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Acceptance, Rejection, or Somewhere In-between: Family Communication Regarding Interracial Relationships

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ACCEPTANCE, REJECTION, OR SOMEWHERE IN-BETWEEN:

FAMILY COMMUNICATION REGARDING

INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Lisa M. Martin

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The assumption that interracial families are neither as strong nor stable as same-race families is slowly becoming an archaic opinion. While it is difficult for some to admit that some mindsets are strongly rooted in prejudice, research shows that people are capable of changing. This study specifically seeks to explore the dynamics of family communication regarding interracial marriages. The findings spotlight those individuals who are actively working to alter misconceptions through their own interracial family.

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INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS

LISA M. MARTIN

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would not have survived the last few weeks of this project without you as my sounding board. To my parents Jim and Sharon, my sister Michelle, my brother Gabe, and my Aunt Jo, words cannot express how much I value your presence and support. You were always willing to listen to me when I thought everything was falling apart. You all made sure I knew that everything would be okay. I love you all dearly.

<div align="right">L. M. M.</div>

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Statement of Problem

Martin Luther King, Jr., presented a dream to the American people decades ago, founded on the idea that one day society would not judge a person by the color of a his or her skin, but by the content of his or her character. He fought the great racial divide in the 1960s in hope of seeing a nation bridge this gap set in place centuries before. The 1967 Supreme Court decision to bring legitimacy to interracial marriages (McClain, 2011), subsequently igniting "a fire of demographic change," changed the tide of possibilities of potential partners in future relationships (Brunsma, 2005, p. 1131). In a recent article, Jayson (2012) reports statistics from the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau that indicate the number of interracial marriages in the United States has jumped nearly 28% since 2000. With this rise in interethnic coupling, how families see themselves may also be changing from the view established in previous decades.

At the same time, some might argue that it has been made abundantly clear that racial equality in American society has not been a well-received topic by much of the modern public. There still exists a deeply rooted ideology in this nation's present generation that a legacy of Whiteness is the equivalent of winning the genetic lottery. This cultural belief is a well-established attitude, passed down from one generation to the next, in hopes of preserving superiority. Jacobson and Johnson (2006) supported the notion that geographic location and age were directly associated with the

uncertainty and negative attitudes regarding interracial relationships. Many in this present generation still embrace past ideologies; however, there are enough individuals who welcome a tide of change to challenge these past ideologies.

The changing standpoint on interracial relationships through family dynamics has not gone unnoticed. Turner and West (2013) state:

> Communication researchers need to discuss the communication variations within bi- and multi-racial families; families consisting of more than one race must deal with issues related to language and communication. Moreover, because races have various interpretations of relational development, it would be worthwhile to assess the rule construction and adherence within multiracial families. (p. 367)

In light of what these authors mention, the present study hopes to establish a foundation for continued research in this area. The groundwork of how partners in interracial marriages experience family identities and narratives will be related to the type of interracial family dynamic described by the participants. The findings will inform our understanding of the literature, which states that certain family-inherited identities can be problematic given the family dynamic present in families of origin.

The path of interracial relationships over the past decades has begun to be embraced by younger generations of Americans who are seeing a different world and atmosphere than in previous decades. The following review of literature provides the conceptual and practical background used to guide this investigation. This background includes research in ideology, hegemony, race ideology, and the causes and consequences of attitudes towards interracial relationships, family communication and dynamics, and grandparent roles. These topics will set the stage for an in-depth interview study of

couples in interracial relationships, with implications both for such couples and for researchers.

Review of Literature

Perspectives of Ideology

  Ideology. Ideologies assist individuals in understanding their observations of the world around them. Understanding an ideological framework, according to White (1992), involves:

> Looking beyond the surface structure of an artifact to discover the beliefs, values, and assumptions it suggests. An ideology is a pattern of beliefs that determines a group's interpretations of some aspect of the world. These beliefs reflect a group's social, economic, political, or cultural interest. Another way to think about an ideology is a mental framework - the language, concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation that a group deploys to make sense of and define the world or some aspect of it. (p. 209)

While constructing a critique involving ideology, it is critical to understand that multiple ideologies constantly compete with each other in every society. Repression is the only way one ideology is ever able to overcome all other ideologies within a culture (White, 1992).

