation of the racialized society and shows who would lead the charge to conserve White values (Closson, 2010; Lewis, 1960). Many Black-White interracial couples have difficulty with how Blacks and Whites are situated in society because the foundation of the Black-White interracial couple structure neglects how the individual within the couple relationship is situated in society. One could argue that this difference is only due to family structure, although that explanation overlooks the fact that the family structure is based on how Blacks and Whites were situated in a racialized construct which makes it a topic of race. Due to the strong influence of race within human interactions within the United States, the factor of race will be used to analyze the impact of race and racial identity on Black-White interracial marriages, and to better understand how race impacts the internal workings of the marriage.

### **Formation of the Black-White couple relationship**

Though both Blacks and Whites go through separate process in forming positive racial identities, it is important to know that the formation of a Black-White interracial couple does not end with creating a positive racial identity (Foeman & Nance, 1999).

Forming the interracial couple relationship starts with the personal struggle of Black and White identity formation. As the individual in the couple relationship begin to know who they are from a racial perspective, those individuals begin the process of having the ability to maintain an interracial couple relationship through the process of Interracial Couple Relationship Development (Foeman & Nance, 1999).

Racial awareness is the first stage of interracial couple relationship development (Foeman & Nance, 1999). This stage is a landmark in which the couple learns to be vigilant of their own racial identities, their partner's racial identity, the joint belief of individuals who share their racial identity, and the joint belief of individuals who share their partners' racial identity. In addition to understanding racial identity, the individuals in the couple relationship are constantly gaining a new understanding of how they are similar to one another as well as how they are different. Furthermore, in this stage of the relationship, individuals in the couple relationship are hypersensitive about how race is viewed. Individuals in the relationship are likely to make decisions based on issues of racism. For example, a couple may choose to eat-in for dinner because they felt that they were treated unfairly the last time they went out for dinner.

The second stage of this theory is called coping with social definitions of race (Foeman & Nance, 1999). If the couple has decided to further their relationship, they will have to decide how to incorporate the function of race into their day to day relationship. The action of moving into the coping stage of this theory typically is pushed forth by racism in society. As the couple moves through this process, they begin to learn coping strategies for dealing with adverse situations. Moreover, the couple begins to learn how to proactively verbalize responses to difficult situations.

In the identity emergence stage, the third stage of the model, the couple begins to look at racial identity and having a unique relationship or family as more of a strength than a deficiency (Foeman & Nance, 1999). Couples in this stage have also learned how to reframe negative commentary in a way that allows individuals to better consider their motives behind a comment. Communication becomes one of the most important aspects of the couple's lives. Communication serves as a gateway for individuals in the couple relationship to have a voice for their experiences and to better express their voice to the world.

Once the interracial couple has become comfortable with their identity emergence the couple embarks on the maintenance stage in their relationship (Foeman & Nance, 1999). In the maintenance stage the couple begins to be at ease in using proactive strategies and communication to effectively express their feelings. Moreover, the couple begins to understand that race is not the driving factor for or against their relationship. The goal of this theoretical perspective is for couples to raise racial awareness, to help couples intentionally notice proactive coping strategies, and for the couple to have the ability to come together as a new unit of individuals through maintenance.

### **Analyses of Black-White couple relationship**

Some researchers suggest that racism and discrimination have steadily decreased with the increase of interracial marriage. Recent research has suggested that race may play a larger, more covert role within the racialized couple relationship (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010). Due to a higher likelihood of divorce within the interracial couple relationships as compared to same race couples, it is implied that a racial and gender hierarchy may exist in the inner workings of the relationship.

Research conducted in 2009 showed that racial and ethnic differences play a role in the success of a marriage (Burton et al, 2010). Moreover, research found that Black women, who maintained relationships with lighter skinned men, whether a lighter skin Black individual or White individual, were better able to experience the privilege of the higher status of their intimate partner. In addition, the use of skin lightening treatment has been on the rise by women living in places such as South Africa and India. Researchers have also found that African American men have a high likelihood of ‘hooking up’ with women of different races as part of the college experience. On the other hand, dating relationships had a low likelihood of occurring after the ‘hook-up’ and an even lower likelihood of marrying an individual outside of their race due to discomfort. Even in interracial relationships that teens experience, teens who date outside of their race are less likely to openly speak about their relationship with family, friends, and in public (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010).

In the view of critical race scholar Frantz Fanon, the construct of the Black-White interracial couple will always be compounded with thoughts of economic gain, superiority and inferiority (Fanon, 2008). Fanon argues that ‘White love’ must be gained, and this gain is always at the price of the confidence, truth, and integrity of the Black individuals (2008). Though Blacks may argue that love exists within their relationship with a White individual, Fanon would argue that for a Black-White interracial relationship to be maintained, the Black individual would first have to acknowledge and accept their position within the couple relationship. The position that the individual would have to accept is the realization that they will never actually be good enough to be with a White individual and exist in all the contexts of the White experience.

Moreover, Fanon (2008) would argue that even the desire for a Black woman to have an intimate relationship with a White man is because the Black individual has an unconscious longing to be White. Fanon (2008) writes in terms that would suggest that the love that is given from a White individual is the purist love that can be experienced. In addition, Fanon (2008) argues that for a Black individual to experience ‘White love’, the Black individual must be worthy of the love of a White male or female and the individual must be willing to give up all his Blackness to be accepted at the lowest levels in the White context. Though, a Black individual may be accepted into specific contexts of White society, the Black person in the biracial couple will still not be privy to socialization in the White construct, because, the individual is still not White (Fanon, 2008).

It is difficult to pinpoint what and if there is an internalized struggle that is based on racism in the Black-White biracial couple (Fanon, 2008). However, research has cast doubt on the notion that the existence of interracial couples simply shows that racism and discrimination is dwindling in American society. If it is believed that race is a construct of society used to foster racial dominance, the racialized society would have to play out and be relevant in all aspects of an individual’s life; from birth through socialization to dating and long-term relationships.

### **Conceptualization and Racial Models**

The purpose of describing these models of racial identity development is not to use these models as a means of analyzing or interpreting the statements and identity of participants in this study. The models will be solely used to understand that each individual goes through a process of gaining meaning to both their personal identity, or

who that person is as an individual; in addition to their racial identity, or who that person is within the context of how their racial identity is interpreted in society. Race is the central focus of this research. Models of racial and ethnic identity were developed to create a clear understanding of the lived racial and ethnic processes that are current and applicable, despite the differences in conceptualization of common ethnic and racial terms (Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001). Racial and ethnic models do not have a primary focus of understanding how outside influences impact racial and ethnic beliefs. The focus is on how each individual relates and interacts with their own racial and ethnic cultures as a member of a smaller group within the broader society (Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001).

Within the development of ethnic and identities models, Phinney (1990) outlines three processes of theoretical understanding and research regarding ethnic identities which gives a lens to which theories are formed to understand racial identity. Phinney (1990) states that ethnic and racial identity models can spawn from social identity theory which allow for the growth of an individual's positive self-concept. Social identity theory fosters a sense of belongingness (Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001). Other theories of identity development focus on the formation of identity through exploration, believing that ethnic and racial identity are processes of development that occur over time (Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001). Lastly, some ethnic and identity frameworks, work through the lens of "acculturation" which emphasis' "ethnic involvement, or an individual's acquisition, retention, and maintenance of cultural characteristics" (2001, p. 342). Cross's Nigrescence Model (Cross W. E., 1971) and Helms' White Racial Identity (Helms, 1995) development will be discussed in order to

come to a better understanding of the process of White and Black racial identity. Racial identity is not the same for every individual, and is an evolving process.

**Nigrescence Theory.** Cross's model of Nigrescence (1971) describes how Blackness impacts interactions and the understanding of one's self within society. Cross's model was first brought to the forefront in 1971, although its development began in the 1960s in the height of the Black Power movement. It was developed to better understand the development of Black consciousness (Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001). The original theory was presented in five stages displaying the transition from White superiority and Black inferiority into less rigid beliefs and attitudes regarding Blacks, Whites and their respective cultures (Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001). As Cross' theory progressed (2001), the theory expanded to one that consists of six issues: 1) The Black self-concept and how the identity of a Black individual is separate from that of the White majority; 2) the variation within Black identities and the process of knowing insiders and outsiders; 3) socialization from infancy to young adulthood; 4) adult identity conversion or re-socialization (the original focus of Nigrescence model); 5) identity recycling, meaning the process which allows Black adults to try to magnify and enrich their self through the life span and; 6) identity functions or "the repertoire of Black identity enactments, Black people evidence within or across situations" (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). In referencing the six levels that Nigrescence theory addresses, eight Black identity types were also recognized. It is important to keep in mind that the five stages of Nigrescence were not removed in the expansion of the model; however, the six levels of the theory serve as a context to view Cross' (1971) original five stages.

According to Cross (Wardle, 2000; (Cross & Vandiver, 2001), the identity development of Black individuals occurs in 6 levels which also encompass the original five stages of the Nigrescence Model. The original five stages of Nigrescence will be explained followed by the updated six level model.

Cross' (1971) five original stages of Nigrescence are the pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization and commitment stages (Wardle, 2000). In the pre-encounter stage, the individual has limited awareness of himself, as well as others. Cross's pre-encounter stage is disconcerting because the Black individual is engrossed in the dominant White culture and understands their personal world through the images, values and beliefs of the dominate culture. The individual in this stage may believe in the idea of colorblindness or even the idea of the "race-less" society. The pre-encountered individual sees his world from an individual perspective and through the building of relationships. Additionally, the individual in the first stage in the Nigrescence is naive as to the significance of being a part of a larger group and a community of Black individuals. Moreover, this individual most likely feels a strong connection with the White majority. Unfortunately, for the individual to feel a strong connection with the dominant society, the individual must downplay certain racist tendencies of the dominant culture. Also, this individual may be rejected by individuals within his own racial identity because of the perceived bond that the person has with White culture.

Once the individual passes through the pre-encounter stage and into the stage of encounter, that individual begins to see the impact of race, which may be experienced as either positive or negative (Wardle, 2000). Not only does the individual in the encounter



stage begin to visually notice the racialized structure in society, but they also start to feel the positive or negative emotions of living in a racial society. If the individual feels the encounter as a positive experience, the individual is taken aback by the perceived differences between them self and the dominant culture. However, if the encounter is negative, which is a more typical response, the individual will feel abandoned and of little value. Additionally, the negative encounter leaves the individual unsure of their identity, which may open the door to feelings of betrayal because of their previous belief in justice and equality. As the individual continues through the encounter stage, the individual may feel bewildered and angry. Due to the hurt experienced in response to the dominant culture, the individual may begin to build-up mental walls, or an oppositional identity, which provides a protective factor for the individual and keeps the dominant culture at arm's reach. Nonetheless, the individual begins to consider the importance of his own race and cultural identity.

As the individual begins to consider the importance of race, the person starts to search for a concept of identity that is positive and shows the truth of the Black experience through immersion-emersion (Wardle, 2000). The immersion-emersion stage allows the person to begin the journey of redefining their own identity. The individual continues to hold the dominant culture at arm's length and has limited desire to engage with the White majority. At the same time, the individual begins to dive heavily into his Black racial identity through peer groups and other types of social networking. In continuing the process of finding a positive racial identity, the individual begins to search for sources, both in the present and in history, that show the Black image in a positive light. This process shapes the idea in the individual that "Black is beautiful."

Through the process of immersion/emersion, the individual begins the process of integrating the new positive identity into day-to-day life (Wardle, 2000). Once the individual moves into the internalization stage, the individual's sense of identity and self-concept is affirmed and allows the individual to experience security. As the individual is beginning to embrace their Black identity, the individual begins to open to individuals in a cross-racial manner. This development allows people into their life that accepts the racially secure, confident individual that they have become.

Initially, each part of the model (Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization and Internalization-Commitment) was referred to as a *stage*. However, as the Nigrescence stages were updated, Cross transitioned to understanding the socialization of Blacks throughout the lifespan (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). In the first level of Nigrescence, development affirms that the self-concept of any individual is defined by two components, first the personal identity (PI) and second, the reference group orientation (RGO) (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). The PI is a matrix that consists of general traits that exist in all human beings, which include psychological processes and deep-structure personality dynamics, including the emotions of individuals and interpersonal communication that reflects an individual's self-concept. In order to clearly define Black identity, level one of the model asserts that personality traits are not the cornerstone of Black identity development because personality holds many universal traits that may be true of any human being regardless of race. In contrast, the basis of this model lies in social identity or as Cross & Vandiver (2001) termed it, the *reference group variable* (RGV). The RGV grounds Nigrescence because it engages the *social groups* in which the individual uses to give meaning to their lives as social individuals. The RGV is

not solely subscribed to by personal choice; the RGV can be defined by society, the individual, or both. In Nigrescence theory, Black identity is defined by the way an individual, thinks and acts within the matrix of the RGO and these reference points are limitless (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Level two of the Nigrescence Model is called Nigrescence and the Universe of Black Identity Types. In the second level of Nigrescence, the theory highlights that idea that the Black identity contains numerous identity types; however, despite the various Black identities, Nigrescence attempts to capitalize on the identities which increases the probability for Black individuals to lean on one another in order to; 1) help counteract the challenges that Black individuals face on a daily basis within society; and 2) discover Black individuals that will take up causes in reaction to the infractions of the rights of Blacks within society as well as who will find joy and passion in the celebration of Black culture (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). In taking these ideas in consideration, Nigrescence theory looks at all aspects to help create and shape the Black psyche by drawing from both Afrocentric and Eurocentric approaches. By using these approaches, Nigrescence looks to find the identities that Black individuals draw from which pulls them away and draws them closer to Black problems and culture in hope to uncover the many principle identities that are at work and shape Black individuals (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

In the framework of Level 2, a Black individual's disengagement from Black Problems and culture refers to the Pre-Encounter stage of the Nigrescence model. The pre-encounter is termed as such based on the assumption that there is always a refining process that the individual will engage in and experience challenges that will not be learned if there is no engagement with Black culture (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). As the

individual's moves through this experience, the individual is challenged and creates a new identity, which allows for greater understanding of the Black experience. The identity type that allows the Black individual to be engaged in Black problems and cultures is termed Internalization. Level two further encompasses the immersion-emersion stage with displays of extreme identities of pro-Black and anti-White views. This paradigm of immersion-emersion is a transition point that shows a conversion into multiple identity points that show engagement into Blackness as opposed to the non-engagement view. This level also attempts to understand the reasons why some Black individuals strongly and continuously engage in the Black culture and problems while others do not (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Nigrescence theory and traditional socialization is Level 3 of the Nigrescence model. This stage refers to the different socialization and identities discussed in Level 2, called the racial-cultural reference group orientations also known as identity statuses (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). These identities are relevant throughout the lifespan and vary in the degree to which they highlight or downplay the Black race and culture. The identities include racial self-hatred, Miseducation, anti-White, militantly pro-Black, Black Nationalist, Biculturalist, and Multiculturalist (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Level 4 is called Nigrescence as Resocialization or Conversion Experience. Level 4 is important within the Nigrescence model because it highlights a transition from assimilation, Miseducation, and racial hatred identity profiles that remain present within the late adolescence period which may risk the well-being of a Black individual as they become more experienced within the racialized world (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). The profile of assimilation is important as far as self-identification with Black culture, which

is not a simple transition. Instead, it is due to an unrealistic view of the world which is based on the idea that the views and understanding of the dominant culture will not be able to create meaning of experiences that concretely express difficult racialized occurrences (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). The profile of Miseducation is a little more self-explanatory than that of the assimilation profile because the Miseducation profile moves through change as the individual's false ideas of Black history which fed into the negative stereotypes and perceptions of Black culture and society (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) did not state any conversion experience which can specifically target Black self-hatred; although, they do submit that in the process of conversion, the individual becomes aware of the resources that they need to utilize in order to reach a positive identity conversion resulting in Nationalist, Multiculturalist, and Biculturalist Black identity types.

Level 5 of the model is called Nigrescence and recycling. Within level 5, Parham (1989) stated that Black individuals with well-established and positive Black identities move fluidly throughout certain stages of Nigrescence. This process of movement throughout Nigrescence stages is called "Nigrescence Recycling" (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Nigrescence recycling comes into effect when Black individuals established in their identity navigate and confront new questions that challenge their identity as they move through different life stages and situations throughout the lifespan. The process of Nigrescence recycling is not a hindrance to the established Black identity, but it serves as another refining process that builds understanding and allows the ability to delve deeper into the Black identity being challenged (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

The last level in the Nigrescence model is level 6, called Nigrescence and Identity Functions. Once an individual has established him/herself in the identities of Nationalist, Biculturalist, or Multiculturalist, the solidified identity is an active, integrated part of the individual's daily life through social interactions with multi-cultured individuals (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). These interactions display identity functions, which can be perceived as ideologies in which an individual operates from the acceptance of a stable Black identity. Within Black/White interactions, buffering is an important term because it serves as a psychological protection when overt racism is displayed by a White individual. Within Black-White interactions, Blacks tend to defer to code-switching when involved in situations with Whites that seem to have a friendly disposition and are possibly co-workers, employees or classmates (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). The code-switch occurs when the Black individual diverts to the White mainstream process and way of communication in order to address any uncomfortable feelings or fears on the part of those within the White culture with whom they are interacting (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Within popular culture, the concept of code-switching may be referred to as "acting White" or "fronting". Code switching is a sign of bicultural competence, unveiling an individual who has the ability to be seen and heard within the context of White and Black culture. Next, within the context of Black-White interaction, is bridging. Bridging is seen in situations where a Black individual feels a sense of "profound trust, love, affection and cross cultural connectivity, *bridging* is the way Black identity is enacted" (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Bridging puts race on the forefront of the individual's interaction with another allowing their differences to be a catalyst of the relationship. For instance, Cross and Vandiver (2001) stated, "In contradistinction to

colorblindness, bridging makes differences foundational, explicit, and intrinsically engaging” (p. 379). *Bonding* highlights the importance of a Black individual’s interaction with their own racial group. Cross and Vandiver (2001) report that “Black-on-Black” (p. 379) regular daily interactions allow a continued connectivity to Black culture, people and experiences. Lastly, being one’s self or *individualism* is also an important aspect of Black interactions because it allows the person to simply be who they are without having to understand themselves as a social reference group, seeing people, just as they are, people. This interaction is more closely associated with the assimilation identity.

**Helm’s Model of White Racial Identity Formation.** Terms used to describe Whites have varied in American society (McDermontt & Samson, 2005). Much of the variation in terminology has largely been due to self-identification of Whites as a certain ethnicity, as well as variations in communities and regions of the country. Whites may self-identify themselves as either Anglo, White or Caucasian, but 60% of Caucasian Americans identify as simply White. Specifically, in the slave states, the term White is more prevalent as a racial identification due to the long history of race relations that persists today. Furthermore, the term Anglo is widely used in Upper New England states as well as in the Southwest. McDermontt and Samson (2005) report that researchers indicate that individuals who self-identify as White are more likely to be educated than the general population. Although the term “White” has a direct connection with an American history of slavery, educated Whites still tend to flock to self-identifying as White rather than Caucasian. The term Caucasian is a reference to the existing racial structure of society and specifically refers to the divide of Whites and minorities, with

Whites being at the top of the racial divide expressing superiority (McDermontt & Samson, 2005).

White identity formation is a topic of research that continuously changes (Wardle, 2000). White identity is always being redefined because Whiteness is the basis of the construct of the racialized hierarchy. When beginning to understand racial identity formation, researchers concluded that White identity can be connected to cultural denial, pride in being White, and ambivalence to the actual nature of what it means to be White (Wardle, 2000). Unlike other theories of identity formation, White identity formation has been formulated based on autobiographies of a small number of White individuals. Overgeneralization of the White experience may be the very reason why it has been difficult for researchers to begin to measure White identity formation in concrete terms.

However, what we do know about White identity formation is that Whiteness is used to differentiate allies and threats to White power (Wardle, 2000). Helms (1995) constructed a model of White Racial Identity which is composed of six stages: contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, immersion/emersion, and autonomy. The first stage in the model is contact. The contact stage shows an individual who is ignorant to racism and has experienced minimal or no contact with individuals of color. A person in the contact stage typically self identifies as colorblind. Additionally, this stage identifies an individual who is oblivious to race relations between Black and Whites which allow the individual to ignore racism and discrimination. Furthermore, a person in the contact stage simply accepts the superiority that Whites exerts over other individuals of color without considering the power differentiation. Lastly, the individual in the



contact stage does not have a personal understanding of their own superiority. As a matter of fact, the individual does not believe that they have prejudices or biases.

In the second stage of Helm's theory, disintegration, the individual is in a conflicted relationship with self (Wardle, 2000). This individual experiences an internal struggle regarding unsolved racial dilemmas. This individual may notice that Blacks suffer racial injustice but, the individual is unable to accept the racism that he observes on an everyday basis. A disintegrated individual self identifies as non-racist, yet has difficulty accepting a racial minority in his personal family system. The individual experiencing disintegration slowly begins to acknowledge his own Whiteness and may experience discord when pushed to choose sides between the White in-group and other groups.

The third stage of the White identity model is reintegration (Wardle, 2000). This stage can also be referred to as a stage of regression. White individuals in this stage begin to side more with their own racial group and reject other groups. Additionally, the individual develops intolerance for minority groups and clings to childhood socialization or White privilege. The individual also idealizes his own socio-racial group. Lastly, the individual begins to subscribe to the bootstrap theory by blaming minority groups for their own problems.

The fourth stage is pseudo-independence (Wardle, 2000). Individuals in this stage typically have experienced some type of life changing event which caused them to move out of the reintegration and this allowed them to attempt to understand cultural and racial differences as well as differences in sexual orientation. The individual in this stage may begin to interact with minorities while trying to better understand their own personal

experiences as a White individual. Though the individual socializes with minorities, the friendships that she/he chooses are typically with minorities that have similar experiences with the dominant culture. The individual begins to try to understand differences in race through the left-brain perspective of conceptualization and intellectualization. Lastly, the individual only attempts to understand differences on a surface level rather than the deeper level of understanding race, bias, prejudice and discrimination.