  Ideologies are spread and reinforced through the use of verbal and visual language. Miller (2009) explains that "language and ideology are nearly indistinguishable…Understanding language is tantamount to being spoken by ideology. Ideology, in other words, is an unconscious process, and language itself is ideological regardless of the intentions or views of the speaker" (p. 248). Symbols, such as written

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words, and artifacts, such as religious items, represent these ideologies. While individuals may state something, thinking they are not reinforcing any specific world view, ideologies are omnipresent. Due to their inescapable nature, ideologies have become so ingrained that individuals often function unconsciously within them.

Shell (1978) posits that ideologies "seek to express how matter 'gives rise to' thought by employing metaphors such as 'influence,' 'structure,' and 'imitation'" (p. 1). Shell reflects Althusser's (1969) notion that "ideology has a material existence" (p. 37). Althusser believes that society is composed of an infrastructure and a superstructure. The infrastructure is the economic system the particular society operates through, while the superstructure is the combination of all of the ideologies that reinforce the infrastructure. The material aspects of the economic infrastructure are replicated within various ideologies to create a sense of continuity between the infrastructure and superstructure. While not all ideological discourses connect specifically to race and ethnicity, the majority of ideologies function to reinforce a division between one group and another. An ideological discourse regarding race specifically interconnects with cultural practices (e.g. interracial relationships) and material conditions (Hall 1996).

Hegemony and Race. Hegemony is the idea that an elite group will have power over all others in a given society. Gramsci serves a crucial role in the understanding of hegemony. Gramsci (1972) explains that hegemony occurs when "the class which is economically dominant will try to impose its own peculiar way of seeing the world on a society as a whole" (pp. 275-276). The elite group will communicate their power through various communication channels, establishing who is part of the privileged and who is not. Croteau, Hoynes, and Milan (2011) argue that on more controversial issues, the

elite's opinion will prevail because of their inherent power; however, they also note that "messages express both the dominant ideology and at least partially challenging worldviews" (p. 161). The power associated with hegemony has the ability to alter the manner in which a subaltern group views the world.

Currently in American society, White is seen as the skin color of power, and therefore the group with the majority of the power. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) explain that Whiteness "is a territory that has remained invisible as it continues to influence the identity of those both within and without its domain. It affects the everyday fabric of our lives…it yields power" (p. 291). The idea of Whiteness is everything; people think of white as the absence of color, whereas black is the combination of all color.

Therefore, the patterns of communication of Whites are considered to be the norm by the masses, and behaviors of non-Whites are measured against Whites and symbolically marked (e.g., "Black" English). The very "invisibility" of Whiteness "exemplifies how Whiteness is constructed as a norm, and neutral; thus, it is accepted as a universal standard" (McCann, 2007, p. 3). Whiteness represents all that is good and positive in America and sets the mark for minority races to dream of reaching. McCann (2007) explains that the idea of being born White equates to winning a genetic lottery and provides the connection between Whiteness and hegemony. McCann (2007) states:

> The social construction of race, gender, and sexual orientation manifests itself as racialized, engenderized, and sexualized identities, establishing a hierarchical binary between opposite categories, in which white, male, and heterosexual are seen as positive or superior to non-White, female, and homosexual. (p. 4)

Both neutralization and transparency hold the power to construct a reality that serves to justify and normalize the supremacy of Whites.

Those in power use the media to tell the populous what is correct, what is sayable and unsayable (Hall 1986). This power structure is linked to the language and attitudes used to create the discourse of the dominant class that is commonly present in society. Embracing Whiteness allows for a continued legacy of one group of individuals to possess power over others. It is critical to note that Whiteness only continues to survive because of the acceptance from Whites and non-Whites alike. Fundamentally the power associated with Whiteness is linked to the understanding that "human diversity lies essentially in our ease with categorization," and that "race is a constructed category that derives its power from a taken-for-granted legitimacy which race categories have acquired in their historical formulation" (Downing & Husband, 2005, p. 2).