If the individual is pushed into a deeper sense of self-evaluation, s/he will enter the immersion/emersion stage of White identity development (Wardle, 2000). In the fifth stage of this model, the individual begins to look at race from a personal perspective. The individual begins to examine Whiteness by confronting personal biases and through the redefinition of Whiteness. The individual in the fifth stage begins to take a more active role in fighting oppression and racism. This individual also begins to increase his contact with minority groups which were restricted in the previous stage.

The last stage in Helm's model is autonomy (Wardle, 2000). In this stage, the individual notices that the feelings of guilt they once experienced regarding their Whiteness have dissipated and the individual has gained the ability to step out of his box of comfort and allow to explore both their own Whiteness as well as the racial identification of others. Additionally, the individual has become more comfortable in his Whiteness and is better able to acknowledge his personal role in the perpetuation of racism. In the sixth stage, the individual puts forth the effort of letting go of Whiteness in order to gain autonomy. The autonomy stage unveils an individual who is well-versed in racial education; furthermore, the individual begins to let go of his non-racist White ideology and no longer experiences intimidation or fear when engaging minority groups.

**Critical Race Theory.** Critical race theory (CRT) provides the lens to understand how race has been impacting human relations in American society. Critical race theory was created from the basis of critical theory focusing specifically on aspects and ideas of race (Closson, 2010). CRT was first spawned in the understanding of law in society. CRT was first brought to the forefront in the 1970s as a reaction to civil rights legislation and to understand the pervasive nature of race (Closson, 2010). CRT came from a group called critical legal scholars which was headed by Bell, who CRT subscribers affectionately denote as the father of CRT. Bell's work in *The Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (1993) outlines an understanding that White superiority cannot be removed from society without the consent of the White majority. Bell contends that all changes within the beliefs and structure of race within society can only be made by authorization of Whites. Based on the work of Bell and other scholars (Closson, 2010), CRT both today and in the past, challenged the current structure of all individuals in society living under the standards of White superiority without contention (Closson, 2010).

CRT is a lens of thought that is engrained in the belief that race is a relevant, manipulated structure of society that is used to keep the dominant White culture in continued power while oppressing the rights of the minority culture (Alexander, 2010). Moreover, CRT is consistent in its belief that race is not based on the science of heredity, but on the needs of the dominant White society. CRT questions the nature of racial dominance. Believers in CRT are certain of the development and use of race as an opportunity to exploit the beliefs, skills, and abilities, thoughts and actions of the minority culture as inferior to that of Whites (Alexander, 2010). Though the fundamental nature of race saw its beginnings first in the cognitions of society, this process has

maintained its standing not only through the spreading of ideas, but also through the interpretations of history, lack of minority representation both in the professional world and in the political world, as well as in the writing and adjudication of laws disproportionately on minority communities (Alexander, 2010). The oppression of minorities, specifically Blacks, allow for White society to maintain privilege in access to resources, the expression of ideas, and the imposition of morality in society, whether it be social or legal. Delgado and Stephancic (2001) describe four basic principles of CRT: 1) Race is a pervasive structure of society; 2) White privilege and superiority is omnipresent structure in society and a difficult system to change, restructure or remove; 3) Race is not a natural construction of nature but it is manmade idea and structure in society changed and redefined by the dominant culture; and lastly, 4) Variance in racialization of different minority groups is commonly changed as the needs of the majority society changes. The variance in racialization has recently been seen in society by the lack of a comprehensive immigration policy specifically for Hispanics which one could surmise is a response to a depressed economic climate in the United States in regard to job creation for White America.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The purpose of the section is to bring clarification to the theoretical basis of the methodology and research design including the participants, participant selection and data collection procedures, data analysis, ethical concerns, and validity. Briefly, information for this research was gathered through the internet and phone interviews. A series of open ended questions were also used to investigate the impacts of race within Black-White interracial marriages. Qualitative approaches were used to code, analyze, and interpret data.

#### **Theoretical Basis of the Methodology**

Couched within the CRT, this study is an attempt to capture the influence of racial identity in spousal relationship experiences within Black-White multiracial marriages. Using the phenomenological methodology, qualitative analytical techniques are used to answer research questions: How does race and racial identity impact the relationships among individuals within Black-White interracial marriages? What role race plays in the inner working of Black-White interracial marriages? Qualitative research is conducted to explore complex relationship topics that require multidimensional answers that transcend what can be understood through numerical information alone (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). The qualitative inquiry is in-depth and gives meaning to experiences through the direct questioning of the individual(s) who have lived the event, experience, or circumstance and therefore enables us to understand the people and contexts in which a problem exists (Creswell, 2007).

## Phenomenology

Creswell (2007) describes phenomenological research as the “lived experience” of a group of individuals through the analysis and coding of the shared experiences of all of the involved individuals (p. 58). A phenomenological study does not focus on any specific individuals within a context. Instead, the researcher peels away all personal experiences in order to view the actual happenings of an event. The focus of phenomenological study in the context of this research is to understand how race is situated in Black-White interracial marriages by understanding the experience through the creation of an overall universal experience. In line of this methodological approach, this research will be grounded in three basic assumptions: 1) the understanding of the personal lived experience; 2) the assumption that the lived experiences that occur in an individual’s life happen on a conscious level; and 3) the belief that the common experiences between a group of individuals will uncover a universal description of the event (Creswell, 2007).

Phenomenology is a unique form of qualitative research, due to that fact that it utilizes *intentionality*, *noema* and *noesis* (Abassary, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Within phenomenological research, *intentionality* is used as a means of determining the researcher’s focus and awareness to new experiences within the research which directs the researcher’s focus on the real, imaginary or nonexistent. The *noema* is specific to the meaning that is prescribed to any given event that is experienced through the researcher’s emotions, critical thought and physical processes. The *noesis* describes that researcher’s ability to assign meaning to the noema based on memories and experiences (Abassary, 2016; Moustakas, 1994).

In this study, a *transcendental phenomenological* lens was used to attempt to understand how race is situated within Black-White interracial couples by attempting to understand individual racial identity development and the creation of *textural* (understanding what the individual experienced) and *structural* (the circumstances, condition, or context of the experience) descriptions in order to tease out the fundamental nature of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). However, in order to understand the phenomena of how the racialized view of one's partner impacts the overall relationship for Black-White couples, it is necessary to realize that race and racial differences add a new variable, or characteristic that is contrary to the mainstream belief that race does not matter. As stated previously, CRT is a lens that views race as a fundamental structure of American society which impacts legal structure, racial classifications as well as structure and privilege (Creswell, 2007). Because this research views race through the lens of CRT, the question is not if race impacts Black-White interracial marriages, but rather, how race impacts the marriages, allowing race to sit within the relationship as a manmade structure of society (Closson, 2010).

Creswell (2007) describes the process of phenomenological research as the following:

1. Data should be gathered and organized.
2. Researcher should review data and write down initial thoughts and begin to form codes for the information.
3. Using epoche, the research will describe their own life experiences which may affect the view of the data.
4. Researcher will clearly define "the essence of the phenomenon".

5. Researcher will develop significant statements from the data to support the coding in the phenomenon.
6. All statements for the data will be grouped in “meaning units.”
7. Within the phenomenon, the researcher will clearly state what happened; also, known as the textural description.
8. Next, the researcher will define how the phenomenon was experienced for the participant through using a structural description.
9. Then, the researcher should develop the “essence.”
10. Finally, the researcher should show the essence of the experience through using quotes from the data and by using visual tools such as a table to illustrate the point.

### **Procedures and Demographics**

Phenomenological studies typically include 5 to 20 participants (Creswell, 2007) and therefore, data for the current study was collected from five couples (ten individuals). Each couple was heterosexual, Black-White interracial married couples who were born and raised in the United States. All participants in this study were between the ages of 21-65; specifically, my participants ranged from 27-60 years of age. I allowed a broad age range for the participants in this study in order to give the research room to explore the wider context of similarities or differences in racial experiences and beliefs within the marriage. Participants in this study were recruited from around the United States. I collected data from three couples living in New Mexico, one couple living in Missouri and one couple living in Pennsylvania. All couples who participated were married for at least 3 years. Participants came from all educational and economic backgrounds. This



study did not include any specific gender/race compositions; the marriage could consist of Black male-White female or White male-Black female marital partnerships. Couples with children were not excluded from this study. Racial affiliation of the participants was solely based on the participant's self-report.

Participants for this study were identified through the snowball method using social media, specifically Facebook, and e-mails from personal and professional contacts (See Appendix A). I also met some participants while vacationing. My personal and professional contacts were asked to forward the request for participation to any Black-White interracial couples they knew. I also informed my contacts that it was mandatory that both partners in the marriage participate in the study. All my participants had a phone in order for me to set up interviews and to engage in phone interviews. Furthermore, all my participants had internet access to answer preliminary questions through Survey Monkey. All the participants for this study answered preliminary questions in order to be considered eligible to participate in this study. Each spouse also answered questions individually.

The recruitment information that was sent out stated the purpose of the study and directed the prospective participants to the Survey Monkey hyperlink, which displayed the preliminary questions for inclusion in the study. Facebook was also utilized in the recruitment process in which I asked my personal Facebook friends to distribute a status update to their Facebook friends, which described the nature of my study and posted the hyperlink which gave the possible participants access to the hyperlink to answer the preliminary questions. The study's confidentiality clauses and consents (see Appendix D) were managed and authorized electronically.

Recruitment for the study lasted approximately two years to get the desired number of participants who were qualified to participate in the study. I reviewed each preliminary questionnaire in the order that it was received. Once the preliminary questionnaires from qualifying couples for the study were received, recruitment was discontinued. In order to qualify for this study, participants had to be between the ages of 21 and 65 years of age. If a potential participant reported that they were not in this age group, they were immediately informed via SurveyMonkey that they did not qualify for this study. Moreover, if participants were not born in the United States, they were also immediately notified that they did not qualify for the study and thanked for their attempt to participate. Furthermore, participants had to be in Black-White interracial marriages in order to participate in this study, if participants did not meet this qualification then they were immediately informed that they did not qualify for participation in the current study. Lastly, all participants in the study had to self-identify as either White or Black and their marital partner had to identify as their racial opposite; which means, if the potential participant identified themselves as White, their partner then would have to identify as Black and vice versa. In order to verify that the potential participant and their partner were of different races, I personally viewed both partner's qualification forms to make sure this criteria was met, if it was not met, I would inform the participant that they did not qualify for the study, and then thanked for their desire to participate. I used FreeConferenceCall.com in order to conduct the phone interviews since all participants did not live in New Mexico. I personally interviewed all the participants using this method. The phone interview took a minimum of 27 minutes and a maximum of 90 minutes. After the participants were interviewed via the recorded line on

FreeConferenceCall.com, I had each interview transcribed by Voicebase, a confidential, paid transcription services used by FreeConferenceCall.com within two weeks of the interview occurring. Each participant had two weeks to review the validity of their interview through member check but also had the opportunity to opt out if they chose to. No participants returned any corrections to me.

Paper trails of the data and transcription materials were kept in a securely locked cabinet. All data was secured and stored through the University of New Mexico's VPN network. All information, including personal identifiers, were securely stored on the University of New Mexico main campus and password protected. After all of the participants' data was collected and analyzed, all data, recordings and transcriptions were deleted and/or shredded.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Measures**

**Qualifying Questionnaire.** In order for me to investigate the impact of race on Black-White interracial marriages, the participants' eligibility for recruitment into the study were determined through the use of the qualifying questions in SurveyMonkey. Before any questions were asked of potential participants, each individual was asked to read and electronically consent to participation in the study. Once consent was given, each participant was asked questions related to their involvement in Black-White interracial marriages and demographic qualifiers which took the participant no more than five minutes to complete. Examples of these questions include, "Are you currently in a Black-White interracial marriage?", "Are you in a heterosexual relationship?", "Were you born in the United States?", and "Was your marital partner born in the United States?" The participants were given each question one at a time. If at any time during

the questionnaire, a question was answered in a way which disqualified them for the study, the participant was not able to continue with the questionnaire and they were informed that they do not qualify for the study. If the participant did not meet all qualifications for participation in the study, they were not accepted as a participant. If the participant met all the criteria for qualification, that individual was advised that they have been accepted as a participant and then they will proceed to the demographics questionnaire (See Appendix B).

**Sociodemographic Questionnaire.** Demographic information assisted in assessing participants in the study. This was a 10-item questionnaire that included questions such as age, education, length of relationship, income, racial category, and occupation (See Appendix B).

**Personal and Family History Questionnaire.** The participants were asked to answer seven questions about their personal and family history which addressed each participant's past in regard to personal and family dating/marriage history, race, and beliefs of friends and family. Examples of these questions are, "Are there other interracial relationships in your family? If yes, describe the different racial compositions of the couples." "How frequently would you say you and your partner discuss race in your relationship?" and "What was the reaction of your family when they found out that you were in a Black-White interracial relationship?" The existing literature was used to develop these background questions. This information assisted in adequately describing the personal and family context of the participant (See Appendix B).

**Racial Identity and Relationship Questionnaire Interview Questions.** This questionnaire was developed to collect data on the two central research questions: 1)

How does race and racial identity impact how individuals within Black-White interracial marriages relate to one another? 2) What role does race play in the inner working of Black-White interracial marriages?

The central questions of this research consist of two themes which address racial identity and the role of race. There are four questions that aided in accessing information about the theme of racial identity. An example of a racial identity question that was asked was, “How would you describe the connection that you have with your own racial group?” There are two sub-themes that addressed the second major research theme of my work. An example of a role of race question would be, “How has race impacted your relationship with your partner?” This was explored with four questions. The second sub-theme (i.e., What have you learned about race being in a Black-White interracial marriage?) was explored with two questions (See Appendix C).

**Researcher as an instrument.** In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument in interviewing, gathering data, exploration of documentation and observing the human experience (Creswell, 2013). Because I am the primary instrument for this research, I believe that it is imperative to outline my positions as an insider and outsider in topics of race and relationships.

I am a Black, educated, middle class, female, originally from Kansas City, Missouri who is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. I come from a close-knit, very opinionated family. My parents were married for 31 years, until my father passed away in 2010. Both of my parents are Black, and I have two older siblings and two nephews. My eldest nephew’s mother is Black and Mexican and my youngest nephew is Black and Chinese. I was never taught that I was limited due to my skin color. I was

taught to live and dream as big as I chose and that if you want to achieve big, you must work hard. When, I was struggling in high school, I remember my father asking me, “Did you do your best?”, placing the responsibility back on me. If I did my best and still did not achieve my goal, then I could say I put my best foot forward and fell short; however, if I did not put forth my best effort, my failure would be no one’s fault but my own. These beliefs were instilled in me by my father.

Race is not an unusual topic to be discussed in my home either as a child or as an adult. From a young age, I knew that being Black and being White were not the same. My sister and I had a White friend who lived down the street from us, whose mother put her in a different elementary school from the one we were in, so that she would be around more White students. That friend’s next door neighbor was a racist and the father taught his son racism. When we would go to our friend’s house to play with her, the White child from next door would come over to the house and harass my sister and I by throwing things at us, and calling us niggers.

White flight was common in Kansas City. Many White families moved out of more urban areas into the suburban neighborhood due to an influx of Blacks moving into their neighborhoods. Moreover, White families would send their children to private school for their educations and anytime a bond or school budget proposal was brought to a vote to improve public school, the Whites would vote against it, because, their children did not go to public schools.

Nonetheless, racism was not exclusive to Whites; Blacks also struggled accepting who they were as a people. It was not uncommon for myself and others in the Black community to admire someone because they had ‘good hair’. Good hair means, that the

hair of that individual most closely resembles the hair of the White dominant culture. People with good hair, do not have a tight curl pattern in their hair, which is referred to as “nappy” in the Black culture; rather, they have hair with a loose curl pattern so that it is easier to manage.

Additionally, people of lighter skin were of more value than those of darker skin, and if someone were to have a child of mixed race, people would tell them, “You’re going to have a pretty baby!” They would say that because children of mixed race with Black tended to have lighter skin and good hair, which made them more attractive because they had a more pleasing complexion that would give them a look resembling the dominant White culture.

When it came to dating, most of my peers dated other Blacks. I cannot recall any interracial couples in my family growing up. However, as I became an adult, I had uncles who married White women and I have a cousin who dated and is now married to a White woman and they now have two children. Family members have joked around with my cousin’s wife due to her being the only White girl in my paternal family.

Growing up, my parents never taught us or told us that we were only allowed to date other Black people. Although, if anyone dated outside of their race, it was sure to become a topic of conversation. The conversation was not necessarily negative, but more a conversation about curiosity than anything else. I have never been in a dating relationship or marriage with a White man. Though I would not rule it out, I tend to tell friends that if I would ever date a White man, he would have to have some urban roots.

My family has always had pride in our culture and an awareness of the struggles of Black people. My brother has been pulled over several times and questioned by the

police for absolutely no reason. Since being in New Mexico, I have learned to greet every Black person I encounter, because there are few of us here. I call it the “Black nod.” I use to resent the Black nod; yet still, I never fail to initiate the customary greeting.

I recall an experience in which I was a college ambassador, and was with two other White students, dressed in uniform, while giving a school tour. The teachers of the class that we were giving the tour to were White and walked up to introduce themselves to the two White students who were with me, neglecting to introduce themselves to me, even though, we were all standing in a group wearing the same uniform. I waited a second to see if they were just delaying their greeting to me, and when I realized that they were going to ignore me, I straightened my posture, smiled and said, “Hi, I’m Christine!” and shook their hands.

I do not think that the fight against racism is a lost cause. My sister and I protested in Ferguson after the death of Mike Brown. I am a strong believer in the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement, and I believe that Whiteness is real concept and that many Whites do not understand how much of a privilege it is to not see or experience the ugliness of racism. I believe that the fight against racism should be a societal cause; however, I do not believe that Blacks can effectively teach the White culture the truth and ugliness of racism in today’s culture. I believe it is the job of White people to first recognize the existence of today’s racism and understand that it is not just in the heads of minorities. Second, I believe that after White culture has recognized racism within our country and have recognized their own privilege, then it is up to White people to educate their White brothers and sisters and to create a unified voice with minorities.



Currently, in a society that has seen the perceived unjustified killing of Trayvon Martin, Renisha McBride, Mike Brown, Freddy Gray, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, and Sandra Bland, many insist that racism has been eradicated from our society. The concept of a racialized society is not a new idea in the United States. In recent years, many of us have chosen to turn a blind eye to the experience of minorities around our country. I have personally heard people report that racism does not exist right now, and that people currently in the United States are all treated the same. I am unsure if this notion is an intentional misrepresentation of the facts and of the racial climate of our culture in the United States or if this sentiment captures society's desire to believe that everyone is treated in the same way as the majority culture. Within the last three years, there have been a growing awareness of the inequity of minorities in the country and due to this, the Black Lives Matter movement came to existence to bring to light the idea that the life of Black individual is just as important as the life of the White individual. As the Black Lives Matter Movement, has continued to grow, many within our communities, media, and within politics have tried to negate this movement by creating the mantra that All Lives Matter. Although the statement that All Lives Matter should be true, this apparent truth has not been substantiated by the statistics of our time which says that we as African Americans represent approximately 13% of the United States populations; but, we embody roughly half of the incarcerated population (Stuntz, 2008). Moreover, Black men are imprisoned at least seven times more than White men; additionally, out of every 100,000 Black Americans, 359 of those will be incarcerated based on drug related charges while only 28 of 100,000 White Americans will be imprisoned for the same reason (Stuntz, 2008). If these statistics are not sickening enough, I can take this

information much further by stating the fact that in areas where people have lower income and where Black people live in high percentages, violent crimes are least likely to be solved (Stuntz, 2008).

**Data Analysis.** Within phenomenological research, the initial groupings of the data are referred to as horizontalization (Abassary, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). The process of horizontalization allows the researcher to group the data based on relevance. During this process, the data is not repetitive and it does not overlap. Moreover, if the expression is not relevant to the phenomenon or is not conceptualized clearly, the information is then eliminated (Abassary, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental-phenomenological reduction is conveyed by Moustakas (1994) as being each participant's singular experience of the phenomenon. In this study, thirty (30) meaning units from the transcripts were developed which were then collapsed into three (3) themes and seven (7) sub-themes. Creswell (2013) stated that *textural description* is formulated by clustering similar meaning units from each participant in a way that helps describe the group's experience of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) emphasizes the ideal that *imaginary variation* is a means of searching for meaning in the data through the use of imagination; more specifically, it is used to view the data from different points of view. Lastly, axial coding is the outcome of the analyzed data, which gives meaning to the phenomena through structural representation of the data (Abassary, 2016; Hays & Singh, 2012).

All research question-related interviews (i.e., racial identity and role of race) were audio recorded. Once the information was transcribed, horizontalization was used to break the data down into meaning units through the use of the *Nvivo* software (i.e., thematic pattern distribution) based on the information presented by the participants as

compared to the completed interviews of all ten participants. The meaning units were then collapsed to create a clear *structural description*, or the clear and profound meaning of the group experience, in order to describe the shared group experience that occurred which created the phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

### **Research Validation**

Just as quantitative research has validity and reliability measures to authenticate the soundness of the research, so does qualitative research; although, the terms used to inform the accuracy of qualitative research are *trustworthiness*, *credibility*, and *transferability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Vaillancourt, 2006).

**Trustworthiness.** The terms of trustworthiness and credibility are the quantitative equivalency to internal and external validity (Lincoln and Guba, 1986; Vaillancourt, 2006). Specifically regarding trustworthiness, it is important for the researcher to have preliminary questions in order to validate that each participant engaged in the research and met the criteria for the research. Specific to the case of the current research, participants must meet the age requirement of 21-65 years of age, be born in the United States, have been married for no less than three years and be involved in a Black-White interracial marriage with one partner self-identifying as White and the other partner self-identifying as Black. Additionally, the data was reviewed over several separate occasions in order to ensure that the coding of the data matched what the data presented. Moreover, a critical individual who also engages in qualitative inquiry reviewed the coding of the data to ensure that the coding represented the data and that the data revealed a phenomenon that corresponds to current research; while also bringing new insight to the body of research (Allen, 2000; Patton, 2001; Vaillancourt, 2006).

**Credibility.** Credibility within qualitative research is specific to the quality or accuracy of the data presented (Patton, 2001; Vaillancourt, 2006). In order to ensure the credibility for this research, member check was utilized in order for each participant to have the ability to fix any inaccuracies or to correct any mistakes in the data. The quest to yield high quality data for the research should show a rigorous effort (Patton, 2001; Vaillancourt, 2006). In addition to the researcher showing a rigorous effort in producing quality data, the researcher, herself, should also prove as creditable as a qualitative researcher. As the researcher, I attempted to closely follow the methodology of phenomenology research as outlined by seasoned researchers within the field and utilized a critical individual who is versed in qualitative research. Moreover, in order to increase the credibility of the research, I clearly stated my views on the current research by stating my own biases that may effect the analysis of the data. Furthermore, I had my committee chair and the critical individual review and analyze the data to uncover any personal biases within the data that I was unable to detect.

**Transferability.** Within qualitative research, transferability is specific to the idea of generalization within the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1986; Vaillancourt, 2006). In order to gauge the transferability of the data and its findings, I was detailed in the demographics of the study in order to allow the possibility for others to replicate this study. Transferability in the eyes of qualitative research allows another research to gather data in a similar method as the current research and due to the researcher using similar techniques, they should be able to achieve similar results (Patton, 2001).

## Chapter Four: Analysis

This research is an attempt to understand the lived experiences of individual currently living in Black-White interracial marriages. The purpose of this chapter is to magnify the significant themes that emerged from the individual interviews of all participants in this research. The Couples and Interviews section give the background of each couple. Next, each individual interview is summarized with highlighted responses that were pivotal to the creation of the overarching themes.

### Couples and interviews

**Couple 1: Michelle and Steven.** Michelle and Steven have been married for five years and are in their first marriage. They both were born in New Mexico. Although the couple has been married for five years, the couple has been together for a total of 13 years. The couple is very involved in their church and consider themselves Christians. Michelle self identifies as a 32-year-old White female while Steven self identifies as a 38-year-old Black male. Both Michelle and Steven have two-year college degrees. The couple made a combined gross income of approximately \$30,000 in 2015. Michelle works as a caretaker for about 35 hours per week and Steven, who recently started as new career as a production assistant, works over 40 hours per week. The couple has a total of five children; three children are the biological children of Michelle and Steven and the other two children are from Steven's previous relationships.

*Michelle.* For Michelle, having begun a relationship with her husband Steven was not uncommon. Michelle had dated African American men prior to her current marriage. Looking beyond Michelle's marriage with Steven, there are no other interracial relationships in her family. When asked about her family's reaction to her relationship

with her husband, Michelle reported, “My entire family has never said anything about my marriage being interracial. They have accepted my husband just like they would if he was White.” Michelle never recalls experiencing any backlash due to her marriage to a Black man. Michelle says that her family and friends met Steven and liked him for who he is regardless of his race. Although Michelle did not receive any negative attention due to her interracial relationship, conversations about race do arise in her day to day life due to racial topics being a reality in her relationship with her husband and children. When Michelle and Steven talk about racial topics, Michelle says, “We mostly talk about how we have a different experience because we come from different racial backgrounds. Mostly our discussions revolve around our children who are half Black and half White.”

**Michelle and racial identity.** When Michelle was asked, *how would you define the connection you have with your own racial group?* Michelle reported that she identifies herself as White, she does not feel a personal connection to the White culture. When Michelle was asked, *how does it make you feel to be a part of your racial group?* Michelle stated that she feels more a part of the New Mexican culture than she does for her White racial group. Michelle states, “My family is all mixed up, I’m mostly Irish but I don’t identify with being Irish...we don’t celebrate any Irish traditions or anything like that...I don’t really feel a connection to my race.” Michelle feels that much of the emotion connected to her racial group is negative; stating that feelings are expressed for her race, “Only when it comes to situations and where my racial group has done something bad against Black people mostly. You hear [it] on the news or stuff like that.” Additionally, Michelle does not feel that the history of her racial group has impacted the way she has lived her life. Michelle reported that she gained her identity as an individual

from her familial upbringing. Michelle says that her parents told her, “Don’t treat people different because of their skin color...” Moreover, Michelle reports that, “I think more of my life experiences have shaped me into the person I am, more so, than my race.”

When Michelle was asked, *how has the history of your racial group impacted who you are and how you have lived your life?* Michelle reported that she does not feel that her racial history has impacted how she has lived her life, she does feel that American society has shaped the way she feels about the White race. Michelle reports having negative feeling about her racial group, especially since she has been in a relationship with her husband. Before Michelle was in a relationship with Steven she reports that she did not clearly see that impacts of racism with society. Michelle stated, “Well, I wasn’t really so much aware of it [racism] still happening all the time until I was in a relationship with him [Steven].” Furthermore, when asked *how has American society shaped the way you think about your own race?* Michelle reports that American society tries to impact that way that she and others feel about Black culture. Michelle stated, You kind of think, it's [racism] gotten better, it's not as bad as it used to be. But I mean, to think that racism is gone is to be White...It's just like, it happens all the time and you don't see it.

When Michelle was asked, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your partner’s race?* Michelle stated feeling that a stronger connection to the Black culture through her husband which has shown her a different view of society reporting, I mean people don't believe me sometimes. Sometimes the stuff that I tell them, people are always shocked whenever they hear something and I'm not as shocked. I'm not shocked when he's accused of stealing candy when we're in the grocery store or whatever, [and] just treated differently.

When Michelle as asked, *how do your feelings about your partner’s racial group impact how you feel about your own racial group?* Michelle stated, “Well, I mean it

really opens your eyes. Being in an interracial relationship, I see stuff more...I mean people don't believe me sometimes.”

**Michelle and role of race.** When I asked Michell, *what is your experience in being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* Michelle reported, “Well, I've definitely learned a lot about a whole different culture. I'm actually more involved in Black culture than I am in White.” Michelle further stated that she feels more connected and involved in the Black culture due to the activities they participate in as well as the individuals that they are involved with. Michelle stated that, “I’m usually the only White person around with our friends.”

When I asked Michelle, *how are racial differences communicated within your relationship with your partner?* Michelle reported that the extent of the racial differences that are communicated typically does not come from within the relationship, but it is highlighted in the interactions that they have when they are out in the community. Michelle said,

I think it's because he's like, yeah, okay, he treated me differently, that's just how it's been my whole life. And I'm just like, well that's not okay, that makes me mad, you shouldn't accept that.

Looking beyond outside social reactions, Michelle could not think of any major events in which there was difficulty in the relationship due to racial difference but when asked, *describe the ways you feel that you are culturally interpreted by your partner based on racial values?* Michelle said that at times Steven did bring up her being White, not necessary as an insult but in order to explain why she did not hold a certain set of knowledge or her lacking at certain experiences. Michelle said,

Like just yesterday, we were talking about that movie, that Michael Jackson movie, Moonwalker. Yeah, and I never seen it. And he's like, so blown away that I've never seen



this movie. And said, because you grew up White. You grew up with White parents and you didn't...Like, he was my idol, I wanted to be him...

Additionally, Michelle reported, “Well, we've had moments, certain things and certain situations that I've been more upset about than him, or he's been more upset about. Or maybe I don't get it quite as much as he does...”

When discussing the considerations, I asked, *What considerations did you make when deciding to be involved in a Black-White relationship? When you were dating? And when you were deciding on marrying?* Michelle said,

I never really was thinking, he's Black and I'm White and how's this going to work. It never crossed my mind. I remember other people, outside people saying are your parents going to be okay with that. And I was thinking like well yeah, duh, why wouldn't they be okay with it. He's a nice guy and I didn't think about it in those terms really.

When Michelle *How has race impacted your relationship with your partner?*

Michelle said, “...we haven't really had any major issues, we've just had more discussions or something... a lot of it has come up with the kids and stuff, maybe more so, than with him and I. But it's just discussions that people have or things we see on TV and I maybe have a different reaction than he does.”

*Did you have preconceived ideas about your partner's race? And if yes, describe those preconceived ideas about your partner's race,* Michelle stated, “No, I mean, no, I don't think so.”

When asking Michelle *What experiences, both positive and negative, have you encountered in attempting to understand your partner's racial background?* she has had in trying to understand Steven's racial background, Michelle said, “...it's a lot of learning about his culture and being part of his racial background...a lot of it is at church.”

Michelle then described a situation in which she was asked to be a part of an African

dance for Black History Month. Michelle reported that her biggest concern would be saying “no” because her church asked her to do it, not because she was uncomfortable doing it, but because, “I didn't want to be disrespectful, is where I was coming from.” When discussing the situation with her husband, he said to her, “...nobody thinks that.” However, Michelle stated that, “I don't want to be the White person, that thinks, just because I'm married to a Black man, I know all about Black people. Or, that I understand the struggles of Black people, because I'm married to a Black man and that's not how I feel at all.”

I asked Michelle, *Are you comfortable discussing race with your partner? And describe how it feels to discuss race with your partner*, Michelle stated, “Yeah, yeah,” and further reported,

Well, we talk about everything, I know when we had a discussion, not that long ago about the use of the n-word and he says it. But, it's something that's never came to my mind or out of my mouth, never had, never will. Not accidentally, not when I'm mad, it's just a word that's not in my vocabulary. And I don't get why some white people think it's okay to say it, and it just drives me crazy.

Michelle and I summed up the conversation by asking her, *what have you learned about race from being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* Michelle said the following:

Well I've learned a lot. I have Black children and so, I need to know more than I was taught. So, I made it a point to talk about it and we make a big deal out of Black History Month...Being with Black people all the time and [seeing and understanding] just how they view things...White people sometimes just are completely oblivious to what they're doing...I've got to learn about a culture that I wasn't a part of, I've got to become a part of a church that I absolutely love. I think we've come from such different backgrounds and...I think really, we balance each other out.

When I asked Michelle, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship been a positive experience*, and she stated, “I've got to learn about a culture that I wasn't a

part of, I've got to become a part of a church that I absolutely love.” Moreover, when Michelle was asked, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship made your relationship better or stronger?* She stated, “I think we've come from such different backgrounds and we're so different that yeah, I think really, we balance each other out.”

Lastly, I asked, *What information do you wish you would have known prior to being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage? And how would knowing this information beforehand have helped you to better your own relationship with your partner?* Michelle stated, “I don't really think anything. Nothing I can think of.”

**Steven.** Steven is familiar with dating individuals outside of his racial background. Steven says that he has been involved in relationships with Asians, Whites, Spanish, Mexican and Russian women. Steven has people who are in his family who are dating or married to individual's who are Spanish, White and Mexican. Like his wife, Michelle, Steven said that his family was happy when they found out the he was dating Michelle because, “everyone loved her.” In addition to his family, Steven did not voice any concerns about the social environment that he learned in reporting that many of his friends were also in interracial relationships so they would have no reason to voice any concerns about his relationship.

**Steven and racial identity.** When Steven was asked, *how would you define the connection you have with your own racial group? And how does it make you feel to be a part of your racial group?* He reported, “Yeah, I'm just proud to be Black, I love my Black folks.” When asked, *how has the history of your racial group impacted who you are and how you have lived your life?* Steven responded ... “I mean our history carries over even if we didn't experience some of the things that they experienced, it still makes

us stronger as a people...” When I asked Steven, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your own race?* He reported:

They haven't affected the way I think about my own race at all...I mean it's kinda sad they don't really teach everything about our history, you know...As far as things we went through and things we've accomplished. Where we came from and to now, you know, they want to put their own little twist on certain things. I'm pretty much learned all my history for my people from my aunties and my mom and church and uncles, all the family members.

When Steven was asked, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your partner's race?* He stated that he feels that the White majority culture attempts to make people feel they are better than others by reporting, “...but I think they certainly try to make themselves look superior, I guess, you could say.” Additionally, when asked *how do your feelings about your partner's racial group impact how you feel about your own racial group?* Steven said that he does not try to treat people differently based on different characteristics they have, stating, “I'm friends with everybody. I've got friends of all cultures. I don't let, I try not to let anything I've heard or learned or seen dictate how I live my life or how I treat other people.”

**Steven and role of race.** When I asked Steven, *what is your experience in being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* He stated that, “I've certainly done things I've never done before.” Furthermore, when asked, *how are racial differences communicated within your relationship with your partner? And describe the ways you feel that you are culturally interpreted by your partner based on racial values?* Steven replied,

She's, it's weird though...cuz I can say she's a little more lenient as far as parenting and then I could say I'm a little more aggressive. Just different things like, I'm quicker to walk off, she's quicker to yell...Things like that.

When Steven and I talked about *what considerations did you make when deciding to be involved in a Black-White relationship? When you were dating? And, when you were deciding on marrying?* He reported, “I mean yeah there was really nothing I was worried about.”

When speaking to Steven about the role of race in their relationship, I asked him, *how has race impacted your relationship with your partner?* Steven reported that he was unsure if it played a role at all. When I asked Steven, *did you have preconceived ideas about your partner’s race? If yes, describe those preconceived ideas about your partner’s race.*

Steven replied, that he tries not make judgement about people based solely on race, stating,

So, I mean, of course...getting treated a certain way by teachers and stuff. Of course, I don't wanna say I hated it, cuz that's a strong word. But of course, I really did not like that but I don't say it's because of race.

When I asked Steven, *what experiences, both positive and negative, have you encountered in attempting to understand your partner’s racial background?* Steven reported that she notices a difference in the experiences that they had growing up but he was unsure if these differences were due to him being five years older than Michelle, or due to them having different racial backgrounds. Steven said that Michelle would watch David Bowie or artists similar to him and at times he would ask Michelle, “What Black person watched that?” When Steven and I discussed how he feeling about discussing race with his wife, I asked, *Are you comfortable discussing race with your partner? And describe how it feels to discuss race with your partner.* Steven replied, “Yes I feel comfortable talking about race with her, the thing is...we really don’t talk about race.”

When I asked Steven, *what have you learned about race from being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* He reported, “Nothing, really because my family accepted her with open arms.” Moreover, when I asked Steven, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship been a positive experience?* Steven replied, “Like I said, I’ve definitely done things that I’ve never done before in my lifetime.”

When Steven was asked, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship made your relationship better or stronger?* Steven reported, “Yeah, I mean I think I changed my life for the best, for her.” Lastly, I asked Steven, *what information do you wish you would have known prior to being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage? And how would knowing this information beforehand have helped you to better your own relationship with your partner?* Steven stated,

How sensitive white girls are. I don't know that it would've helped me but I'd have learned. I'd have tried to express my feelings. Try to get my point across, or tried to get her to do something with a different tongue, different dialect. I would try to choose my words more wisely.

**Couple 2: Lisa and Jeffery.** Lisa and Jeffery have been married for 20 years and this is the second marriage for them both. Lisa is 49-year-old Black female who has some college experience and Jeffery is a 50-year-old White male who has a master’s degree. Both Lisa and Jeffery were born in the eastern part of the United States with Lisa being born in New York and Jeffery being born in Pennsylvania where the couple currently lives today. The couple has one child which Lisa had from a previous relationship; however, Jeffery has legally adopted this child as his own. The couple makes a combined gross income of approximately \$92,000 per year. The couple is strong in their religious beliefs as Christians; because of their faith, they both work in ministry with Lisa working

as a Children's Ministry Director and Jeffery working as a pastor. Jeffery works over 40 hours per week while Lisa works no more than 20 hours per week.

**Lisa.** For Lisa, this is not her first time dating someone from outside her race. Lisa has dated individuals of Hispanic and White backgrounds and she briefly dated a man from Trinidad while she was a teenager. Lisa describes her family as diverse on both sides of the family. Her family members have dated or married White, Hispanic and Asian individuals. Lisa comes from a diverse background and she reports that the topic of race does not come up too often in her conversations. In general, Lisa stated that racial conversations occur in her family typically due to, "race issues brought up in the media." Overall, Lisa states that she and her husband feel that they are more similar than different. Lisa reports that they come from families that are working class. Occasionally, Lisa says that they discuss the differences between Black and White churches based on churches that they have been involved with in their past. Lisa stated that she and her husband have never had conflict in their relationship due to topics surrounding race. Due to the diversity in her family, Lisa also said that her family had never had a problem with her husband being White neither while they were dating or currently. Lisa also reported that she had never had difficulty in her social environment either at work or with friends due to her being in an interracial relationship stating, "If anyone was upset, they did not express it."

**Lisa and racial identity.** Lisa comes from a large family. When I asked Lisa, *how would you define the connection you have with your own racial group?* Lisa reported having a strong connection with her racial group due to the closeness of her family. Additionally, I asked her, *how does it make you feel to be a part of your racial*

*group?* Lisa stated, “I guess I just never really thought about it too much. But, I guess in terms of my own family. You know, knowing I come from this big, large African American family.”

When I asked Lisa, *how has the history of your racial group impacted who you are and how you have lived your life?* Lisa stated that before she became a Christian, she had a strong desire to discover her history and visit Africa. However, after she became Christian, her racial identity became less important and her identity in Christ moved to the forefront, Lisa stated,

You know, I guess just trying to live my life for the Lord and not place such an emphasis on color or race and for me, it's like often times people will say well I'm colorblind. And for me, I don't feel like I'm colorblind, it's okay to look at someone and say, oh they're Black, or they're White, or they've got brown hair or blue eyes...And so, for me, I don't allow that define me or really impact how I behave.

Although Lisa does not believe that the characteristics that one holds should define who they are, she does believe that American society has skewed that view of people of color. When I asked, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your own race?* Lisa said, “I've been going to school the last couple years, and just learning more of the history of slavery and African Americans and things like that, and I think sometimes the media does portray Black people in a negative light.” Lisa further explained,

...there's a lot of television shows on now that are I think, portray more of a wider variety... Black-ish, some of the shows now. It's creating now more of a variety of Black people, where I feel like it wasn't always positive...

In contrast to the way American society portrays Blacks, I asked Lisa, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your partner's race?* Lisa reported that there is a difference in how Whites are seen within society. Lisa also stated,



[Black people] we didn't have a lot of positive role models when I was growing up... usually the shows that you see were mostly just Caucasian people. For me, the images were all positive, you know? The negative roles were usually people of color...

When I asked Lisa, *how do your feelings about your partner's racial group impact how you feel about your own racial group?* Lisa responded, "At times, I've talked to some people that felt like they might have been less than because, like you said, in the media, there's always been a positive view of what White culture is."

***Lisa and role of race.*** When speaking about the role of race, I asked her, *what is your experience in being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?*

Lisa stated the following,

I would say that surprisingly, we haven't had any major issues, there haven't been anything like big or anything. Prior to me being married to my husband, I was married before. That was hard, you know...I lived in the South half at the time, and so I remember, you know, there were people that did react to my marriage and to my ex-marriage. Then it was also hard because after that first marriage, I didn't want to get involved in another interracial marriage because...my ex-husband had a drinking problem and whenever he would drink he would call me the n-word and...I felt like I don't want my son to grow up in a family like that and then his son [ex-husband son] was extremely racist.

When I asked Lisa, *how are racial differences communicated within your relationship with your partner?* she stated,

...I don't know because, like I don't see any huge differences in between him being White and me being Black. You know? And so, I don't think we need to communicate anything. I'm trying to think if there's anything we've had... it's not like I say, Oh, Jeffery, you need to behave this way because we're... We haven't had any, we haven't, and it could be because he's very comfortable. He's always been around the Black community, so it wasn't a big deal for him. And it wasn't a big deal for me because like most Black people, our work environments, school, we are always around the majority [White culture]. And so, I feel like we haven't had to communicate anything.

When I asked Lisa to *describe the ways you feel that you are culturally interpreted by your partner based on racial values?* Lisa said,

I don't think that he looks at me like, okay, well she's a Black woman so I've got to view her in this way. He just looks at me as his wife, as a woman, not as a Black woman. Just

like I look at him as my husband, who's a man.

When asking Lisa, *What considerations did you make when deciding to be involved in a Black-White relationship? When you were dating? And, when you were deciding on marrying?* Lisa replied,

...when I married my husband, I really was concerned about whether or not his family would accept us. I knew that if my family didn't like him, it wouldn't be based on race, it would be based on personality or something that they felt...it wouldn't be because he was White.

When I asked Lisa, *how has race impacted your relationship with your partner?*

Lisa stated, "I don't think he sees me as being a Black woman, he just sees me as being his wife." When I asked Lisa, *did you have preconceived ideas about your partner's race? If yes, describe those preconceived ideas about your partner's race. And, What experiences, both positive and negative, have you encountered in attempting to understand your partner's racial background?* Lisa, reported that she did not have any preconceived ideas about him or trying to understand his racial background because she has dated White men before. Additionally, Lisa reported that she did not want this relationship be involve abuse, as her last marriage did. When I asked Lisa, *are you comfortable discussing race with your partner? And describe how it feels to discuss race with your partner.* Lisa replied, that she feels that she can be open and honest with her husband about anything.

In discussing what Lisa has learned from being in an interracial relationship, I asked her, *what have you learned about race from being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* Lisa said,

I think for me, when we see things on the media and we have conversations, when they have the Trayvon and the Michael Brown, all the things throughout the years...it's really seeing his perspective. Oftentimes, you have groups sometimes where Black people talk

among other Black people, and White people talk among other White people about different things but not necessarily with each other.