Race is distinct from ethnicity. Herbst (1997) clarifies ethnicity as containing shared elements common to a specific cultural, such as traditions and history, whereas race is comprised of inherited, distinctive characteristics, such as skin color or facial features. The very notion of racial division supports the power of racism and Whiteness. Pascoe (1996), critiquing the court's use of racial division, notes how racializers (those who frame social interaction in categories of "race") and racists see race as "an indivisible essence that included not only biology but also culture, morality, and intelligence"—an essence that has been "a compellingly significant factor in history and society" (pp. 47-48). Childs (2009) elaborates on the construction of race as

a collective process and practice, which produces "a distinctive set of meanings." Race and sex mix together in many ways to create distinct ideologies about all

groups: The clash of sexualities was an important feature in the development of

ideologies that defined each group and the construction of ethnic boundaries that

divide them. (p. 15)

The knowledge that the United States was built on the construction of racial separation

and distinction only reinforces the notion that "America from the very beginning" has

been built "upon the exploitation of people of color to ensure the economic and social

power, status, and wealth of Whites" (Childs, 2009, p. 15). Althusser's (1969) notions of

the infrastructure are clearly evident in the formation of America's early economic

formation. Feagin (2006) constructs racial inequality to be more than simply stereotypes

that occur between groups; rather, "White-generated and White-maintained oppression is

far more than a matter of individual bigotry, for it has been from the beginning a material,

social, and ideological reality" (p. xiii). Therefore, the world has taken this constructed

reality and formulated images that correspond with the ideology that was set in place over

a century ago. Despite the Civil War and Civil Rights Amendment, America has not seen

a reduction in racial inequalities. Brunsma's (2005) perspective highlights the notion that

race and racism are supposedly being denounced and diminished; however, "race still

matters as an axis through which goods, services, opportunities and life chances are

distributed unequally to members of the same society" (p. 1132).

　　　　The ideologies above frame the mindsets and attitudes of how Americans view

and acknowledge their surroundings, specifically interracial relationships. These

ideologies establish firm opinions about such coupling, resulting in a society that

showcases its displeasure towards mixed unions.

Attitudes towards Interracial Relationships

History. Racial coupling is a difficult issue for many White Americans, especially when the individuals involved are White and Black Americans (Feagin & O'Brien, 2004). This is evidenced by the fact that marriages in the United States overwhelmingly are between people of the same race.

Thankfully, history has a way of changing such rooted beliefs (Zebroski, 1999). To understand how interracial relationships are seen currently, one must first realize that marriages between racially diverse individuals, particularly among Blacks and Whites, were deemed illegal and poor etiquette throughout the beginning of the 20th century. Farber (2011) examined how the 1960s brought about an air of change in America, and more directly, on college campuses in regards to the interpersonal relationships of the students, specifically the relationships of interracial couples. In recent reports, it seems that ongoing judgments have taken a more permanent tide of change. The most recent statistics for interracial relationships report interracial marriages between Blacks and Whites witnessing a threefold increase since 1980 (Jayson, 2011). The 2010 Census Bureau report has total married couple households at 56,510,377, and total interracial couples/interethnic couples 5,369,035. Of the total number of interracial couples, 422, 250 or 7.9 percent were in a Non-Hispanic White/ Non-Hispanic Black relationship (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

In lieu of the previously cited statistics of increasing interracial relationships, Inniss (2010) highlights that increase of the 3.2 percent of married people in interracial relationships was reported in 1980, and in 2010 the percentage had risen to 8.0 percent. Although, this is not exactly the 9 percent increase Jayson mentions, the increase is

indeed significant. Additionally, Daniel Lichter, professor at Cornell University, was interviewed for an article in the New York Daily News discussing the increase of interracial marriages in the U.S. Lichter explains this rise as an "indication that race relations have improved over the past quarter century;" however, he goes on to stress that "America still has a long way to go" ("Interracial Marriages" 2012). He is illustrating that interracial marriages, particularly Black and White relationships, are showing improvement, implying that centuries-old taboos created by society have not hindered the rise of Black and White interracial marriage (McClain, 2011).

However, though the country is on the verge of change, there is still sensitivity to race issues, as reflected in differences among social class, status, wealth, and power. Mainstream American views of interracial relationships through most of the 20th century did not acknowledge the mixing of races. For example, some college administrations sought to keep such actions from materializing by mandating that they were illegal on campus (Farber, 2011). Although new openness towards more diverse relationships promised to alter the established notion of race in the 1960s, deeply rooted cultural biases and prejudices towards race and interracial relationships were not erased.