I summed up our conversation by asking, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship been a positive experience? In what ways, has being in an interracial relationship made your relationship better or stronger? What information do you wish you would have known prior to being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage? And how would knowing this information beforehand have helped you to better your own relationship with your partner?* Lisa said the following:

For me, that has nothing to do with being Black or White, that just has to do with...Who he is. How he's impacted my life, but not only my life spiritually but my son's as well, our son. He adopted our son, and so for me, that's how he's added value to my life. Really, him being White is really irrelevant... I think I thought because of previous experience, we would have a harder time. I think, knowing that, and being on guard against that. Knowing that, you may have to work harder at your marriage or fight for it more, but like I said, over the 20 years, we really haven't had anybody, at least to our faces or overtly saying anything.

**Jeffery.** Prior to Jeffery's current marriage, Jeffery had been involved with both African American and Hispanic women. Jeffery said that there is not a lot of racial diversity in his family; although, in the past he had an uncle who was married to a woman of Asian descent. Just as was stated by Lisa, Jeffery said that they do not discuss racial issues on a regular basis unless there was something reported in the news. Additionally, when racial discourse is shown on the news, Jeffery and Lisa both agree that in these matter's, people are, "more alike than they are different." Jeffery also reported that there was no conflict in his family nor among his friends do to him being in an interracial relationship. Jeffery further stated that he can only judge this by the actions of his social environment, noting that it is possible for different beliefs having been expressed behind closed doors.

**Jeffery and racial identity.** In discussing Jeffery's connection with his own racial group, I asked Jeffery, *how would you define the connection you have with your own racial group?* Jeffery described the following:

... I'm of Italian ancestry, and we moved from Philadelphia, the Philadelphia area to more of a less populated area in Maryland, and it was all White at that time. And then, I was looked upon as the ethnic, our family the ethnic family. And so, the kids related to me on that level, and didn't really accept me... my dad had darker skin and the first time I ever heard the n-word was in relation to my father...

When asked, *how does it make you feel to be a part of your racial group?* And *How has the history of your racial group impacted who you are and how you have lived your life?* Jeffery reported that he experienced a change in how he viewed race, and how he viewed himself due to becoming a Christian just as his wife reported. Jeffery stated, ...since I became a believer in Christ, before that I used to put a lot of emphasis on my ethnic heritage. And then once I became a believer I realized well, I really need to find my identity in Christ.

In my discussion with Jeffery, I told him that it sounded like he places more of an emphasis on his Italian heritage than the White racial group and Jeffery said, "Yeah. Being White as a whole, that doesn't mean anything to me."

In discussing how American society has shaped the way he feels about his race, I asked him, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your own race?* Jeffery stated,

So, I think a pitfall that some people could make is, everybody who's a White person who's from the South, they all must be a racist. Because of the history and all that. And everybody from the Northeast who's White, well they're not racists, but that's really not true. I've seen plenty of White people from the Northeast that were behind closed doors would say the most vicious things about [Blacks], you know, and then people from the south who aren't...

When discussing how American society has shaped the way he thinks about his wife's racial group, I asked, *how has American society shaped the way you think*

*about your partner's race?* Jeffery stated,

So, we're very fortunate because we live on the other side of the Civil Rights Movement. And so, there's been a lot of progress that's been made...you know there was the desegregation of schools and a big move to try equality of persons and all that...but then you also see that racism still exists. I experienced it, I saw it. I saw attitudes and things like that. So, in terms of shaping it, I guess it's more like me saying, here's to different! You had this whole wide range of views, and you see the progress, but then you still see there's still work that needs to be done on these things.

When I asked Jeffery, *how do your feelings about your partner's racial group impact how you feel about your own racial group?* Jeffery stated,

In terms of how I feel about Black people and how it relates to White people...I guess no difference. I'll give you an example. So, when I was in the military...most of my friends were Black, and we would hang out and go to clubs and sports teams, stuff like that. But then I started to play softball and most of the guys on the team were White and so I would go out to the pub after the game, and I would drink beer with those guys. I came back to the dorm and one of my Black friends said, hey, man, what are you doing? And I was like, what do you mean what am I doing? He goes, well, you're hanging out with the White guys, you can't do that. You're like, with us, you're one of us. So, I was like, well, listen man, I get what you're saying, but I really don't care what color anybody is, I just want to have a good time.

**Jeffery and role of race.** Jeffery and I further discussed his experience in being in Black-White interracial relationship, I asked him, *what is your experience in being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* Jeffery said,

You guessed that she's African-American. But sometimes people, they say she's Hispanic or something else. Now I've dated African-American women before and it was harder cuz they were darker skinned or whatever. And so, that was a different situation where people were more hostile...

When I asked Jeffery, *how are racial differences communicated within your relationship with your partner?* Jeffery further stated that he does not think that racial differences must be communicated in his relationship with his wife. Jeffery said,

Well, we talk about stuff related to race, on occasion, if it comes up in the news we'll talk about it. But other than that, we don't...people sometimes make a big deal over interracial marriages, like how could that work? My wife is like, well, because we're people. We're more alike than we're different.

When I asked Jeffery, *describe the ways you feel that you are culturally interpreted by your partner based on racial values?* Jeffery said, "...all of my tastes were that [that of the Black culture] so from music to whatever. And taste in clothes and everything. So, there wasn't a lot of difference..."

*What considerations did you make when deciding to be involved in a Black-White relationship? When you were dating? And, when you were deciding on marrying?* Jeffery said,

So, like I said, I have dated African-American women before and had experienced some of the difficulties of that. So, then I became a Christian and then I'm like I need to find a Christian wife now. But then I started to make criteria. Yeah, but initially, I guess, because of the cultural pressure closer to what I experienced in the past... maybe if I could just avoid dating Black women. That would be nice. But when I met my wife and we got involved... I was just so thankful to the Lord.

Regarding Jeffery having any considerations when deciding to marry his wife, he said, "No, cuz...once I met my wife and then we fell in love...I didn't even think about it...I was just thankful for the person that the Lord brought into my life, and that was that. So, I didn't give it two seconds' thought after that. I was like, this is the person for me. And this is what, I'm ready to do it."

When I asked Jeffery, *how has race impacted your relationship with your partner? And, did you have preconceived ideas about your partner's race? If yes, describe those preconceived ideas about your partner's race.* Jeffery said the following,

I knew that not everybody, not all African Americans were accepting of interracial marriages, and so I was concerned at first, like well I hope her parents accept me...She would probably tell you the same thing. Yeah you worry about that. But other than that, the only preconceived idea I guess was just the reality that some people don't like this.

When I asked Jeffery, *What experiences, both positive and negative, have you encountered in attempting to understand your partner's racial background?* Jeffery reported,

So, the positive was, in the African American culture, I found people to be warm and friendly. There was like a joy, a vibrancy, an energy. There was a togetherness, like a brotherhood that you don't find in other places... Yes, I guess I would use those terms... Then the negative would be just the difficulty that some folks gave me because I was there. And I was called names and pushed around. Like what are you doing here? Who do you think you are?

When I asked Jeffery, *Are you comfortable discussing race with your partner?* And describe how it feels to discuss race with your partner. Jeffery said,

I could discuss anything with her... like I said, when things come up in the news, we will talk about it and we'll give our opinions about it. We agree on pretty much... everything that we see... in the news... we discuss the difficult things that we see about race in America today...

When Jeffery was asked, *what have you learned about race from being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* Jeffery stated,

I think that we put far too much emphasis sometimes on the differences. I think people are so dug in on their ethnic heritage, or their racial heritage, so that they can't see anything else... It's like, no we're a lot more alike than we are different. And especially in America. I mean we're part of the larger culture, the American culture, which is shaped by the media and the values that we have... But we're far more.

When asked, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship been a positive experience?* Jeffery said, "I don't think like in those terms like... I think... being married to my wife has been the most positive thing in my life, so I don't think of it in terms because she's Black... It's because she is who she is as a person, and who God created her to be, and that's the person I love..."

When I asked Jeffery, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship made your relationship better or stronger?* Jeffery said that he does not feel

that it necessarily has made them stronger because they have not faced much adversity. However, Jeffery stated that, “We live in the northeast outside of Philadelphia. If we lived somewhere say in the deep South in a small town in Mississippi, we might feel a little differently.”

Lastly, I asked Jeffery, *what information do you wish you would have known prior to being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage? And how would knowing this information beforehand have helped you to better your own relationship with your partner?*

My answer would probably be a lot different before Christ than it is after Christ. But, in Christ now, and trying to look at things through a biblical worldview, through the lens of the gospel, it's just different. I don't think the same way I used to think, you know? At the same time, we don't want to be naive. To the real challenges that are out there. And we wanna be able to speak to those issues, and help people understand that there still is work that needs to be done with regard to race relations and stuff like that.

**Couple 3: Tamara and Carlos.** Tamara and Carlos have been married for 15 years. Tamara is a White 41-year-old stay-at-home mom who was born in West Virginia and Carlos is a 44-year-old Black pastor who is originally from California and works over 40 hours per week. Both Tamara and Carlos are college educated with master's degrees and the couple makes a gross income of over \$70,000 a year. Together the couple has six children and their current marriage is their only marriage. Currently, the family lives in the state of New Mexico.

**Tamara.** Tamara is not unfamiliar with Black culture; previous to her marriage, Tamara had dated African Americans, Latinos and a Black individual from Africa. Tamara has a sibling who is half-White and Sudanese. Tamara says that conversations regarding race happen regularly in her life which cover current events happening in the news, racial statistics, health and other related issues and topics



affecting her children.

Tamara reported that in the beginning of the relationship with her husband, she felt that his family would prefer a Black partner for him. She describes feeling inadequate due to her husband predominately having dated Black women in his past. Additionally, early in her marriage, Tamara felt inadequate due to her husband saying to her that she did not understand him due to him being a Black male. Furthermore, Tamara reported that she felt that she had to be the spokeswoman for the White racial group, having to explain the actions and reactions of White people around her; many times, trying to defend why their actions were not racist.

Tamara said that her family was not at all surprised that her boyfriend was Black because this was not the first relationship she has been involved with a Black man. However, Tamara says that this may have been more of a surprise to her extended family due to her family having been racists. Tamara said that her mother attempted to steer her to dating individuals who were White in order to reduce any problems due to racism. Although, later, Tamara found out that her mother had a secret relationship with a Black individual in which her mother became pregnant with her younger sibling.

Nonetheless, Tamara did not report having any conflict with family or personal friends due to the relationship that she had with her husband. Tamara reported that before she became a stay at home mom, many of her co-workers were surprised to find out that she was married to a Black man. Tamara further reported that some did not figure out that she was married to an African American until she confronted them after they made a racist comment. However, when Carlos did become the senior pastor of a church in California, there were some individuals who left the church because they did

not agree with interracial relationships.

**Tamara and racial identity.** When I asked Tamara, *how would you define the connection you have with your own racial group? And how does it make you feel to be a part of your racial group?* Tamara reported that she has a stronger connection to her Irish roots than she does to the White racial group. Tamara says that she is approximately 50% Irish. Regarding how Tamara has lived her life based on her racial group, I asked her, *how has the history of your racial group impacted who you are and how you have lived your life?* Tamara reports, “although it's [being White has] contributed to who I am, I don't feel like it's my primary way of making decisions or anything.” Tamara says, that although she is White, “Well, I feel like I don't, when I have a life choice to make, I don't think, ‘what would other White people do?’ Or, like, I don't think back to my race.”

When I asked Tamara, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your own race?* Tamara said, “So I think that that has definitely made me think about situations where I've probably been given an easier deal, or something, maybe, because I'm White.”

When I asked, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your partner's race?* Tamara said,  
 ... we're just so inundated with media, and stereotypes that I think that you can't not have these impressions put upon you. But I think that's where I think your own personal choices, [that you make come in] you know. I'm going to get to know a person, and not just assume that they like rap.

When I asked Tamara, *how do your feelings about your partner's racial group impact how you feel about your own racial group?* She stated,  
 ... I mean, sometimes I am disappointed in how some people have behaved based on

race. Whether they're White, and were racist against a Black, or a Black person who's been racist against a White, or Chinese, or ... You see all culture groups, there's always some people who aren't accepting of other culture groups. Why, White lady, are you nervous around my husband? I always try to assume the best in people.

**Tamara and role of race.** When Tamara was asked, *what is your experience in being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* Tamara said,

I mean, I would say overall it's been...a non-issue. I think the first few years, earlier in our marriage...there was more issues related to it. But now, we've been married for so long, you know, that trust is built between us...But I think early on ... I gave you some examples that he had dated mostly, predominantly Black women. So, then he ends up marrying me...What happened here. So, there's... just kind of questions around that. Other families, or friend's opinions of that. I think it's more been on his side, as far as... the opinions being stronger, than on my side. You know, for me it hasn't been a big deal, but I think he's had more, probably, verbal comments and opinions given to him about it.

When discussing, *how are racial differences communicated within your relationship with your partner?* Tamara said,

I don't understand everything about how you [referring to her husband] grew up, or Black culture. I am a White person, and I'm only going to be limited to those experiences. So, you know, there's only so much that I can empathize...But there was a line I had to draw, and say, look... You're right, I'm not a Black person. I'm never going to be a Black person. So, there are some experiences and things that I cannot understand on a personal level. That doesn't mean I don't understand it from, you know, a human beings' level...

In asking Tamara to, *describe the ways you feel that you are culturally interpreted by your partner based on racial values?* Tamara said,

...I would give him examples of when I had been affected by a racist action or remark. Like, reverse racism. But I didn't have as much, obviously ... And I didn't really want to compare... my little... couple instances with, maybe, what he had experienced over a lifetime. So, you know, it was like, I could tell him, I understand a little bit, but I'm never going to understand, maybe, to the effect of that a Black woman would understand.

When I asked Tamara, *what considerations did you make when deciding to be involved in a Black-White relationship? When you were dating? And, when you were deciding on marrying?* Tamara reported that she did not make any considerations before dating and marrying Carlos, Tamara said,

No, because I had dated other Blacks before him. So, for me there wasn't a factor...But, you know, I remember [my mom] her saying something that I should just consider that dating him would have some complications, or problems...And then, while we were dating, I didn't know it, my mom was having a secret relationship with a Black guy...

When I asked Tamara *how has race impacted your relationship with your partner?* Tamara stated,

Not in a negative way at all. I mean, I know it sounds silly but... you just kind of forget. Like, you just don't think about it... sometimes people will say something, and I'm like, oh yeah, I have a Black husband. Like, I don't really dwell on it, or think about it until it's brought up because somebody's talking about race...

When I asked Tamara, *did you have preconceived ideas about your partner's race? If yes, describe those preconceived ideas about your partner's race.*

Tamara stated,

I'm trying to remember. If I thought anything, like, because he didn't play basketball, so he already wasn't like, in that stereotype. He wasn't in any sports. You know, I just thought he was just really nice, and really cute. I don't know why I didn't think it was a big deal. I didn't think it was a big deal until other people acted like it was a big deal.

When I asked Tamara, *what experiences, both positive and negative, have you encountered in attempting to understand your partner's racial background?* She stated,

I think for me it's been more important to understand his upbringing, his personal upbringing...So, you know, just kind of going in, and just trying to understand his personal experiences. Like, things had happened to him, racist or not. Just things that shaped him, like his personality, you know, his relationship with his parents, and his grandparents, and his sibling, and his friends.

When discussing how comfortable Tamara feels about communicating about race with Carlos, I asked her, *are you comfortable discussing race with your partner? And describe how it feels to discuss race with your partner.* Tamara stated,

Oh yeah...We talk about all the current events, and I think more through the years... Like, you're just like, I can't believe that happened...But there are some times when things happen, and...early in the relationship I would, you know, always try to kind of

defend the White person's actions.

To sum up the interview, I asked Tamara what she has learned about race from being in about Black-White interracial marriage and Tamara responded,

I think that what I've learned is ... And what I still believe is true, is that people are people. You just can't get around that. It doesn't matter, you know, there's things that cross all races, that are just universally true about people. Experiences shape us, and make us appreciate things differently.

When I asked Tamara, *what have you learned about race from being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage? In what ways, has being in an interracial relationship been a positive experience? And in what ways has being in an interracial relationship made your relationship better or stronger?* Tamara said,

I think it's been positive because ... Well, for one, I think a lot of people look at us and know that we're not racist. Either of us. They know he's not racist because he's married to me. And they know I'm not racist because I'm married to him. So, I think that puts a lot of people of every race, like a little bit of comfort...

Lastly, when I asked Tamara, *What information do you wish you would have known prior to being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage? And how would knowing this information beforehand have helped you to better your own relationship with your partner?* She replied, "I mean, I think that maybe the thing that surprised me, or I wasn't really 100% prepared for, was dealing with something as simple as our girl's hair. You know? Hair is, like, a big thing. And I don't think a lot of White Americans who don't deal with any Black hair...understand."

**Carlos.** Carlos has dated White women in his past, and he is in the only interracial couple in his family. Carlos reports that conversations about race happen infrequently in his life. However, when he does discuss race, he and his wife, tend to discuss racial stereotypes and how their interracial marriage impacts their children.

Carlos further reports that the topic of race has not caused any conflict in the relationship he has with his wife.

Carlos says that there was not concern in his family about him dating a White woman. Carlos said, "Race has never been an issue in my family." Although there was not conflict due to Carlos dating outside of his race, he does report that some of his close friends were surprised that he was dating a White woman. Additionally, Carlos reports that people in his social environments such as work assume that he is married to a Black woman.

**Carlos and racial identity.** When talking about Carlos' racial identity, I asked him, *how would you define the connection you have with your own racial group?*

Carlos reported:

I try to be more intentional about staying connected with Black people in the community and different organizations, things like that. So, long story short, at this point in time, my mother has a picture in her house that is a picture of this face and it's a White face, and then this person is peeling off the White face and then underneath that White face is a Black face.

I asked Carlos, *how does it make you feel to be a part of your racial group?*

Carlos stated,

Well, I've always struggled with the title African-American, because I grew up as Black, and so most people in my age group, they struggle with that. So, it's weird for me to say that, I guess I'll say it though. As a Black person...well, I feel very proud to be a Black male, but again, I think there still is that disconnect with my brothers and sisters when, I mean it's kind of unspoken. But it's kinda like when they see that I'm married to a White person, it's almost kinda like he really doesn't understand the struggle...

When I asked Carlos *How has the history of your racial group impacted who you are and how you have lived your life?* Carlos said,

I was always taught as a Black person, it's just the way it is. You're gonna have to work twice as hard, you're gonna have to hustle twice as hard, because that's just the world that we live in. However, I was not taught that because you're a Black person you have less

value, that you are just as valuable as any other ethnic group and not to make excuses of being at a disadvantage because you're Black. And so, I never been taught, and I never live my life that way, and sure there's been discrimination I'm sure I've even experienced, but...I never said well, I didn't get the job because I was Black. Or I haven't been able to progress because I'm Black, because that's not how I was taught.

When I asked Carlos, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your own race?* Carlos reported the following,

I think so, I think that there is kind of an either, a stereotype or added to that by race that as a Black person. I'm not as sharp or educated or intelligent and I think, sometimes, that comes out when I first meet someone. And we start to talk and you know I'll, I was talking to my friend about this the other day, you know, I'll hear comments like well you know, you speak very well.

I further asked Carlos, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your partner's race?* And he reported:

... I think people, and this is my opinion. They think that the average White person is automatically intelligent, well-read, well-spoken, which the average Black person is illiterate, uneducated and, you know, doesn't speak well.

When I asked Carlos, *how do your feelings about your partner's racial group impact how you feel about your own racial group?* Carlos said,

No, no. No, it doesn't. No. No, Tamara and I were talking about this the other night. Race doesn't really come up too much unless, someone else makes it a point, or kind of makes a comment, and it's like, oh yeah, she's White and I'm Black. So, we don't really look at that too much. I don't think that's really had an effect.

**Carlos and role of race.** When I asked Carlos, *what is your experience in being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* He said,

As a whole, I think, it's been good. A lot of people, well not a lot of people, some people have mentioned before we got married that well, have you thought this though. You know, what about the kids? What about the challenges that you're gonna have to go through, extra challenges as an interracial couple? And you know, I don't see that. I think we have the same struggles, same challenges as everybody else.

When Carlos was asked, *how are racial differences communicated within your relationship with your partner?* He said,

That's a very good question because my wife. One of her brothers is Black. She's had some pretty unique experiences that probably a lot of other White people have not had. So, she's been around racism, she knows what it's like to be discriminated against, so it's a little bit different with my wife. However, there are some times where I think, there's just some things that she's not going to understand. Being a Black person. Just some things that are different.

When I asked Carlos to *describe the ways you feel that you are culturally interpreted by your partner based on racial values?* Carlos reported:

In our relationship, I used to subscribe to Essence and Ebony magazine. And unfortunately, a lot of the articles in there had to do with Black and White relationships and basically how they were dogging the fact that mostly White women at this particular time, I think it was in the early 90's, were taking over the Black man. It was very difficult for her to read articles. It was definitely bashing there. That was something that she didn't quite understand from a cultural perspective. Why there's so much hostility with that. And I tried to explain to her that in a lot of circles there are more Black women that are eligible and professional than there are Black men in some circles.

When I asked Carlos, *what considerations did you make when deciding to be involved in a Black-White relationship? When you were dating? And, when you were deciding on marrying?* Carlos said,

... this was just kind of impressed from my grandfather who grew up in the south, a little old school. He's in his late 80's now. He always looked at promotability. In corporate America because the situation, you know. You know when I was first dating my wife, and I told them that...she was White, which was not an issue. To be honest with you, I thought it would be because they're from the south and you know I've heard the phrase, well if she can't use my comb, don't bring her home...you know that was just a thing to say, but no they embraced her. It was not an issue at all but yeah, the consideration was, well you know with me dating her is that going to impede my ability to succeed or climb the corporate ladder at that particular time.

When I ask Carlos, *how has race impacted your relationship with your partner?* He said,

And again, it's just really, we forget that we're interracial couple. Cuz it's just not that big a deal, until someone reminds us with a comment or a look where it's like, oh yeah. That's right. They're tripping off of that. But we've been married for almost 16 years. I mean, the average marriage now is seven years. So, we've endured just marriage period. So, race is not. It's just not an issue with us, it's just not an issue unless somebody makes it an issue, or things in the news if it comes up, then you have discussions about that. But



it just really has not played a big deal in our marriage.

When I asked Carlos, *did you have preconceived ideas about your partner's race? If yes, describe those preconceived ideas about your partner's race.* Carlos said,

You know, I told you before, that in my experience I've only dated Black women. And, dating Tamara, my wife, there was kind of this, idea that I'd be able to get away with a lot of more things with her. But, the total opposite of that was true. And that's kinda why we got married. I said, Now, this is The One, she's not gonna put up with my stuff.

When I asked Carlos, *what experiences, both positive and negative, have you encountered in attempting to understand your partner's racial background?* Carlos said the following,

Well you know, I think that I kind of understand it pretty well. Being that I've grown up in a predominantly White neighborhood, school, city...It's not like I was totally out of touch with the White world. I was probably more in touch with the White world than I was the Black world because I was, surrounded by it...

When I asked Carlos, *are you comfortable discussing race with your partner? And describe how it feels to discuss race with your partner. And what have you learned about race from being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* Carlos responded,

I do feel that I can talk to my wife about race. I've learned that people make a lot of assumptions. I don't know how different it would be if I were married to a Black person, but I don't really see anything spectacular that we have learned that we wouldn't have learned if we were just married in general.

I further asked Carlos, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship been a positive experience?* Carlos replied,

Well again, I think it's opened some doors. So maybe not opened doors, but has given us an opportunity for exposure of what a good strong, interracial relationship looks like, you know, up close.

When I asked Carlos, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship made your relationship better or stronger?* Carlos said,

Absolutely. Again, just the challenges with marriage period, is rough. You know it's

rough and so that added aspect of it... You've gotta deal with things that probably, that obviously, a lot interracial couples have to deal with. So, you have to endure that too, you know.

Lastly, I asked Carlos, *what information do you wish you would have known prior to being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage? And how would knowing this information beforehand have helped you to better your own relationship with your partner?* Carlos reported:

You know it's really not that different. I think that going in, I'm thinking that it's going to be a world of difference. Because at least in my mind it is, if you grew up Black. It's almost like being in a fraternity or sorority. There's just things that you just know.

**Couple 4: Vanessa and Jason.** Vanessa and Jason have been married for 38 years and have three children together. Vanessa is a White, 60-year-old women who was born in California and Jason is a 59-year-old Black male, who is born in the state of Missouri where they currently live. Vanessa and Jason were educated either through a university degree program or through trade school. Vanessa has a degree in nursing and currently works as a nurse, and Jason is an inspector of utility plants. The family makes a combined gross income of approximately \$170,000 per year.

**Vanessa.** Previous to Vanessa marrying her husband, she had been involved in relationships with other African Americans and with Hispanics. Vanessa also states that her relationship with her husband is not the only interracial relationship in her family, she has a Black-Filipino relationship in her family as well.

Vanessa says the topic of race came up in her family on an almost daily basis. Vanessa reports that the conversations typically arise due to things happening in the news. When Vanessa discusses race with her husband Jason, she says that they typically share the same viewpoint; they discuss unfair treatment of their children and the

opinions of certain family members regarding race when her and her husband first started dating. Despite family opinions about race, Vanessa says that they have never had a conflict about racial issues because they typically share the same views.

When Vanessa began to date Jason, her parents were not too happy with her decision. However, since they met Jason and decided that the relationship that Vanessa had with him was serious, they grew to like Jason. Vanessa's brothers have no issues with her relationship. Vanessa's brothers knew Jason from school and one of them had a class with him while they were in high school. Vanessa's brothers were happy Jason and Vanessa were dating because they were friends.

Among Vanessa's friends, she had no difficulty due to her relationship with Jason. Vanessa reported, "I didn't lose any friends due to my relationship." Vanessa reported only minor difficulty in her work environment because some co-workers would make a negative comment and some thought that she was joking when she said that she was with a Black man.

**Vanessa and racial identity.** When I asked Vanessa, *how would you define the connection you have with your own racial group?* Vanessa said,

That's a hard one. I don't feel like I have a connection to all White people. You know. As a group, I don't feel like I'm connected to all White people because I'm White...it's not that I don't like other White people, I just don't feel like, hey, you know; you and I and all the White people are this, that, or the other. Where that other group is something else. So, I know I'm White, I don't try to act like I'm something other than White. People have so many prejudgments about how you're supposed to act within a certain racial group. But I just am who I am, and...and that's how you do it.

When I asked Vanessa, *how does it make you feel to be a part of your racial group?* Vanessa reported,

...when I look at the big picture and how a lot of White Americans appear to people, I'm

kind of embarrassed by that. You know? Like, I mean I try not to get political, but when you see how people, as a whole, react...I wanted Obama to win, but I was surprised, because I still feel like there is a lot of racism among White people. Even though White people try to say there isn't racism. They don't live it so they don't know.

When Vanessa was asked, *how has the history of your racial group impacted who you are and how you have lived your life?* Vanessa said,

See, I guess I kind of disassociate myself a little bit with White Americans, because my ancestors weren't here...I am White. I mean my skin is White. My mom's parents are from Czechoslovakia and they didn't arrive in the country until...I don't know, 1910, 1915. And my dad's grandparents are from Ireland. And I think some are from Germany, I'm not sure, but I don't have like ancestors that have been in America for generations. So as a White person I'm embarrassed by, you know, slavery.

In asking Vanessa, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your own race?* Vanessa responded, "Well, I guess my answer is similar...American society has made me feel kind of ashamed of the White race in general, I guess that would be my same answer." Additionally, I asked Vanessa, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your partner's race?* Vanessa responded by saying,

Well, it has not affected me, only because I know, you know, people are people. Just because one White person does something horrible, you know, if you're White you don't blame everybody White. And if somebody Black does something horrible, I don't look at Black people and think, my God, what a horrible race. I think that's what discrimination is all about. I feel like American society, if you mean White society, I think in general they have tried to make everybody think that, you know, negative responses about Black people are correct. I mean, if you listen to the news.

When I asked Vanessa, *how do your feelings about your partner's racial group impact how you feel about your own racial group?* Vanessa stated,

I guess because my children are biracial, and my husband is African American. I sort of identify more with the Black race because of being the underdog in society. I guess it's just...I feel like I'm on the other side of the fence. If I have to pick a side of the fence, I'm gonna jump on my husband's side because I think as a whole, they're treated unfairly here, and I think probably in other countries, too. But it's made me feel negative toward my own race, I guess, if I had to consolidate my answer.

**Vanessa and role of race.** When I asked Vanessa, *what is your experience in being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* She said, “It could be, being married to him for the amount of years, it could be the, I don't want to say differences. It's cuz it's not necessarily going to be differences, but I think marriages have differences in general so.”

When I asked Vanessa, *how are racial differences communicated within your relationship with your partner?* She stated,

See that's the thing, if we have differences it's not, it doesn't usually involve race. Because...Because I'm usually siding with, I mean I don't feel like we make decisions based on our race. We know people on both sides are bad and people on both sides are good. So, if we have differences it usually has nothing to do with race.

Moreover, I asked Vanessa to *describe the ways you feel that you are culturally interpreted by your partner based on racial values?* In answering that question, Vanessa stated, “Well, I don't feel like he is, judging me...”

Additionally, *what considerations did you make when deciding to be involved in a Black-White relationship? When you were dating? And, when you were deciding on marrying?* Vanessa responded,

Well, I knew that it wouldn't be easy because even in 1975, [which] was not that long ago, but things were still, there was still plenty of overt racism in society, so I knew things wouldn't be easy. I loved him, and he loved me, and we were willing to deal with whatever came along. And then agreed to love one another.

Furthermore, Vanessa stated that she did not make any considerations before deciding to date or marry her husband.

When asking Vanessa, *how has race impacted your relationship with your partner?* Vanessa said, “I know it sounds odd, but I just don't think it has.” In addition, I asked Vanessa, *did you have preconceived ideas about your partner's race? If yes,*

*describe those preconceived ideas about your partner's race.* Vanessa said that she did not have any preconceived ideas about her husband's race. Furthermore, I asked Vanessa, *What experiences, both positive and negative, have you encountered in attempting to understand your partner's racial background?* She reported:

I know this sounds really strange, I guess I felt like I always...I mean I've known the history of where Black people come from. I know the difficulties of the race in general. And so, I can't say that I've had any positive or negative experiences figuring out why he is who he is. He's just who he is.

When I asked Vanessa, *are you comfortable discussing race with your partner?* And describe how it feels to discuss race with your partner. She said,

Yeah, yeah. Well, when we're discussing it, it's usually a discussion on some unfair treatment. So usually we're both upset, not at each other though, just at the situation. But it's a calm discussion, because we're not arguing about anything.

In summing up the interview, I asked Vanessa, *what have you learned about race from being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* Vanessa responded, "I've learned that race doesn't matter or shouldn't matter. People are people, everybody's got their quirky differences. And most of the time it has nothing to do with their race."

When I asked Vanessa, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship been a positive experience?* She reported,

Well I think just the fact that I am faced with whatever affects the Black community is going to affect me and my family. Because our children and my husband. So I think probably my eyes are a lot more wide open. I think that's a positive thing, because for a lot of people it's easy when things aren't difficult or if I weren't married to a Black man. If I were married to a White man, and you know, there was mistreatment of the Black race, I might want to bury my head in the sand and not think about it because it's overwhelming.

I also asked Vanessa, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship made your relationship better or stronger?* She replied,

Well, my husband and I have to, be a team...We've had some situations on both sides

where, one or the other of us is being treated unfairly...sometimes it's just a stupid comment by a family member, or a friend saying something and not necessarily meaning it. It's made us stronger as a couple, because we feel like if we aren't strong enough to put up with nonsense and to deal with it then, you may end up falling apart.

Lastly, when I asked Vanessa, *what information do you wish you would have known prior to being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage? And how would knowing this information beforehand have helped you to better your own relationship with your partner?* Vanessa stated, “I really can't say that there is any information that I wish I would have had.”

**Jason.** Jason did not have any experience in dating interracially before he dated his wife Vanessa. However, in his family, there are other Black-White interracial couples and there is a Black-Asian interracial couple. Jason reports that he gets into a conversation regarding race during most days of the week. Additionally, Jason says, that when he and Vanessa discuss race, they typically discuss inequality in the Black community. Moreover, Jason says that the topic of race has never caused conflict in his relationship with his wife.

Jason reports that his family was, “not too thrilled” to find out that he was in a relationship with his wife but his parents did say, “Son, it’s your life, do what you want to do.” Among Jason’s friends group, he says that his real friends did not truly care that he was in an interracial relationship. Although, in Jason’s social environment, there were mixed opinions reporting, “Half didn’t care, and half didn’t like it.”

**Jason and racial identity.** When I asked Jason, *how would you define the connection you have with your own racial group?* Jason reported that his connection is, “strong and positive” and that he feels “very proud” to be a member of his racial group. Additionally, Jason reported that, “When I see Black people, I’m proud of being

associated with them in every way.”

When I asked Jason, *how does it make you feel to be a part of your racial group?*

Jason reported,

It has kept me humble. I was born and raised poor. I like to think that I've lifted myself somewhat out of that poverty. But I remember and will never forget my humble beginnings. And I draw my strength from that.

When asking Jason, *how has the history of your racial group impacted who you are and how you have lived your life?* Jason responded,

Society has constantly painted a dull, bleak picture of our race, of the Black race. You see it in the news. The news, they only emphasize the negative that takes place in our communities. There are far more positives.

When Jason was asked, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your partner's race?* Jason said, that he does not allow society to dictate how he feels about Blacks in America. When I asked Jason, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your partner's race?* He said the following,

It seems to paint the rosy picture that everything's all well in Kansas. But I know that is not true. I paint my picture of society by looking and observing society, not by what the media portrays it to be. I live in the society...Black and White.

I also asked Jason, *how do your feelings about your partner's racial group impact how you feel about your own racial group?* He responded, “I don't draw any conclusions about my wife's race, because I see her as a part of my race...”

**Jason and role of race.** When I asked Jason, *What is your experience in being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* Jason said the following,

It's been a mixture of good and bad. It's say the good, because we've produced three lovely children that are a credit to both races I would say. And who are, I think, well adjusted, kind human beings. What could be better than that? I don't think anything.

I also asked Jason, *how are racial differences communicated within your*



*relationship with your partner?* He said, “Well I don't know so much as racial as gender. She's a woman, I'm a man. There is the most distinctive difference between us two, man and woman, and I don't think race has anything to do with that.”

When I asked Jason to, *describe the ways you feel that you are culturally interpreted by your partner based on racial values?* Jason said,

I'm a pretty cool dude...So, nothing added to that. I think she looks at me as just her husband and her soulmate of 40 plus years. And an honest answer to that, to add a little more, I have to be reminded that she is White, because I don't remember that.

When Jason was asked, *what considerations did you make when deciding to be involved in a Black-White relationship? When you were dating? And, when you were deciding on marrying?* Jason replied,

I didn't consider anything. I just, well, let me back up. She picked me out of the lineup and said, hey come here, you're my man. And that was it. Who can argue with that? She told me to be at the church at such and such, and bring a tux. So, I showed up.

I asked Jason *how has race impacted your relationship with your partner?* He said,

Probably made us stronger. Yes, I would say stronger. This was early on, there were probably some negative reactions from people, and I'd say the bulk of those reactions were White. I'm not the type that likes people telling me or suggesting to me how and who I should be and what. So I guess any conflict just solidified my relationship with my wife.

When I asked Jason, *did you have preconceived ideas about your partner's race? If yes, describe those preconceived ideas about your partner's race.* He said,

I had never been in an interracial relationship other than, I mean, I have always gone to school with Whites. I would say not always, but in the junior high level. Grade school one through six, exclusive Black school but after that it was a more mixed schools.

Additionally, I asked Jason, *what experiences, both positive and negative, have you encountered in attempting to understand your partner's racial background?* He replied, “We had similar interests, and that's what I pursued, the similar interests.” Jason

was also asked, *are you comfortable discussing race with your partner? And describe how it feels to discuss race with your partner.* He replied, “yes”, reporting that their conversations about race feels, “open and honest.”

In summing up my interview with Jason, I asked him, *What have you learned about race from being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* He said, “I guess I’ve learned that we’re all the same under the skin. Our outward appearance is superficial at best. We are the same.” Following up on that questions, I asked Jason, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship been a positive experience?* He said,

I guess I could say I’ve seen and met people probably would not have met without knowing my wife, because I’ve gone to places, met people that I probably would have never met. Because she has friends that became my friends only because they were her friends.

When I asked Jason, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship made your relationship better or stronger?* Jason reported,

I think being in an interracial relationship forces me to maintain my own self-identity as a Black person. I have never wanted to be someone who wanted to be something other than who I am. And I guess the short of that is, I’ve never wanted to be White. I’ve never dreamed of being White. I never thought I would achieve Whiteness by marrying someone White. I am Black and I will die Black, African-American, or whatever title you put on it. I have never run from that, and I will always embrace it.

Lastly, I asked Jason, *What information do you wish you would have known prior to being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage? And how would knowing this information beforehand have helped you to better your own relationship with your partner?* Jason stated,

...People are so shortsighted and cruel at times. I guess that's the sum of it. Fear of the...unknown. [Knowing this,] Well it would have made my skin a little thicker a little sooner. But it's thick enough now. You can't cut it with a knife. I mean I've always been a kind-hearted person, and I still am. I just have a little crusted armor on, that's all.

**Couple 5: Janice and Carl.** Janice and Carl are in their first and only

marriage and have been married for three years. Janice is a 30-year-old White American who strongly identifies with her ethnic roots and Carl is a 27-year-old who identifies in society as a Black male, although his father is Black and his mother is White. Both Janice and Carl have some college experience but do not hold a degree. Additionally, both Janice and Carl work full-time; Janice works as a museum manager while Carl is a banker. The couple makes a combined gross income of approximately \$75,000 per year. While Janice was born in the state of New Mexico, Carl is originally from Louisiana and they currently live in New Mexico.

***Janice.*** Although Carl is the first Black individual that Janice has dated, she has dated individuals from the Mexican culture and a Native American individual. Furthermore, Janice is not the only interracial relationship in her family. Janice reports that her family members have dated and/or married Asian, Black and Peruvian individuals.

Janice states that racial conversations are not an unfamiliar topic in their home. Janice says that they discuss race on a daily basis. At times, Janice states, that race is brought up in a joking way as well as in serious conversations. Although race seems to be an important topic in the home, Janice said that the topic of race has never caused any major conflicts in her relationship with her husband Carl.

Overall, Janice says that her being in a relationship with a Black individual has not caused conflict with much of her family and her friends. Janice recalls a friend telling her, “Once you go Black, you never go back.” In Janice’s work environment, she says that there have not been any issues with who her husband is; however, sometimes someone will go in to her office and see the pictures of her with her husband and then

say, "I didn't know your husband looked like that." Janice and her family are very close; however, Janice stated that her grandmother is not happy about their relationship.

Although her grandmother never said anything specific to her or her husband, Janice reported that her grandmother had racist tendencies when she was a child and when her husband is around, her grandmother may make noises and give him looks.

**Janice and racial identity.** Beginning the interview, I asked Janice, *how would you define the connection you have with your own racial group?* Janice said,

So, I'm not White. No, so right, I look White, but culturally I don't feel like when I look at these White people, like higher-class entitled, I don't feel like I relate to them. And I grew up in the South Valley and at my high school, I was one of the, probably lighter skinned, definitely lightest skinned people.

When I asked Janice, *how does it make you feel to be a part of your racial group?* And *how has the history of your racial group impacted who you are and how you have lived your life?* Janice said,

...it's just me realizing that I don't feel like I'm White. Like when I see people who- so a perfect example is my sister actually went away for college to a school in Pennsylvania with all these White people.

And their kids, as soon as they turned 18, they had them move out. They wouldn't let them move back in with them. They graduate college, you go out, you get a job, you find your own place to live in. My family, I would. If Carl didn't mind, I would've been like let's just live with them forever, and then when they get old, we'll take care of them.

When I asked Janice, *how has American society shaped the way you think about your own race?* Janice stated,

I think society, in my mind just makes it seem like they like White privilege, right? Which kind of just then makes me angry. I'll be- I hate White people. That sounds really bad but ... you hear about this like White privilege thing and you see it. I mean I see it at work. I see it out and about just people thinking that you owe them something and that makes me angry.

Additionally, I asked Janice *how has American society shaped the way you think*

*about your partner's race?* Janice said,

You know that also makes me angry just because I think... on the news and stuff, you hear all these things about the shootings involved Tamir and just all the publicity about different things that happen. And that just upsets me. But I think actually dating Carl and being married to him actually made me focus or pay more attention to that.

I also asked Janice *how do your feelings about your partner's racial group impact how you feel about your own racial group?* She reported,

I don't know if I would say it actually impacted how I feel about my own racial group. It's more just being aware of how people view different races differently. And I think again, it's personally...frustrating to me and it upsets me, because, like I said...we're all humans. So, race shouldn't even be a thing, like I don't know why it's even something that people feel like they need to talk about.

**Janice and role of race.** When talking about the role of race, I asked

Janice, *What is your experience in being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?*

She said,

It's one of those things that when we started dating and we got married, I didn't think, I feel like I'm still learning stuff about being in an interracial marriage, and I'm still noticing things that happened that I didn't think necessarily were gonna happen. So for instance, it's kind of interesting, but at work we have all sorts of races and ethnic groups there. I've noticed, and this is kind of weird, but we have some Black staff, and I've noticed that they'll come to me to talk to me about issues. And it doesn't even necessarily have to be a race issue, but they'll think that I'm married to Carl so they can talk to me about it.

I asked Janice, *how are racial differences communicated within your relationship with your partner?* Janice replied,

We just talk about them all the time. And I think a lot of the times that we do talk about it, it tends to be brought up usually in some sort of joke. Sometimes, when more of the serious conversations will come up; in that case, a lot of times I feel like, he has to explain things more to me, I feel like about how it is. Just cuz I think there are just a lot of things that I never realized he had to think about or was just aware of.

Next, I asked Janice to, *describe the ways you feel that you are culturally interpreted by your partner based on racial values?* She said,

I think he interprets me as Hispanic and Latin. Culturally, he knows how I am as a person and with my family. When he first met me, he thought I was White, cuz I am. Being married, I think he definitely has come to realize how I identify myself and he just sees me as that now.

When I asked Janice, *what considerations did you make when deciding to be involved in a Black-White relationship? When you were dating? And, when you were deciding on marrying?* Janice responded,

I didn't even think twice about it honestly, I didn't consider dating him cuz he was gonna be leaving on a deployment, and that just seemed silly to me to get into a relationship that was gonna be long distance right away. So I didn't consider dating him, but it had nothing to do with race. I remember the one thing that did kind of played a little part that still, again, wasn't race, was I'm very religious, and I'm Catholic, and I knew that he wasn't at the time. And so, I remember kind of just thinking about that, but we started dating anyway cuz that wasn't gonna stop me.

Janice further stated that her considerations did not change when deciding to date or marry. Janice reported:

No actually, not at all. That didn't come into play at all. And I think we talked about it more because when you get married in the Catholic Church, you have to go through these focus classes. And some of the questions had to do with race. And so we carried on some conversations about that when we were engaged...before we got married, [we discussed] just kind of how that can affect relationships and just how you would deal with that, and stuff like that. And so, it wasn't that we never talked about it before we got married, but it didn't affect at all my decision.