This continuing discrimination resulted in maintaining a status quo that honored the Whites and oppressed the rest. At the beginning of the 1960s, African Americans were restricted to Black colleges and universities. With the help of the Civil Rights Movement, Black students were able to enroll freely in any university or college throughout the country, even those that were predominantly White. With this increased interaction of different races on campuses and in classes, interracial dating became

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inevitable, even though interethnic dating may be more acceptable than marriage. As Yancey (2007) states:

> Dating is a less serious relationship. Dating couples are not expected to plan for children, combine household budgets or engage in other activities married couples must handle. One who dates across his/her race can be seen as sowing wild oats rather than making a permanent relationship with family and identity ramifications. (p. 915)

Yancey notes that real and powerful prejudices were still deeply rooted among many, causing interracial couples to face alarming problems during this time. Even in large northern cities with ultra-liberal communities, mixed-raced couples were expected to be met with glares, if not more overt forms of disapproval (Farber, 2011).

Mystery. The Civil Rights Movement contributed to destabilizing this cultural taboo, thus placing in motion a cultural shift. The movement challenged anti-miscegenation statutes, awakening deep racial fears and concern (McClain, 2011). Even for those who did not oppose interracial relationships openly, such relationships contained a cloak of mystery and fascination. Johnson and Warren (1994) attribute several past researchers' recounts of severe feelings of disapproval of interracial marriage to the simple fact that noticing these relationships and even marriages is proof that on some level marrying into another ethnic group is not socially acceptable (p. 1). The idea of White supremacy was strongly enforced, so that if interracial relationships were to have taken place, they were under the concept of White man and his mistress or concubine. The general public was not to know the existence of the relationship, thus establishing this foundation of shame, disapproval, and secrecy (Roberts, 1994, p. 20).

Years ago, a White man's sexual relationship with a Black woman was acceptable when kept out of the public's eye. The moment the couple chose to make the relationship public, with their children present, the entire family would be ostracized by society (Roberts, 1994, p. 15). Over a hundred years ago, Baker (1908) summarized investigation of interracial marriages by reiterating the points made by the previously mentioned authors: The moment a White female married an African American male she was declassed by fellow White people, and though she was acknowledged in the African American community, she was essentially an outcast from both forms of society. As previously mentioned, The Civil Rights Movement bought about the legal system establishing laws for the interplay between White Americans and African Americans in the workforce, thus allowing for the first time in history the national acceptance of interaction between two people of different races.

Johnson and Warren (1994) argued that the attitudes associated with interracial marriages carried a negative theme as recently as 1965, when a person could be found guilty by the legal system and sentenced to ten years in jail for marrying interracially. Porterfield (1982) elaborated that some feared that promotion of interracial marriages would lead to equality: "If complete acceptance comes to pass, it is likely that discrimination in the United States based on race or skin color will cease to exist" (p. 31). Davis and Smith (1988) report findings from previous research that suggests two significant indicators for acceptance of interracial marriages. The age of the individual played a strong role, showing significantly more accepting and tolerant attitudes in younger (18-29) Americans. In addition to age, the level or years completed in school, such as having a bachelors degree or higher in education, related to more positive views

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toward interracial marriage (p. 363). Watts and Henriksen (1999) focused on how perceptions of interracial relationships and marriages were manifested, which was through a series of mythical meaning embraced by the White culture. Many have expectations that individuals involved in interracial marriage are deemed to fail, that someone in an interracial marriage will leave a spouse for other prospects, or that people engage in interracial marriages out of a level of hatred for their parents. In addition, Smith (2013) pointed out the underlying but still apparent issue that "legalized racial segregation is no longer accepted, but residential segregation exists," revealing the mindset that such deeply rooted themes are not easily changed (p. 786).

Partners in interracial marriage may be aware of these expectations; thus, emotional difficulties may come to those individuals who engage in interracial marriage. Ponzetti (2003) found that with the increase of interracial marriages, the attitude of shame associated with such a union has diminished. Still, engaging in an interracial relationship or marriage has been linked to self-hate and rebelliousness, thus leaving the individuals in the union with the uncertainty of whether or not a state of love is truly a part of the relationship (p. 938). Vernon and Buffler (1988) concluded from their research that Americans are uncertain of what they have not experienced and are reluctant to be in situations that are unknown to them; therefore, with little interaction with interracial couples, Americans seldom express support to the union, and attitudes toward the relationship, either positive or negative, can be experienced through potential interaction with families and in-laws of the partner.