Additionally, when I asked Janice, *how has race impacted your relationship with your partner?* She reported,

I think it's just kind of having to be aware of kind of how we're perceived in public. I gave the example earlier of just us messing around and him taking my purse. And we like to joke around a lot and play around a lot, and we'll go outside and we'll have these sword fights. And I'll scream, and just sometimes now I feel like I have to be just kind of more aware of what people might be seeing and that not understanding that we're together, or not understanding our relationship. And that they will actually see us messing around and think that we're actually fighting, and what would happen.

I also asked Janice, *did you have preconceived ideas about your partner's race? If yes, describe those preconceived ideas about your partner's race.* She said,

Yeah, this is a funny story. So, when I first met Carl, I knew he was Black. Well, that's how I saw him. I was like, he's Black guy. And it wasn't something I actually thought in my head, but that's just what I thought. And then when we became friends and I started to get to know him, he showed me a picture of his sister and his dad and his mom, and his mom was White, which he hadn't told me.

Next, I asked Janice, *what experiences, both positive and negative, have you encountered in attempting to understand your partner's racial background?* Janice stated,

I think most of them have been positive. It's been a learning experience, like I said. But I'm glad to have learned it. But it's definitely made me more aware of just racial issues and things that I just never even thought of to really, necessarily, to pay attention too.

When I asked Janice, *are you comfortable discussing race with your partner? And describe how it feels to discuss race with your partner.* Janice stated, "Definitely comfortable. I think sometimes, it's hard to understand him. And I try... But, sometimes I get frustrated. I think cuz sometimes I don't understand and I honestly try to understand."

In summing up my interview with Janice, I asked her, *What have you learned about race from being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* Janice responded, I've definitely learned just having to be aware...that race is an issue even though I don't want it to be. And even though I can try and ignore it, and just think I'm just gonna worry about me and how I treat people, and everyone's a human. It doesn't matter because it's still there.

Furthermore, I asked Janice, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship been a positive experience?* Janice said,

Personally for me...this could just be me hoping that...people realize it shouldn't be an issue like me dating or being married to Carl or just any biracial relationships in general, just shouldn't even be, like, a thing.

I also asked Janice, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship made your relationship better or stronger?* Janice reported:

I think just communicating. And again, I don't think that's necessarily just about race, but

just in general. I mean, when Carl was on deployment, we had to really learn how to talk to each other. And I think that has made us stronger to be able to talk about race without it being an issue or without it causing fights.

Lastly, I asked Janice, *what information do you wish you would have known prior to being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage? And how would knowing this information beforehand have helped you to better your own relationship with your partner?* Janice said,

...I think in any relationship you learn stuff about someone no matter what it is, and so I can't say there was anything I wish I had learned. I think I'm still learning stuff every day, but I think that just comes with marriage, not necessarily because we're different races.

**Carl.** Carl reports that he has never had a problem or concern in dating individuals that are outside of his racial group. Carl has dated Whites, Hispanics, Asians, and an individual from the Middle East. Carl is not the only interracial couple in his family. His mother, who is White, is married to a Black man. Carl also stated that he gets into conversations about race on a daily basis. Carl says that when he and his wife discuss race, they typically talk about racism, racial profiling and they make a lot of racial jokes. Although race is a common topic that he and Janice would discuss, Carl says that they have never been in any major conflict about race; although at times, they may not always understand one another's perspective.

Carl said that there were no major reactions from family members when they found out that she was in an interracial relationship. Carl reported, "I have a rainbow family and no one cared on my side." Moreover, Carl says that there were also no major reactions from his friends group because he says that, "We have multi-friends and multi-families and multi-races. However, within social environments such as in work or church, Carl reported that at times they are treated differently.



**Carl and racial identity.** In beginning my interview with Carl, I asked, *how would you define the connection you have with your own racial group? And how does it make you feel to be a part of your racial group?* Carl said,

Honestly, growing up, I just always felt kinda disconnected or hard to identify. Just because my background is so mixed. And there's never really been a sense of specific identity when it comes to race. Like my biological father... was Black, Navajo Indian, and my mom was pretty much all things European.

When I asked Carl, *how does it make you feel to be a part of your racial group?*

Carl reported,

So I've always been one of those types of people that I see the color of my skin and I see the people see me as that color. So I think about that part and look at the history of Black people in America. And the segregation, the enslavement, the complete and utter lack of respect or even just common human decency. To a certain group of people based on the perceived level of humanity and their perceived level of education.

Next, I asked Carl, *how has the history of your racial group impacted who you are and how you have lived your life? And how has American society shaped the way you think about your own race?* Carl replied,

I don't wanna say it's shaped how I think about Black people. I would say that it shaped how I react to certain situations. For example, the riots in Baltimore and St. Louis, and stuff like that. Martin Luther King said that civil disobedience was a great way to get people's attention, just to paraphrase. And I agree with that. If you are in a situation where nobody is understanding or hearing or getting attention to a certain social construction that is taking place in your society, and they just overlook and don't care and they go about their daily lives and, they can be careless.

Adding to what Carl said, I asked him *How has American society shaped the way you think about your partner's race?* He replied,

Okay, let me put it this way, an example that I've heard used before. So if you go through your life, and every day you're able to walk to work and when you walk to work, every time you cross the street the traffic sign is lit green for you. Just automatically you're able to walk across the street. You don't have to wait. You can just go right across that street just because you're the one who walked in, and it's green. It's never been something that you really thought about. It's just something that always has been. That's just how it is. And then one day you're walking, and that light is red. And you can't cross

the street. So you feel inconvenienced. You feel like something's being taken away from you. That privilege of being able to cross the street without any consequence or without any wasted time has been taken away from you.

When I asked Carl, *how do your feelings about your partner's racial group impact how you feel about your own racial group?* He reported,

So, every day I go to work, and every day I come home during the school year, I see this Black guy, pretty much every day if not maybe four times a week, walking down the street and he has his two sons with him. And they're going out to either school, you see them in their gi, so they're going off to karate practice.

He's a father, a Black father, and he has both of his Black sons with him and he is raising them. I mean, just by watching him walk down the street you can tell there's something good about that family. And I mean, whether they have their backpacks with them, whether they're carrying groceries, whether they're in their karate gi. I mean, it doesn't matter, he's always with his kids.

And I get happy about that. It makes me happy because I see a Black father with his son. And I would never think that, about a White family. I would just be like, it's just a bunch of White people walking down the street.

**Carl and role of race.** When talking about the role of race, I asked Carl, *what is your experience in being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* Carl stated,

I'm trying to think of a time that it's ever been an actual factor. I've been mentioned rudely in a conversation, we joke with some of my friends about being Black and White, and we talk about racism on a daily basis. However, I feel like...New Mexico for that matter, is kind of like a sheltered area from some of the more detrimental or judgmental parts of the country.

Additionally, I asked Carl, *how are racial differences communicated within your relationship with your partner?* He said,

I would just say the differences just comes up in trying to explain to one another. And sometimes I have to explain more or find a different way to talk about it. You know, honestly, there was a specific instance where we didn't have a heated conversation, but it got serious trying to understand because she wasn't picking up what I was laying down and I actually can't specifically remember that convo. But there's never been an instance where I've thought I'm married to a White lady. It's just like that's just my wife.

Next, I asked Carl to, *describe the ways you feel that you are culturally interpreted by your partner based on racial values?* Carl replied,

So, one thing that I didn't realize is that my wife pointed out to me. Given my diverse background, I code-switch a lot. So, if I start talking to family back home in from Louisiana, my accent will change automatically. If I start talking to White people, my accent will change. If I start talking to Hispanic people, my accent changes. It's not something that I'd ever been aware of in my entire life, but since I've moved around and grew up in different atmospheres and around different people, it's just something that was embedded on me.

I also asked Carl, *what considerations did you make when deciding to be involved in a Black-White relationship? When you were dating? And, when you were deciding on marrying?* He reported,

No, actually I've always been the kind person that I like beauty and doesn't matter what color it is. A beautiful woman is a beautiful woman. And that's just that, and I met Janice, and the first thought that I ever had about her was wow, she's better than everybody in this room. And I just wanted to get to know her, and her inside was far superior to her outside, and her outside is freaking awesome in the first place.

Carl further reported jokingly,

Yeah, I kinda made an exception. I always have this big rule that if a girl doesn't know how to make me a perfect peanut butter and jelly sandwich, then we can't be in a relationship. And I mean, it sounds stupid but I like certain parts jelly, certain parts peanut butter.

I've literally said all my life that if a girl can't do it correctly, then there is just no point ever being together because they don't understand who I am, as a person and obviously don't respect my personhood at all. And Trisha can't make a good peanut butter and jelly sandwich in my opinion.

When I asked Carl, *how has race impacted your relationship with your partner?*

Carl reported,

...honestly, just normal things that come with being a person of a darker skin tone. You feel like you have to be more hesitant about certain things that you do. I don't think it's affected our relationship between the two of us. However, it has affected our relationship in the manner that I believe how we as a couple act out in public with others.

I further asked Carl, *did you have preconceived ideas about your partner's race?*

*If yes, describe those preconceived ideas about your partner's race.* He stated,

Her mom's side of the family is Spanish. And then her dad's side of the family is Italian. So they're all very tight-knit. And they have this very, I wanna say it's Hispanic, but a Latin idea on what family is. I mean, big family dinners, like you're over every Sunday, everybody stays over at mom and dad's house. Like it's very family-centric, very focused on the family unit. And I was expecting the kind of White people that you just normally run into. Well, we put our parents in a nursing home. And once you turn 18, you move out and you get out of mom and dad's house and you go live on your own, and all this.

I also asked Carl, *what experiences, both positive and negative, have you encountered in attempting to understand your partner's racial background?* He said,

Janice hates White people. And I mean, it's an experience just because when I've conversations and she doesn't realize she's doing it. And it sounds funny because it's coming out of this White face and this White mouth but like, okay...she works at a museum. So, there'll be like a mom that comes in that is just super entitled.

And Janice comes home all pissed off, like, well, I had this stupid White lady that got super... upset and entitled because I didn't want to change her baby's diaper. So stupid stuff like that. So I was not expecting to hear that come from my wife given her skin color.

But I don't think there's, I mean, maybe I'm bad for thinking this, but I laugh my ass off every time something like that happens, just because I think it's funny. And it's a weird contradiction in what you would think the norm would be.

When I asked Carl, *Are you comfortable discussing race with your partner? And describe how it feels to discuss race with your partner.* He said,

Yeah, I don't think we would be able to be as close as we are if we weren't comfortable just talking about everything. So when we first actually started dating, which, by the way, she told me no when I first asked her out because I was about to go on a deployment. Well, she finally came around and said, yes. So the first 13 months of our relationship were literally just dancing around having phone conversations.

My last few questions for Carl was about his experience in Black-White interracial marriage, I asked Carl, *what have you learned about race from being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?* He said,

Honestly, I don't think I've learned much. My biological father was Black. I never met him, but my stepfather was Black. And all of the things that as a child, watching my White mom and my Black dad, the man that raised me, go through, I see that happen.

The first time I remember going to a restaurant with my stepfather and my White mother. And the entire wait staff was Black. I remember having to wait then. Even as a child, I remember the waitress getting this super attitude, and giving my parents evil looks, and then having to go into the car afterwards and hear them talk about why that was.

Like that's something that happened that I saw in my childhood and that's something that I've experienced as an adult, like when we went to [Washington] D.C. There's really nothing that I would say that I've learned or experienced that I haven't really, it's just reaffirmation of the status quo or the reality that I've already lived in for most of my life.

I also asked Carl, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship been a positive experience?* He stated,

Whenever I get up on a soapbox I have a better position to speak from. I mean, I can look at other people and see their background and see where they're coming from. And then I look at myself and I automatically know that I have more experience in a certain area than they may. And I mean, if I don't, then awesome, I get to learn something.

Next, I asked Carl, *in what ways has being in an interracial relationship made your relationship better or stronger?* He said, "I don't even think that the strength of our relationship has been affected by race. We have a strong marriage and an amazing marriage, because who we are in the marriage."

Lastly, I asked Carl, *What information do you wish you would have known prior to being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage? And how would knowing this information beforehand have helped you to better your own relationship with your partner?* Carl said, "...there's nothing that I know now that I didn't know when I was younger."

## Interview Themes

**Table 1. Themes**

<b>Connection/Disconnection to Racial Group</b>	Whiteness	The White individual hierarchical standing within society in regards to White racial group's treatment within society as well as the ability and privilege of the racial group to be personally unaffected by the racial inequality of the minority culture.
	Ethnic Identity	The extent to which an individual feels belonging to an ethnic group, which does not include identity based on racial identity.
	Black Identity	The extent to which a Black individual feels a connection to the Black racial group, which includes its triumphs and struggles; in addition to the overall hierarchical positioning of the Black racial group in society.
<b>Marital Identity</b>	Marital Personhood	The condition of being an individual that brings outside experiences into the marital system.
	Marital Perspective Taking	The ability for each partner within the marital relationship to step out of their own personal experiences and attempt to understand the experiential and spiritual experiences of their marital partner.
<b>Personal Identity</b>	Beliefs about Partner's Identity	An individual ability to understand who their partner is as an individual through experiential methods rather than assumption.
	Beliefs about Self	Understanding who one is as an individual which includes one's racial, experiential, and spiritual identities.

**Connection/Disconnection to Racial Group.** An individual's connection/disconnection to their racial group is specific to how the individual feels about their own racial group based on significant racially charged historical events in addition to the continued racial conflict currently happening in society. The connection/disconnection to one's own racial group is imperative to an individual

understanding of them self as well as the understanding of racial group differences. Without the critical understanding of one's own racial group, an individual cannot understand the advantages or disadvantages of another racial group.

When looking through the interviews, the theme *connection/disconnection to racial group* was prominent throughout the interviews conducted. Specifically, when the couples discussed *connection/disconnection to racial group*, the couples discussed how societal racial values affected connection or disconnection to their own racial groups whether based on how the group was treated through the lens of history, media, or personal experiences.

***Couple 1: Michelle and Steven.*** Michelle and Steven are a couple that had been together for 13 years in total, and have been married for about four years. In discussing racial issues with this couple, it was apparent how this couple had two different experiences in being a part of their racial group. Specifically, in interviewing Michelle, Michelle reporting not feeling any strong ties associated with her racial group. Although, she did report that she has Irish *ethnic identity*, she stated, "I don't have a culture." Michelle expressed that her connection to the society in which she lives is tied to Southwest United States values in which she lives as opposed to sharing an identity with those who share her own skin color or those that share her ethnic identity.

Additionally, Michelle also expressed her ability to look outside of herself and recognize that though all individual should share in the same treatment and respect for one another, this is not true for Blacks in America, while still tying in the meaning of the experience of *whiteness* within American society. Michelle said, "I think a lot of white people that aren't actively racist, are kind of blind to racism."

Steven shared in the beliefs of Michelle to a larger part; however, he experienced his racial group differently than that of Michelle. Steven reports a stronger feeling connection with his *Black identity*. Steven stated that, “I love to be Black!”, as compared to his wife Michelle’s statements of, “...a lot of times, I think negatively about my race.” Steven’s further emphasis his connection with his racial group by saying, “I mean, of course we are a strong people...I was raised with nothing but women, strong Black women...”

Making a connection with Michelle’s beliefs in understanding the experience of *whiteness* for the majority culture, Steven stated, “I think they [White people] certainly try to make themselves look superior.”

**Couple 2: Lisa and Jeffery.** Lisa and Jeffery have been together for 20 years. As far as Lisa and Jeffery’s *connection/disconnection to racial group*, Jeffery says that,

The darker your skin is, the harder it is, the more prejudice you have against you. It's the same way in Italy, for example, Southern Italians have it harder than Northern Italians because of the color of their skin. So for my wife and I, at least from my perspective, haven't experienced that much difficulty because of the interracial marriage.

The information that Jeffery shared in the above quote regarding his *connection/disconnection with his racial group*, really shows the experience of *whiteness*, for this couple. Jeffery reports that due to the lighter skin tone of his wife, he and his wife have not experienced as much racial prejudice. Additionally, Jeffery has strong roots in his *ethnic identity*, specifically in his Italian heritage, Jeffery states, “I remember telling my mom I hate being Italian and she said well you need to be proud of your heritage and stuff like that.” This statement reported by Jeffery shows the struggle that he had in being a member of his ethnic group, and it highlights why he has not felt a strong



connection to this racial group. Despite this, Jeffery's family continued to teach him the importance of his ethnicity and his ethnic identity. Although Jeffery has changed his value system and no longer emphasizes his ethnic heritage, he still holds importance in his *ethnic identity*, reporting, "Not to say my ethnic heritage isn't important, it is, but it's secondary..."

On the other hand, Jeffery's wife Lisa, reports that she does not define herself by racial qualities specifically and does not feel a strong *connection/disconnection to her racial group* but she has a stronger connection to the large African American family in which she was raised and more specifically, to her parents who raised her, reporting, "I'm who I am." Although Lisa does not see herself as strongly connected to her racial group, she did report that she has seen *whiteness* played out in her life both as she grew up and currently, reporting, "It was always like, I didn't always like the way that they portrayed African-Americans. It was like there was always this narrow box, and not the wide variety like in the White race." In this statement, Lisa reports that many times, Blacks are viewed in a narrow manner of one size fits all, while Whites have opportunity to have their story portrayed in a diverse and often a positive lens. Although Lisa has seen *whiteness* as a barrier, Lisa also reports that the strength that she sees in her *Black identity* comes from the view that she has of her nuclear and extended family who has helped ground her as a Black female within the context of the current culture. Lisa stated, "I am who my parents raised me to be." This statement from Lisa is powerful because it is all inclusive of her racial, spiritual and personal identity. Because this statement is all inclusive, it not only highlights Lisa's *ethnic identity* but also her *Black identity*.

**Couple 3: Tamara and Carlos.** When I discussed *connection/disconnection to racial group*, Tamara stated the following, “I definitely feel I’m a part of that racial group, and usually I claim my Irish roots. So, I would say that I’m Irish.” Although, Tamara reported that she has a connection with her racial group, when she stated she is Irish which displays her *ethnic identity*. Nonetheless, Tamara had no issue acknowledging the fact that she is White, and more specifically acknowledging the truth of *whiteness* and that fact that she has been treated differently from minorities due to her *whiteness*, Tamara reported, “it’s been easier in some aspects to be White in America.”

When discussing *whiteness* with Carlos he reported the following:

I get comments like, I like the way you presented yourself, you know, like It’s like a big surprise. I’m an educated guy, I’ve got a master’s degree, I have intellect. But you know, it’s when you first meet someone, it’s kind of like a qualification, we’re gonna start down here. Oh he’s up here, let me raise my conversation.

This statement that Carlos made really highlights the experience of *whiteness* from the perspective of a Black individual because it explains a decrease in standard that is associated with Blacks not based on prior knowledge of that individual, but solely based on the negative perception of the Black racial group.

Nonetheless, despite racism and *whiteness*, Carlos stated the following about his *black identity*,

Okay, so I have a very strong root of who I am, as a Black person, and my history and my culture. But the same time, I have not been able to express that because, just places we’ve lived it’s just been the case.

Looking at Carlos’ statements, he has pride in his *black identity*, yet, it seems as if he has struggled due to feelings that he is at an impasse and continuing to try to stay in a strong connection in his *black identity*, while at the same time, not secure in a way to merge his *black identity* with that of the White majority culture.

***Couple 4: Vanessa and Jason.*** In talking to Jason about

*connection/disconnection to racial group*, she reported in regards to the *whiteness*:

So as a White person I'm embarrassed by, you know, slavery. I'm embarrassed by the treatment of Native Americans. I think, just in general, White Americans are racist towards almost every group if your skin shows it. So even though I don't associate, I don't feel like it's part of my ancestors' fault, I do feel like as a white-skinned person, our history in America has been an embarrassment.

In looking at what Vanessa stated, although she does not associate herself with the White American culture, she does see that White American culture has caused damage to American society due to the history of slavery and racism within the culture. This statement represents *whiteness*, due to how Blacks have been historically placed in a subordinate positioning in society and the act of Black slavery being the inception of the process. Moreover, Vanessa's statements also show her relying on her *ethnic identity* as a hallmark of showing her ethnic identity, rather than by her skin color.

Although Vanessa uses her *ethnic identity* to identify who she is as a person, her husband Jason finds pride in his *Black identity*. Jason stated, "I think being in an interracial relationship forces me to maintain my own self-identity as a Black person." Looking at Jason's statement, Jason has a positive identification to who he is as a Black man and he feels a connection to Black people. Jason also reported that although society tries to shape who people are as a race or a culture, he does not let media, or society sway his beliefs about himself. Jason said, "I tend to not to let certain societal influences affect the way I feel about my race. Otherwise I would be discouraged."

***Couple 5: Janice and Carl.*** In trying to understand Janice and Carl's

*connection/disconnection to racial group*, Janice said, "So, I'm not white." In this statement, Janice does not identify herself as being White, but like many of my other

White participants in this study, Janice again found her connectedness within her *ethnic identity* of Spanish and Italian. Janice reported that she see's *whiteness* in White culture as "high-class entitled" who she does not feel a connection.

When talking to Janice's husband Carl, he reported similarly as Janice about his *connection/disconnection to racial group*. When I discussed *whiteness* with Carl, he was very clear about his feeling of *whiteness* by stating the following,

I look at White people, and there is so many White people, they go through their life thinking that how things are for them, is how it should be and how it is. And if something else changes, they automatically get defensive and get upset because what they had originally been accustomed to, is no longer an option or is being contested at that point.

Carl reported *whiteness* as basically the White majority's privilege of not having to experience inconveniences based on race. Although, Carl does believe that Whites are privy to the concept of *whiteness*, Carl still does not always feel a strong connection with his *black identity*. Carl states,

I identify as a Black guy, just like, I know you see me as a Black guy, I see you as this guy, or this girl. And if you identify as Latino, or if you have certain family traditions of a certain nature that comes with your race I see that. But it was just always this complicated thing...

In looking at this statement, although Carl identifies himself has Black, he did not feel a connection with the Black culture from people at his school. Although he still understands and experiences the hardships of Black culture with American society as he stated when discussing *whiteness*.

**Marital Identity.** Marital identity is defined as the way that a couple defines itself within the marital relationship through a holistic view. Marital identity takes all aspects of an individual's personality into account and seeing racial background as one piece of an individual's whole identity.

**Couple 1: Michelle and Steven.** In understanding who Michelle and Steven are as a couple, I asked them each questions about their *marital identity*. When speaking to Michelle, I asked about the considerations she made when deciding to be involved in an interracial relationship, Michelle stated, “I really never even thought about it. I met him, I was attracted to him, we got to know each other, I liked him.” In this statement, Michelle recognized the difference between her and Steven as far as their race and she viewed it as only one part of her husband’s whole self, recognizing his *marital personhood* without allowing it to be an all-consuming factor.

In the same vein, Steven also recognizes Michelle’s *marital identity* and *marital personhood* in saying, “I was definitely excited. I mean like I said we’ve been together for a long time. We got married, so I really knew her. I already knew what she was about.” The statement that Steven expressed which said, “I already knew what she was about” is important in discussing the topics of *marital personhood* because this statements shows that Steven knew Michelle as an individual, which is beyond looking at just her race.

Michelle and Steven also speak a lot about *marital perspective taking*. When Michelle discusses *marital perspective taking*, she describes the new experiences that she has had, due to her White privilege and not really having had to face racism until she began her relationship with her husband. Michelle states, “Like I said, certain things, certain experiences we’ve had [due to race], make me angry, like I say, even more so than him.” In this statement, Michelle wholeheartedly accepted that racism is currently in existence and became upset for her husband based of society’s unfair treatment. Additionally, Michelle had to recognize that though the experience is new for her, her

husband has had to experience it throughout his life. Although, Michelle may want to take the experience and become angry and agitated about it, Steven has normalized the experience as a Black male in America.

Although Michelle's *marital perspective taking* is centered around racialized treatment within society, Steven's *marital perspective taking* was specific to having new experiences as a whole and stepping out of his family culture and understanding a new family culture. Steven said, "I've certainly done things I've never done before. But I chalk that up to having a sorry stepdad and a sorry daddy but, I mean, I'm not joking. It might sound funny when I say that but like...I've never like, done things. I mean, I'm been on vacations now!"

**Couple 2: Lisa and Jeffery.** Lisa and Jeffery have strong religious convictions, due to this, when discussing their *marital identity*, both of their priorities during their separate interviews was to first identify themselves through their Christian faith. Nonetheless, Jeffery has a strong background in being the outlier within a community that he is interacting. Specifically, when looking at Jeffery's *marital personhood*, I can see how many of his past experiences gave him a lens in which he can view not only himself as an individual, yet also, how to view a racialized society in which he more closely identified with a race other than his own. Jeffery states, "I think because of my background and having grown, my formative years, spent so much time in the African American community and culture..." In looking at Jeffery's statement, it shows how the dynamic in his marriage with his wife Lisa is not contrary to the relationships that he had while he growing up and in his early adulthood. Additionally, it exemplifies Jeffery's ability to construct his own personal identity within his marriage, not always

based on who they are as a couple, but also, by identifying who he is as an individual and highlighting the personal experiences that he brings to the marital relationship.

Continuing in the idea of *marital identity*, Jeffery stated, “I already knew about the African American culture and was a big part of it...Now, I will say, because I had been in the culture, I knew that there was...prejudice there as well.” In reading into the above quote from Jeffery, it is important to see *marital perspective taking* being important to Jeffery. Within the quote, Jeffery stated that he was concerned with how their differing races may cause conflict not only in their own relationship, but also in their interaction with one another’s family members. Due to this, Jeffery had to remember that racism can still be an intruding force within their relationship especially; if their racial differences caused conflict within the family environment.

In discussing *marital personhood* with Lisa, Lisa reports, “And so, for me, I don't really place such an emphasis on it [racial identity], and I don't allow that to kind of define or really impact how I behave.” In saying this, Lisa gives a strong sense of her identity in that it overtly states that she does not feel that she should be bound to racial rules or expectations of what it means to be Black. Moreover, this statement highlights the idea that within a romantic relationship, Lisa does not believe that she must conform to who her husband or other outside individuals think that she should be, but that her only allegiance is that she has to be her own person and to adequately represent the person that she was raised to be by her parents.

Furthermore, when looking at *marital perspective taking*, Lisa states, “But I think that I'm able to talk to my husband and find out, what do sometimes White people feel about this? Not always assuming that if something is said or something is done, that is necessarily racist. And not to always paint it as, well, that person's prejudice or that person is, because that's not always the case.”

Although Lisa may ask her husband, “what do White people feel about this?” Jeffery can only answer this question based on the experiences that he has as White individual, which means that the essence of the answer that Jeffery gives is his personal take on the question being presented. In turn, Lisa is taking the position that her husband presents and takes an outsider’s view of what it means to be a White individual in the context of her husband’s experiences and more specifically what it means to be a White man.

***Couple 3: Tamara and Carlos.*** To understand Tamara’s and Carlos’ *marital identity*, I first looked at their *marital personhood*. Looking specifically at Tamara, she said,

It really comes down to people's individual experiences, and their individual decisions. So I could easily say, well, you know, you're raising a Black family, it's okay to hit your kid. If you're raising a White family, you know, you're not. And, but the reality is, there are kids raised in White families who are slapped a couple times...or, beaten. And there's kids in Black families who are never spanked, or beaten, or slapped...we have to look beyond that.

I believe that the above quote from Tamara is the essence of what she has believed about people throughout her lifetime. Even as a young teen in interracial relationships with Black young men, Tamara believed that she had the right to date the individual that she wanted to date, and with that right, she believed that they should be treated no differently than any other couple.

In contrast, Carlos stated the following in relation to *marital personhood*,  
 ...when I married my wife, it was new to me, I struggled a little bit with the responses I was getting as a Black man dating a White woman. And just a lot of different stereotypes and a lot of different ideologies of, wow you can't date a Black woman cuz they're not good enough for you, these kinda things.

The above statement from Carlos is powerful regarding his feeling of his identity within the marital relationship. Not to say that Carlos is unhappy or uncomfortable in his



marriage with his wife, however; Carlos has found it difficult at times to identify who he is as a Black man in his relationship while he also tries to cling to the culture in which he has grown up. Nonetheless, I do not believe that his statements in anyway shows him struggling with his *marital personhood*. Instead, I believe it demonstrates, is the difficulty for any individual to easily mesh every part of his identity in a package that is pleasing to everyone including himself. His statement depicts the reality of personal identity being an evolving aspect of an individual life, which changes based on life experiences, as was stated by his wife Tamara.

When evaluating *marital perspective taking* in Tamara's and Carlos' interviews, Tamara said the following, "...it's been easier in some aspects to be White in America. So I think that that has made me think about situations where I've probably been given an easier deal, or something, maybe, because I'm White." Although this quote also highlights an aspect of whiteness, it also shows a clear example of Tamara engaging in *marital perspective taking*. Marital perspective taking is evident in this quote in that way that it shows how Tamara evaluates her standing within society and understands that her standing in society is not equal to that of minority groups. Furthermore, the statement shows Tamara's consideration of how her husband is viewed differently. In some aspects, one may argue that the difference is only that Tamara is female; however, the true lens of Tamara's understanding of her husband is that she is different due to her being White and her husband being Black.

In looking at statements that show Carlos utilizing *marital perspective taking*, I noticed that following quote from Carlos referring to his wife and children, ...even though this is true, you're both Black and White. Most people are gonna view you as Black. Somewhat serious conversation we've had about race, because that's just

been my experience, and that is the experience. And I just want to prepare them, and my wife for that, because they might not be used to that. But, it has been true. They're never considered White.

Though this quote could be used in a way that highlight only the perspective of Carlos, it also shows that Carlos has perspective in the way that his wife thinks as a White woman about her mixed-race children. Carlos reported earlier in the interview that his wife was shocked that that would be true and he knew how she would feel about this by allowing himself to understand her perspective, he wanted to clarify with not only his wife but with his children that although they are of mixed-raced, society will see them as one thing, and that is as Black.

**Couple 4: Vanessa and Jason.** When talking to Vanessa regarding the topic of *marital identity*, and more specifically, *marital personhood*, Vanessa stated the following, “If I were married to a White man, and you know, there was mistreatment of the Black race, I might want to bury my head in the sand and not think about it because it's overwhelming.” In this statement, Vanessa shows a transition in the way that she has interacted with racial discourse due to her having a Black husband and Black children. Due to having a Black husband, Vanessa has had to engage in the racial conversations on a personal level in order to help advocate for her family.

In regard to *marital perspective taking*, Vanessa reported that “We have to have each other's back.” Vanessa is saying that her and Jason have to be able to see one another's perspective so that they can be effective advocates for one another.

Likewise, when speaking to Jason about *marital personhood* he stated, “When I see Black people, I'm proud of being associated with them, in every way.” The pride that Jason has as an individual and within the Black culture is a piece of who he is

as an individual within his marriage. Connecting this information to what his wife Vanessa stated regarding her *marital perspective taking*, Vanessa and Jason would be unable to get a full sense of who one another is if they were unable to value each other's differences.

In looking specifically at Jason's *marital perspective taking*, he said that she is similar to himself because she is in, "the human race." Based on my interview with Jason, the statement helps to better exemplify *marital perspective taking* from his viewpoint because it highlights how he views his wife based on her personal attributes and opinions, rather than how others may try to identify her as based on racial identity.

***Couple 5: Janice and Carl.*** When talking to Janice about *marital identity*, I noticed that many of her statements were all encompassing of both *marital personhood* and *marital perspective taking*. The following is what Janice said about the topic:

I think it was when we got engaged. I can't even remember exactly when it was, but there's this woman that I work with, and she was talking to another Black employee. And they were saying something, and they were joking around and one of them was like, you better not talk like that in front of Janice.

And then she says, no, haven't you met Carl? He's Black, like it's fine, she's just cool. So, it's just kind of weird little things like that, that to me it's like, what does that matter? But I guess to people it does, but to me, it doesn't.

Janice's personhood transitioned greatly when she became a part of her marriage, and took on the role of *marital personhood*. Janice *marital personhood* developed as an individual within the relationship who is attempting to see what it means to be in a Black-White interracial relationship. Janice did not consider what it meant to be of a different race until she had the opportunity to experience the world differently. Additionally, in regard to *marital perspective taking*, because of how people have treated Janice since she has dated and married Carl, Janice has been able to see that there is a difference in being

Black or White, and how treatment the is different even though she believes that the aspect of race should not be important or a defining factor in how people treat one another.

For Carl, his *marital personhood* has stayed consistent since before he was married. Carl stated the following:

...our country's messed up, and the history is horrible. But even with that being said, I've always had, not really a pick yourself up by the bootstraps kind of mentality, but keep yourself in the middle ground. And even though you may be at disadvantage when it comes to social structure. Try and understand it from another person's point of view before you start automatically making accusations. Or making assumptions because of your own skin color. Obviously, being Black, you're exposed to and subjected to a certain amount of ridicule.

It is important to understand that Carl's *marital personhood* is based on the idea that he does not have to be subject to what people think of him due to the color of his skin. More specifically, his *marital personhood* is founded on the belief that people are different, and because of this, you must get to know a person on an individual level before a judgement is formed. It is a part of Carl's *marital personhood* that he believes that people should have the opportunity to get to know an individual outside of stereotypes, but this also contributes to Carl's *marital perspective taking*. Carl has a strong belief in taking the time to understand his wife's perspective on an array of topic. Both Carl and Janice pride themselves in their ability to have challenging conversations with one another in order to gain insight on why they believe a certain way.

**Personal Identity.** Personal identity is defined as an individual's view of their whole self which includes that individual's racial, spiritual, and experiential selves.

***Couple 1: Michelle and Steven.*** In discussing Michelle and Steven's *personal identity*, the couple aligned on many of their values within their own

relationship. Just as with the *marital identity* theme, much of Steven's experiences were surrounded by the new experiences that he had with his relationship with his wife, that he would most likely have not experienced outside of his relationship. Steven says that, "I don't know how to explain it. Like, how we met, some of the things I shouldn't have been doing, let's put it that way... and I'm not gonna say she necessarily changed my life for the better but I know she played a good part." However, when we look at the *personal identity* of his wife, Michelle says, "I think more of my life experiences have shaped me into the person I am, more so, than my race." Michelle recognizes that her race is only one part of her personal identity and highlights that race has not necessarily played a major role; but, she also acknowledges how her *beliefs of self* is where her actual identity was shaped. Moreover, Michelle knows that her husband Steve's racial identity as a Black male is important to him and so she also honors the identity traits that are important to him by allowing it to shape her *belief about her partner*, Michelle says, "I appreciate that he is a Black man and I know that's who he identifies with."

Even though Steven cherishes his identity as a Black male, Steven also does not feel that his blackness should play a major role in the *personal identity* of any individual. In discussing Steven's personal self, he states, "No. I'm not afraid of nobody that buys groceries and drinks water and breathes the same air as me." For Steven, *personal identity* does not have to be based on racial values and he defines all individuals as human beings and being a Black male is only one piece of his identity. In relation to Steven's *belief about partner's identity* he states, "I've been hiking. I've never been camping. None of that until me and her got together." This quote exemplifies how the identity of Michelle has impacted his life, not through her

identity as a White person, but through the personal experiences that she has brought to their marriage, and how it has enriched Steven's life.

**Couple 2: Lisa and Jeffery.** As I began to analyze Lisa's statements regarding her *personal identity*, I immediately noticed that Lisa saying, "...so for me, I learn how to keep a broad brush and not say, oh well, that person said that, or this didn't happen because I'm Black and not being super sensitive." Lisa does not believe that people should assume that what people do or what they think is based on one person being Black or another person being White. In discussing Lisa's *belief about self*, it shows that Lisa does not believe that discrimination by race does not occur; however, she believes each person's intentions should be judged by having a relationship with that person, instead of making a snap judgement. Lisa further highlights that point when she says, "I don't say well I'm going to do this because I'm Black." In conjunction with Lisa's belief about self, Lisa's *belief about partner's self* is illustrated by her stating that Jeffery, "sees me as his wife." This is important because again, this shows that she believes that Jeffery does not define her as her racial being, but as the individual that he married.

When I looked at Jeffery's statements regarding *person identity* I noticed Jeffery having said the following about his *belief about partner's identity*, "It's because she is who she is." This statement, is almost identical to what Lisa reported as her belief about partner's self. Jeffery emphasizes the individual perception that he has of his wife which is not based on what she looks like, but based on the person that she is regardless of color. Nonetheless, it is important to note that this was not always his view, because earlier in the interview Jeffery stated, "Well, I don't know, I don't think I can get involved with another Black woman because it's so hard. It was difficult." This idea transitioned

for Jeffery because he took that time to know and love his wife as an individual and based on their personal compatibility.

In regards to looking at Jeffery's *belief about self*, he reported, "I try to look at the world and my own identity is, Christ is first. And so now I really don't pay a whole lot of attention to it. And at least I try not to." Although Jeffery sees his ethnicity as something important to him, in regards to who he is as an actual person, just as his wife, he considers his *beliefs about self* to be based on his spiritual, Christian, life rather than his race or ethnicity.

**Couple 3: Tamara and Carlos.** Looking at the *person identity and belief about partner's identity* in Tamara's conversation with me, this quote best described her belief about Carlos' identity,

But now I'm more cautious. Like, okay ... I think I'm more like him [Carlos]. Like, you know, okay they're flying a flag, why are they flying it. Until I know them, I'm going to be a little more cautious with them, or leery of them. Until I get to know them.

I believe that this statement by Tamara shows that she believes her husband has a sense of identity that will question injustice but at the same time, give an individual the opportunity to reveal who they are rather than solidifying this judgement about others without further inquiry. Furthermore, in regards to Tamara's own *beliefs about self*, she said,

Experiences shape us, and make us appreciate things differently, or think some things are okay...not okay, or acceptable...But, it really comes down to people's individual experiences, and their individual decisions.

It is clear that Tamara's *beliefs about self* is that she should not be defined by her skin color, but that people should get to know her and others by their actions.

When I analyze the statements about *personal identity* that Carlos made, I

noticed an important statement that he made about his wife Tamara, in which he said,

So, yeah, I kind of had this idea that she was just gonna put up with whatever I dish out and this, that, and the other. And she was not playing not. That whole stereotype went out the window... I tell people, and this is true. She's introduced me to more rap and R&B than I ever knew. D'Angelo, all this kind of stuff. She just blew my mind, I had that stereotype, she was country, she listens to country, heavy metal, rock, all this nonsense.

Carlos had a preconceived idea about his wife but her actions challenged his way of thinking about White women being subordinates. Carlos stated that he liked the fact that Tamara was not going to allow him to take advantage of her, and that showed him, in my interpretation, the strength of character in Tamara as an individual.

Moreover, when evaluating Carlos for *beliefs of self*, I encountered the following statement. Carlos said,

I have to endure sometimes people talking about White people, you know how bad they are, and they're out to get you. My wife saying you know, she's gotta hear about, how Black people this, Black people that. Not knowing that she's married to one, or I'm married to one. So it's kind of like...it's a strange. Now, it's not an issue. It's just more of a...I just chuckle. I was like, really? Okay. You're still tripping off that? Okay. We'll go with that.

In looking at this statement, I believe it gives a strong sense of Carlos' *belief about self* because it shows that his life has not always been easy. Carlos specifically uses the term, *endure*. Endure is defined as an individual remaining in existence no matter the circumstance. Further, I believe that this statement shows that Carlos does not have to seek the acceptance of others in his journey through life.

**Couple 4: Vanessa and Jason.** When gauging the *personal identity* of Vanessa, I examined her *beliefs about partner's identity*, Vanessa stated, "Well, I don't feel like he is judging me on my...I don't think he sees me as being a race and I don't see him as being a race, we just, we are who we are." I believe that this is an important



statement about Vanessa's *beliefs about partner* because it assumes that her husband sees her as a person and not a color as other couples have reported. This statement suggests that race does not define her as a person, and that Jason does not see her in terms of racial make-up. I believe that Vanessa also sees herself as an individual who operates independently of race. Regarding her *beliefs about self*, she stated that she thinks people should, "try to live your life in a positive way toward everybody" Vanessa's statement highlights the idea that she feels that people are important regardless of what they look like.

When I evaluated the statements from Jason regarding *beliefs about partner's identity*, I found the best description of Vanessa, when Jason said, "I think she looks at me as just her husband and her soulmate of 40 plus years." I feel that this is a good indication when looking at Jason's beliefs about his wife because just as the other couples reported, his experience with his wife is based on who she is a person.

Transitioning to Jason's *beliefs about self*, Jason reports a relatively strong sense of identity and will not be dissuaded about who he is; he stated, "I have never wanted to be someone who wanted to be something other than who I am."

***Couple 5: Janice and Carl.*** As I assessed Janice for *personal identity*, I noticed the following statement that best exemplified her *beliefs about partners identity*, "...a lot of times I feel like, he has to explain things more to me about race." This describes her beliefs about Carl as a person that is willing to take the time to understand Janice's perspectives on an idea, and I can assume from this that Janice does not feel judged by Carl and that he makes her feel comfortable to ask questions and to engage in a discussion with him.

When talking to Janice specifically about her *beliefs about self*, she said the following:

I would've been like, let's just live with them [my parents] forever, and then when they get old, we'll take care of them. And our kids will grow up with their grandparents, and it'll be great. And it's just more me realizing that I don't identify with them [White people]...

This statement speaks in a significant way for Janice regarding her beliefs about self because for her, it shows the connectedness that she has with her family and how she feels that her Spanish-Italian heritage has influenced her belief system as an individual heavily defined by the connectedness of her family.

In speaking with Carl regarding his *beliefs about partner* he reported this about his wife Janice,

But Janice lived with her mom and dad until she was, goodness, 27, and that's not something I expected from White people. I expect that of Hispanic and Italian and Greek people and what-not but not out of White people.

This statement from Carl about his *beliefs about partner*, mirrored what Janice reported about her *beliefs about self*. Carl's statement about his wife shows her as a person with strong beliefs and values surrounding family, who is centered in making sure her family is taken care of.

When appraising Carl's *beliefs about self*, I found the following statement to be what best describes who he believes himself to be as a person,

...there's different cultural experiences that I've seen, and it's wonderful. You can just see how other people are. But I mean, it's so much I have yet to see, and I feel like if other people were able to have experiences like that outside of their norm. And actually, not just experience it, but be a part of it, have family circles, or circles of friends, that actually included other ethnicities and other races, it would be such a benefit to our country. And, I think having that in my marriage with a White lady.

I believe Carl's statement to be very profound about who he is and specifically his *beliefs*

*about self*; Carl's statement shows the importance that it holds in understanding the differences between the various groups of people in the world and not isolating himself to one way of thinking or one understanding of an event.

**Table 2. Participant Illustrations of Themes**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Emergent Theme</b>	<b>Illustrative Example</b>
<b>Couple 1: Michelle</b>	Connection/Disconnection with Racial Group	“So, I know that I get a lot of stuff about racism and stuff. Well, I wasn't really so much aware of it still happening all the time until I was in a relationship with him. You kind of think, it's gotten better, it's not as a bad as it used to be. But I mean, to think that racism is gone is to be white. I think only white people think that. It's just like, it happens all the time and you don't see it and I think a lot of white people that aren't actively racist, are kind of blind to that.”
<b>Couple 2: Jeffery</b>	Personal Identity	“I've seen plenty of white people from the North-East that were behind closed doors would say the most vicious things about, you know, and then people from the south who aren't. So it's trying to be careful of, trying to, and that's with any racial group. There's the stereotypes out there, and not listening to the stereotype and trying to judge people, trying to find out, who are they and what do they feel about people. Trying to discover who they are apart from the stereotype that certain segments of society wanna paint about this particular group of people. So I try to stay away from that, but I guess it's hard to escape that I guess at some points because when I think of white people from the South, I wonder how they feel about black people or other ethnic minorities.
<b>Couple 3: Tamara</b>	Marital Identity	“At least from my perspective it wasn't, you know ...I wasn't worried about it not working because he was Black, I was worried about it not working because who he and I were, as a couple.”