This uncertainty in Americans has been seen in more recent research. Fiebert, Nugent, Hershberger, and Kasdan (2004) surveyed students in California and found that

the participants believed that interracial dating is socially acceptable, but interracial marriage is still taboo. Herman and Campbell's (2012) findings concur with both Gallagher (2002) and Fiebert et al. (2004) in that, indeed, there has been an increase in the personal willingness to pursue interracial relationships; however, this increase does not directly result in more of those relationships in America (p. 344).

The myths of the past led Chan and Wethington (1998) to establish key factors in how interracial relationships and marriages manage and cope with societal adversity. An interracial couple who has a higher level of education and uses and embraces networks of like-minded individuals from whom the couple receives support has a means to combat negativity or dangerous situations. Essentially, the interracial couple can surround themselves with a cocoon of stability in order to manage and thrive in the day-to-day culture or environment that still views interracial marriage with a high level of uncertainty. The couple's tendency to actively seek out those supportive social engagements is a tactic used in order to live an ordinary life (Zebroski, 1999).

The act of creating this cocoon of stability was an element Steinbugler (2012) built upon in her interviews with bi-racial couples. These couples spoke about the process of actively researching residential neighborhoods for its diversity percentage, in hopes of finding a more balanced ratio, or at the very least to make sure the area was liberal and pro-diversity. Their actions may seem extreme; however, the couples' main concern was to ensure a good environment for their children.

With several indicators as to how interracial relationships result in either positive or negative reactions, one potential reason as to why individuals respond in the manner they do is that they have either accepted the false assumptions that society holds to be

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correct, or they have a family inheritance that has caused the emotional response. Thoughts and feelings about racial issues are still often shaped by family, friends, and social contacts growing up. Those positive or negative understandings about people of different races are likely passed down from one generation to the next, or from one friend or neighbor to the next. A lifetime process of taking in the viewpoints of such issues leaves lasting impressions in individuals' lives, illuminating the significance of a person's family (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003).

Family Communication and Dynamics

The American family standard of centuries past has focused on maintaining a structure of racial purity, of staying within the boundaries of marrying within one's culture and ethnic background, and not expanding beyond the set line of what is acceptable by society (Jacobson & Warren, 1995). This traditional American family has now had to transition and adapt to changing ideals, as well as to the influx of different ethnic backgrounds into mainstream America.

Walsh (2012) examined the concept of the "normal family" in the United States and the complexity it has encountered in recent years, as the standard moves from the culturally accepted, White, middle-class family of four to a more ethnically diverse standard. The family structure and dynamic has evolved in recent years to the point that one in five individuals in America is either foreign born or a first-generation resident (p. 16). This statistic is supported by the fact that the foreign-born population has tripled over the past decades. In decades to come these different ethnics from Latin America and Asia will be the majority over the Caucasian majority that has dominated for centuries (p. 48). The future of the American family will undoubtedly witness a variety of new

definitions and appearances; thus, it is important to know how individuals and their families might handle the shift.

Family. The definition of family is ambiguous for it must take into account a number of issues, and it is widely confused by differences in definition based on culture, communication, and diversity. Therefore, this single term has come to summarize a multitude of meanings and uses. In this study, I will use a broad definition proposed by Turner and West (2013):

> A family is a self-defined group of intimates who create and maintain themselves
> through their own interactions and their interactions with others; a family may
> include both voluntary and involuntary relationships; it creates both literal and
> symbolic internal and external boundaries; and it evolves through time: It has a
> history, a present, and a future. (p. 9)

The process used to maintain these interactions within this self-defined group is essentially a well-established communication style. Turner and West (2013) claim that the foundation of family life is conversation. Some of the key conversations of family members involve explaining the in-group relationships with other family members, clarifying how one's family is a part of a certain culture, and discussing how to present to others outside the family unit a blueprint of the inner workings of one's family (p. 11). One's family of intimates is determined for one at birth; therefore, its members are called the *involuntary family*. A group sharing this high level of connection must be flexible and permit growth, for its members will undoubtedly enter into a variety of relationships through their own choosing; these expansions will become known as the *voluntary family* (p. 14).