## **Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how race is situated within the marriages of Black-White couples. To gain this insight, five couples were interviewed (a total of 10 individuals) from around the United States to discuss the topics of racial identity and the role of race in their relationships. When looking at the data, some of the information gathered mirrored that of the existing literature in the field, although it still added understanding to the current body of research. The three major themes that arose from this research were: 1) connection/disconnection with racial group; 2) personal identity; and 3) marital identity. These will be discussed in conjunction with current research.

It is important to understand that although these couples feel that they are no different than other homogeneous married couples (Forry, 2007), they do not ignore the existence of race and its impact on their relationships. These couples embrace race and utilize it as just one aspect of the whole person. The couples in this study rely on their ability to have open conversations about race, not only in their marriage, but also as society continues to be affected by racial differences (Forry, 2007). Overall, these couples have more similarities than differences, just as many of the participants cited in this study. As I went through the process of interviewing these couples, I found that, in their own way, each individual in the relationship would say at some point that they are more similar than they are different in most aspects of their lives.

In this chapter, I will revisit my research question:

1. How does race and racial identity impact how individuals within Black-White interracial marriages relate to one another?

2. What role does race play in the interactions within Black-White interracial marriages?

These questions will be linked to the themes that emerged from this research in addition to current research in the field. Lastly, I will discuss future implication for research.

## **Discussion**

### **Critical Race Theory**

As a reminder, CRT is the lens in which this research is viewed; because of such, this research does not ask if race plays a role in the interactions of Black-White interracial marriages; however, the question of this research asks what role race plays in these interactions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The theory of CRT was precisely created in order to address matters of race on a societal level and was conceived based on the intersection of law and race within society (Closson, 2010). CRT played an important role in the viewing of these data because it explicitly allowed race to subjugate the analysis of the study. CRT allowed for race to exist as a consistent through the analysis of the data pushing participants to an understanding that race is pervasive factor in their daily lives whether they have seen its manifestation or not. Regrettably, CRT also brings out the limitations of the methodology used in this study because it allows for the existence of the conscious and subconscious effects of race. The subconscious interaction of race was not analyzed due to the methodology used which only allows for the conscious interplay of racial interaction to be seen within the analysis (Closson, 2010). This incongruence will be further discussed on the section titled Future Research Directions.

**How does race and racial identity impact how individuals within Black-White interracial marriages relate to one another?**

**Connection/Disconnection with racial group.** To understand how race and racial identity impact how Black-White married couples relate to one another, we should first look at how the individuals within the relationship see themselves by reflecting on their *connection/disconnection to racial group* which includes *Whiteness*, *ethnic identity* and *personal identity*. After interviewing the couples in this study, every couple acknowledged the existence of Whiteness. Specifically, when speaking with the White individuals in the relationship, many of them reported that they feel that many Whites that they have interacted with have acted entitled such as what Janice reported. Additionally, others, such as Vanessa, Michelle and Tamara reported that they feel, that at times, they have been able to navigate life more easily due to their race as compared to their spouses. Additionally, Black counterparts reported that some of them were raised with the awareness that as a Black individual, they would have to put more work into any tasks that they choose have in order to reach their desired outcomes as compared to their White counterparts. Specifically, Carlos was told by his family while growing up that he would have to work twice as hard as any White person to become successful.

Due to the negative experience's the White participants had in their belief and experience with the dominant White culture, many people such as Michelle and Vanessa have reported being embarrassed based on the history of White in America. Michelle specifically reported that she believes that many White people believe that the Civil Rights Movement has cured the problem of racism in this country, and today everyone is being treated equally. Furthermore, Michelle stated that this belief that racism

is nonexistent, causes Whites to neglect causes of equality for everyone. Much of the frustration about White reaction to racism and inequality pushed White individuals within the relationship to identity more closely to their ethnic identity rather than their White identity. The White individuals shift to an identification with their ethnic identity may be an effect of the cost of racism for Whites, which has been associated with White guilt about racism and has been correlated with a White individual's acceptance of the concept of White privilege (Armstrong, Beer, Poteat, & Spanierman, 2006).

On the other hand, the Black participants in this study, for the most part, reported a strong Black Identity. Steven, Carlos and Jason reported that they are proud of who they are as Black individuals and find strength in who they are. Carlos reported that based on the places that he has lived, he is intentional in staying connected in the Black community, and at times struggles in finding the balance in operating within both worlds. In addition, Carlos feels a part of both worlds because he is married to a White woman. Nonetheless, Carlos has conversations with both his children and his wife about what it means to be Black in America. Although their children are mixed with Black and White, he tells them they will still be considered Black because of how society classifies them based on the 'one drop' rule carried over from slavery to present day thought (Cruz & Berson, 2001). Steven's family intentionally taught him about history of Black people in this nation which demonstrated, for him, the strength that Blacks came from. Moreover, Jason reported that he is proud to be connected to Black people in every way. Although Carl did not report feeling strongly connected with the Black culture, he reported that he still identifies as Black due to how society views him as Black, although he is mixed with both White and Black. Society does not see him as an interracial child who is mixed with



Black and White, they see him as only Black (Cruz & Berson, 2001). Carl reported that he feels disconnected with his Black Identity, if his connection with his Black identity is viewed through racial stereotypes, although he still sees the strength of such an identity and has also experienced the persecution of Black Identity.

In sum, this study revealed that one partner in the relationship tended to show their connection to racial/ethnic group as a stronger connection than the other partner who tended to identify as just being human. Although this occurred more with the White partner, there was one couple in this research that went against that ideal, namely Lisa and Jeffery. Lisa reported not feeling any substantial connection with the Black culture, although she strongly identifies with her Black family since they raised her and helped to shape the individual that she is today. On the other hand, Jeffery grew up with a strong sense of ethnic identity based on his Italian ethnic group and before he became a Christian, his pride was his Italian heritage.

***Personal Identity.*** In attempting to understand each participant's personal identity, in relation to their marriages, we looked at the individual's beliefs about partner and beliefs about self. In trying to understand the individual's beliefs about self, I found that in this research, one partner typically sees self in the broader view based on how they fit within society, how they fit within their own families in which they grew up or even by seeing how they fit based on spiritual beliefs. Many of these participants, such as Vanessa and Jason, reported the idea that everyone is the same on the inside, despite what their color is on the outside. This statement did not serve as a context to devalue their personal characteristics or to minimize the factor of race; it was used in order to reaffirm that they are defined as individuals, not by their race. Nonetheless, although, the

individuals do not view their whole person as race, they do understand that knowing the role that race plays in society helps them to understand the struggles their partner may experience on a daily basis, and in turn, helps them interact better because they are able to more effectively engage in marital perspective taking.

So, the question becomes, how does having one partner in a relationship that sees them self as disconnected to racial group and relate with a partner who has a connection to racial group but reports no connection with an ethnic identity? I believe that the simplest answer to this question is that they communicate. When having a realistic view of the relationship, it is important to note that the aim of any relationship is not to eliminate conflict, but rather it is to effectively manage conflict (Gottman, Swanson, & Swanson, 2002). In using this as a starting place, these couples have navigated their differences through seeking to know each other especially in the instances that one partner is an outsider, meaning they have little or no direct knowledge, experience or insight into the event or situation and the other partner is the insider, meaning they have direct knowledge, experience and insight into the event or situations. Moreover, these couples understand that their differences are not mutually exclusive, which means people with differences can co-exist, especially if they are willing to see the other perspective.

In understanding the insider-outsider position within racial differences in the couples in this study, the outsider tends to pick up the causes of discrimination or injustice for themselves in support of their partner such as what Michelle has done. Michelle reported that she has done a lot research on Black culture and at times gets angrier about racial discrimination than her husband does. Additionally, she reports that

she is intentional in helping her children build pride in who they are. Although, Michelle and other participants have invested themselves in some way against racism and discrimination, it is important to point out that these causes that are championed do not influence the longevity of the relationship. In this study, the conversations about racial matters were more likely to be discussed due to current events happening in society rather than their own daily life events. This does not mean that race related conversations were always like this; specifically, for Tamara and Carlos, in the beginning of their marriage, Tamara would consistently hear Carlos say to that she did not understand him because of their racial differences. Tamara reported in her interview that she finally had to draw a boundary with Carlos, saying to him that she may not understand his struggles as an insider to the situations, however, as an outsider, she can understand and empathize with him about the situation.

**What role does race play in the interactions within Black-White interracial marriages?**

*Marital identity.* The question of what role race plays in the interactions of the individuals within the relationship relates directly to the theme of marital identity which includes both marital personhood and marital perspective taking. When discussing marital personhood, individuals may do better in their relationship if they feel comfortable being who they are within the relationship. Each participant in this study reported that they were comfortable talking with their partner about racial topics. More specifically, for many of the couples, such as Michelle and Steven, and Janice and Carl, their marital personhood has continued to evolve due to their ability to effectively engage in marital perspective taking.

Marital personhood is the condition of being an individual that brings outside experiences into the marital system. This term is not unique to interracial experiences, but is universal throughout any marriage no matter how similar a couple may be. Although, in interracial relationships, the factor of race and discrimination are added to the equation. Many of these couples reported that they do not see any major differences in their ability to communicate with one another based on racial values (Forry, 2007). Furthermore, Janice and Carl reported that racial values help them gain a better understanding of each other's point of view which connects to the ideal of marital perspective taking.

The essence of marital perspective taking for interracial marriages, is that differing viewpoints are being presented within the relationship. These differing viewpoints challenges at least one individual's way of thinking about their spouse and in turn causes the partner to dig deeper in gaining an understanding of their partner's experiences. The majority of the couples interviewed for this study reported that they have never been involved any major issues or conflicts with their partner due to the topic of race, although they have created stimulating and sometimes heated conversations. Moreover, the couples who did report that they had been in conflict with their partner when talking about race, further reported that the conflict was not due to them disagreeing with one another's views, but rather, the conflict was due to their partner's inability to understand the insider point of view.

In considering the emergent theme of marital identity, I believe that the best way for an individual to look at this research question is to understand that when the Black-White couples in the study entered in to their relationship, they felt that they were

compatible with their partner. Each couple in this study reported that they are secure in their relationship with their partner and because of this, they were able to comfortably interact about any topic that arises in their relationship including race. Due to the White participants in this study experiencing frustration about the treatment of Blacks within American society, studies have suggested that their frustration about racism allows Whites to have an increased ability to accept the idea of whiteness and White privilege which was true in the current study (Armstrong, Beer, Poteat, & Spanierman, 2006). Due to the White partner's concern about racism, I believe that this allows race to play a diminished role within their marital interactions due to their ability to express empathy about racism.

### **Future Research Directions**

In this study, I was able to recruit participants from around the country representing a broad array of ages and years being married. To continue to add to this body of research, it is important to replicate this study with a larger sample, which engages the participants in face-to-face interviews in order to get a better understanding of the participants, their reactions to the questions, and to gain the ability to challenge the participants answers to gain a greater understanding of their responses. In addition to changing from phone interviews to face-to-face interviews, it would add more dimension to the study if questions were added which addresses colorblind ideology and if follow-up questions were added after all first-round interviews have been completed, in order to ask questions about seemingly incomplete answers and to ask new questions that came up during the first interviews. Furthermore, to deepen the understanding of Black-White interracial marriages, it be important to change the methodology from phenomenology to

critical phenomenology in order to take into account both conscious and subconscious understanding of race, which would be more congruent with the subconscious lens of Critical Race Theory, and the understanding that many racial interactions occur subconsciously.

This research could also be strengthened if researchers understand the interaction between Black-White interracial relationships and racial identity development. To do this, it is important to add a quantitative component to this study which would identify each person's development of racial identity through racial identity development scales, in addition to administering a perceived racism/racial discrimination measure. Moreover, researchers should investigate divorced couples from Black-White interracial marriages, to discover to what degree race influenced the demise of these marriages. Doing this, researchers and clinicians may gain a more significant understanding of how to adequately counsel and advise couples going into this type of marriage in order to decrease the likelihood of divorce for these couples and increase racial understanding of one another. This study only takes a snapshot of how race is experienced for individuals within these relationships. It would also be important to be able to view the vitality of these relationships through the lifetime of a marriage and to attempt to understand the skills and abilities that couples possess regarding navigating racial differences which increase the longevity of these marriages.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Recruitment Advertisement**

#### **Email Recruitment**

##### **Research Participants Needed!**

I am Christine Ross and am doctoral student at the University of New Mexico. I am recruiting married Black-White interracial couples to participate in a study about race, racism and its effect on marriage. To qualify, you must currently be in a heterosexual Black-White interracial marriage, married for at least 3 years and between the ages of 25 and 62.

Please forward this if you know anyone who may be interested in participating in this study.

To verify your qualification for this study and to learn more of what this study entails, please follow the link below for more information:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/InterracialMarriage>

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please call Christine Ross at 505-980-7219 or you may e-mail me at [steenie@unm.edu](mailto:steenie@unm.edu).

#### **Social media recruitment**

##### **Research Participants Needed!**

I am Christine Ross and am doctoral student at the University of New Mexico. I am recruiting married Black-White interracial couples to participate in a study about race, racism and its effect on marriage. To qualify, you must currently be in a heterosexual Black-White interracial marriage, married for at least 3 years and between the ages of 25 and 62.

Please share this if you know anyone who may be interested in participating in this study.

To verify your qualification for this study and to learn more of what this study entails, please follow the link below for more information:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/InterracialMarriage>

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please call Christine Ross at 505-980-7219 or you may e-mail me at [steenie@unm.edu](mailto:steenie@unm.edu).

## **Appendix B: Qualifying Questions**

### **Qualifying Questions**

1. Are you currently in a Black-White interracial marriage? (Check) Yes No
2. Have you been married for 3 or more years? (Check) Yes No
3. Are you between the ages of 21 and 65? (Check) Yes No
4. Were you born in the United States? (Check) Yes No
5. Are you in a heterosexual relationship? (Check) Yes No
6. Do you consider yourself Black/African American? (Check) Yes No
7. Do you consider yourself White/Caucasian? (Check) Yes No
8. Do you and your spouse have the availability to participant in an hour to hour and a half interview? (Check) Yes No

### **Socio-demographic Information Sheet**

1. Your age (in years):
2. In what state were you born?
3. What is your racial background (e.g., African American or White)?
4. What is your personal income per year?
5. What is your highest level of education?
6. What is your current job/career?
7. How many hours do you spent at employment each week?
8. How many children do you have?
9. How long have you been married with your current partner?
10. Is it your first marriage?



## **Personal and Family History**

### ***Dating and Marriage***

1. Have you dated and/or married someone from a racial/ethnic group that is different from your own? If “yes”, please specify.
2. Are there other interracial relationships in your family? If yes, describe the different racial compositions.

### ***Race***

3. In your day to day life –
  - a. How many times would you say that the topic of race arises within a 7-day period?
  - b. How many times does the topic of race arise within a 30-day period?
4. When you and your partner discuss race in your relationship, what kinds of things do you talk about?
5. Has the topic of race caused conflict in your relationship?
  - a. If “yes”, please describe the ways in which the topic of race has caused conflict in your relationship.

### ***Beliefs of Friends and Family***

6. What was the reaction of your family (e.g., parents, siblings, grandparents) when they found out that you were in a Black-White interracial relationship? How did this change over time?
7. How did your friends react when they found out you were in a Black-White relationship?
8. How did people in other social groups (work, church) react when they found out you were in a Black-White relationship?

## **Appendix C: Racial Identity and Relationship Interview Questions**

### **Racial Identity**

1. How would you define the connection you have with your own racial group?
  - a. How does it make you feel to be a part of your racial group?
  - b. How has the history of your racial group impacted who you are and how you have lived your life?
  - c. How has American society shaped the way you think about your own race?
  - d. How has American society shaped the way you think about your partner's race?
  - e. How do your feelings about your partner's racial group impact how you feel about your own racial group?

### **Role of Race**

1. What is your experience in being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?
  - a. How are racial differences communicated within your relationship with your partner?
  - b. Describe the ways you feel that you are culturally interpreted by your partner based on racial values?
  - c. What considerations did you make when deciding to be involved in a Black-White relationship?
    - i. When you were dating?
    - ii. When you were deciding on marrying?
2. How has race impacted your relationship with your partner?

- a. Did you have preconceived ideas about your partner's race?
    - i. If yes, describe those preconceived ideas about your partner's race.
  - b. What experiences, both positive and negative, have you encountered in attempting to understand your partner's racial background?
  - c. Are you comfortable discussing race with your partner?
    - i. Describe how it feels to discuss race with your partner.
3. What have you learned about race from being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?
- a. In what ways has being in an interracial relationship been a positive experience?
  - b. In what ways has being in an interracial relationship made your relationship better or stronger?
  - c. What information do you wish you would have known prior to being a part of a Black-White interracial marriage?
  - d. How would knowing this information beforehand have helped you to better your own relationship with your partner?

## **Appendix D: Consent to Participate**

### **The University of New Mexico**

#### **Consent to Participate in Research**

The Effect of Race on Black-White Interracial Marriages: A Qualitative Study  
January 2015

#### **Introduction**

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being done by Christine L. Ross, who is the Principal Investigator and Cathy Gutierrez-Gomez, Ph.D., from the Department of Individual, Family and Community Education. This research is studying the effects of race of Black-White interracial marriages.

Conflict and triumph is seen in most marriages; however, because of the strong influence that race plays in everyday society, it is important to look at what role race plays within the relationships of Black-White interracial couples. The purpose of this study is to better understand the lived experiences of the impact of race in Black-White interracial marriages which may lead to conflict within the marriage.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are currently in a Black-White interracial marriage.

This form will explain the research study, and will also explain the possible risks as well as the possible benefits to you. If you have any questions, please ask Christine.

#### **What will happen if I decide to participate?**

If you agree to participate, the following things will happen:

Your participation will involve one online questionnaire and one face to face, phone or online interview (one follow-up call or interview may be utilized in order to clarify answers to questions which were already asked). The interview should take approximately one hour to one and a half hours to complete and will be audio recorded. You may choose to opt out of the study at any time. If you opt out of the study, you will not be contacted further for participation. Your involvement in the study is voluntary. There are no names or identifying information associated with this interview. The interview includes questions such as “How would you define the connection you have with your own racial group?” and “How has race impacted your relationship with your partner?”

You can refuse to answer any of the questions at any time. If at any time you become overtly distressed, or disclose feeling stressed, you will be reminded that you may discontinue the interview and participation at any time. If you would like to discontinue, the interview will be terminated. Only information without identifiers will be kept for 3 years after the end of data analysis in a locked file in Cathy Gutierrez-Gomez’s UNM office and then destroyed. All information with identifiers such as audio recordings will be destroyed after completion of the transcription.

#### **How long will I be in this study?**

Participation in this study will take approximately 1-1.5 hours over 1 day. If the researcher needs to call for clarification she will contact you after all information has

been recorded and transcribed. A follow-up interview, if necessary, will occur after the original interview.

**What are the risks or side effects of being in this study?**

There are minimal risks to participating in this study. The potential risks could include that you may feel discomfort while answering questions related to race, your relationship with your partner, and current feelings about the impact of race on marriages.

There are risks of stress, emotional distress, inconvenience, and possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in a research study.

For more information about risks and side effects, you may ask the investigator.

**What are the benefits to being in this study?**

There may not be any direct benefit to you; however, your participation in this study may offer you the opportunity to better understand how race has impacted your marriage. This is a form of "reflective practice" which can help bring about self-awareness. Additionally, as a participant in this study, you will be contributing to the literature about Black-White interracial marriages which may allow for a better understanding of how race can be handled in interracial relationship, specifically for Black-White couples.

**How will my information be kept confidential?**

We will take measures to protect the security of all your personal information, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all study data.

Information contained in your study records will be used by Christine Ross, the principal investigator and, will be shared with Zia Hossain, co-investigator of the study. The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human subject research and/or other entities may be permitted to access your records. There may be times when we are required by law to share your information. However, your name will not be used in any published reports about this study.

Upon completion of interviews, the audio recordings will be transcribed by the principal investigator, Christine, who will delete audio recordings as soon as the transcription is complete. There will be no identifiers attached to your information; however pseudonyms will be used as a reference name for the write up. All information, recordings and transcriptions, will be stored on a secure, password-protected computer in a locked office at the University of New Mexico. Any paper documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet, in Dr. Cathy Gutierrez-Gomez's locked office at the University of New Mexico. Once the research is complete, all information will be held for three years after data analysis and then deleted and/or shredded.

**Can I stop being in the study once I begin?**

Yes, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate and to withdraw your participation at any point in this study.

**Whom can I call with questions or complaints about this study?**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints at any time about the research study, you may contact Christine Ross at 505-980-7219 or Dr. Cathy Gutierrez-Gomez at 505-277-9606.

If you would like to speak with someone other than the research team, you may call the UNMHSC HRPO at (505) 272-1129.

**Whom can I call with questions about my rights as a research participant?**

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may call the UNMHSC HRPO at (505) 272-1129. The HRPO is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human participants. For more information, you may also access the IRB website at <http://hsc.unm.edu/som/research/hrrc/irbhome.shtml>.

**CONSENT**

You are making a decision whether to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you read the information provided (or the information was read to you). By typing your full name into this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this study. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Adult Subject (Typed)      Date

I agree to be audio recorded during the interview      yes ☐      no ☐

**INVESTIGATOR SIGNATURE**

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

Christine L. Ross MS, LMFT

Name of Investigator/ Research Team Member (type or print)

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