Family of Origin. One's *family-of-origin* references the group of intimates among which a person has been raised. The family-of-origin (FOO) is a highly regarded group of members who typically devote time and support to the development of the individual such that the success of future relationship outcomes centers on the influence from the FOO (Gardner, Busby, Burr, & Lyon, 2011). Different families of origin have different communication styles. A secure adult has a family-of-origin with high levels of trust and constructive conflict management, often with the clear expression of thoughts and feelings. Communication among any culture's family-of-origin and family members allows the message sequences and their significance to be made known to any person outside of the involuntary family (Turner & West, 2013). A continuous cycle of family growth and development depends upon the communication of a family legacy.

The *traditional nuclear family-of-origin* was once a two-parent family coexisting with their biological children, having the father working outside the home and the mother taking the role of a homemaker. Modern times have redefined this concept with the recent development of the stay-at-home dad and working mother, resulting in a shift in communication patterns, leaving the members of a traditional nuclear family experiencing difficulty in communicating their family values outside the family core. This leaves the roles played by the fellow family members to be more significant in nature in continuing a family legacy (Turner & West, 2013).

In spite of social change, the family still remains one of the oldest institutions to play a critical role in presenting culture to a child (Iruonagbe, Chiazor, & Ajayi, 2013). Although there is a vast array of family dynamics and frameworks, the family still remains one of the major institutions that identifies family as a category between groups

of people, such as those of different races. In terms of expressing culture, part of cultural knowledge deals with racial representation. Families can have either more or less favorable attitudes towards racial others and the potential of children marrying racial others; but individuals from specific family types may possess more or less tolerance towards ideas that require looking beyond the race divide.

Family of Origin Subgroups. Root (2001) describes four frameworks in which family identity can exist, elaborating on how these structures are used within family groups to define members' responses to a racial other joining the unit—open, pseudo-open, closed, and pseudo-closed. Although Root is talking about White families here, we realize that families of color can also be open, closed, and so on.

For an *open family,* Root (2001) sees communication as a two-way street, with children growing up into independent individuals capable of making decisions that have the potential of going against what their parents believe or see as important. Family members respect the individual's decision, which ultimately triumphs in the end. Family members show this respect by expressing that each family member has his or her own set of differences. An open family has an implied logic for boundaries, and family members realize that an individual's actions are not portrayals of the family's identity, for an identity is comprised of more than a single person's actions. Members act in response to the meeting of the significant other, with promise and encouragement at the idea of having a person join the family. More importantly, an open family looks at the relationship in terms of quality regardless of the ethnic or cultural differences; they view the experience in terms of whether the person would be a good fit in the family (Root, 2001, p. 94).

Root (2001) frames the *pseudo-open family's* mission statement as a set of guidelines established by past generations that certain relationships simply go against the code of life. The moment a member of this type of family decides to increase the level of seriousness of a relationship to the level of commitment with a different ethnic individual, the family's underlying ideals and stereotypes will come to the surface. A pseudo-open family considers themselves free of racial prejudices and will set aside their objections of race and class, and will express openness to any potential spouse, as long as the partner is of the same race (p. 98).

A *closed family* maintains a level of control through distinctions concerning who is acceptable and who is not. The parents have strict rules and guidelines that have their family as the in-group and people of different ethnic backgrounds as the out-group. The parents may not lessen their hold on their children, even into the adult years; and in this family dynamic there exists a "one-way, controlled, form of communication that travels in one direction, from the parents to the children" (Root, 2001, p. 99). This rigidity stems from their unchallenged prejudices and/or parents' unrealistic expectations. To a closed family, interracial dating is explicitly forbidden, and parents do their best to pass on this way of thinking, that there exists a border between races, to their children and hopefully their grandchildren. The offspring of these closed families are required to marry the 'right partner,' and family members have a very narrow criterion for who is considered acceptable and will be welcomed into their family ranks. In this family dynamic, race matters greatly and the Whiteness of a family is a closely guarded commodity that will be protected (p. 100).

The *pseudo-closed family* has the appearance of the closed family previously described; however, once the parents learn that their son or daughter might marry anyway despite their objections, they fear losing their child. This causes the family to change their pseudo-closed mindset to being an open or pseudo-open family. Also, the death of a family member that overtly expressed opposition to the interracial relationship or the birth of a grandchild may change the thinking of a pseudo-closed family. Lastly, this family may change their stance if the potential in-law is an exception to existing stereotypes, or if the interracial marriage outlasts their predictions of how long they thought it would (Root, 2001, p. 104).

A framework for how families instill in their children a standard of what expectations are required of them provides researchers a window into how families are structured and how they function. The dynamics of families of origin, the structures of how people of different ethnicities seek to raise their children, and personal style differences blend in ways specific to each union. The attitudes associated with the possible union of two different ethnic groups depends greatly on the frameworks illustrated by Root (2001) and sometimes previously established assumptions.

Narratives. In order to better understand a family's framework, we can look to the concepts of storytelling and narratives as reflecting of family values. Goodall (2005) defined storytelling to involve:

> The life stories of those who came before us. What we inherit narratively from our forebears provides us with a framework for understanding our identity through theirs. It helps us see our life grammar and working logic as an extension of, the way we story how they lived and thought about things, and it allows us to

explain to others where we come from and how we were raised in the continuing

context of what it all means. (p. 6)

In accordance with Goodall's definition, Stone (2008) describes family stories as

essential plotlines communicating the knowledge of who the family is, what the family is

known for, and how the family and its members ought to live their lives. The art of

oratory conceptualizes and redefines the collective identity of a family by providing

meaning through the narratives of their past (p. 210). McNay (2009) created the notion

of *narrative inheritance* as this "warehouse" of chronicles that allows involuntary and

voluntary family members to learn of the love linking each person to the past which

detail explanations of the present and the future. As part of this inheritance, everyday

conversation is replete with storytelling, as we do not simply talk about ourselves, we

hear stories of others. Through narratives within families we listen to the stories of

others; interaction is a common practice through which powerful identities are formed

(Fivush, Bohanek, & Zama, 2011).

Narratives are an enduring part of life for us as individuals and family members:

We make sense of these experiences told to us, they bring clarity to our perceptions, and

family members who perform this function bring meaning to our life (Kimball, Cook,

Boyatzis, & Leonard, 2013; Semerikova, 2013).

Grandparents Roles

The narratives passed from one generation to the next rely heavily on the

grandparent and the role he or she plays in the life of the grandchild. While some may

argue that the role of a grandparent does not necessarily constitute part of the traditional

family structure, research throughout the years strongly implies that grandparent roles are

of high value. The role of a grandparent in many families is key; the grandparents understand expectations structured by family roles (Breheny, Stephens, & Spilsbury, 2013). Harwood (2007) emphasizes the need to have a quality grandparent relationship as a means for individuals to more effectively transition from childhood into adulthood.

Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) conducted an interview study on grandparent-grandchild relationships and divided the types of roles portrayed by grandparents into five distinct categories. The *formal grandparent* style centers on the role of grandparents providing the occasionally special treats to the grandchildren and even baby-sitting; however, the grandparents are particularly aware of their role not to interfere with the child-raising process of the grandchild (p. 202) The grandparent who derives pleasure from simply interacting and playing with a grandchild is known as the *fun seeker,* and these elder adults also have a tendency to bend the rules of authority in order to enjoy their grandchildren. A *surrogate grandparent* has the role of being the parent to his or her grandchildren, resulting from the parents' requirement to work an excessive amount. The authoritative older figure fulfills the *family wisdom* role in that she or he has the obligation of passing down the lessons of skills needed in life and even the potential resources required to achieve the lessons taught. Grandparents who interact with their grandchildren only on holidays and at special events have been branded the *distant figure* grandparent (p. 203).

These older individuals do not simply exist for the pleasure of the grandchild they have or for the title they have inherited. Grandparents often invest in the younger generations that have come into their presence, bestowing onto these grandchildren a flow of information that passes down from the older to the younger in hopes of

maintaining a family identity. This role of a grandparent is a great portion of the intergenerational relationship. Narratives grandparents tell of what people did when, where, and for how long reveal a great deal about their life (Settles et al, 2009; Shore, 2009). Turner and West (2013) acknowledge that a grandparent's relationship with a grandchild can create an environment of openness where that family identity becomes more about family inheritance, and the grandchild is presented with a perspective that has an air of familiarity, invites adventure, and can possibly show the grandchild a side of the family previously unknown. This grandparent role is important in any family, regardless of the racial make-up of the family unit. The lack of an active grandparent could result in the loss of a well-developed sense of family history or narrative.

Due to the complex nature of family dynamics, it is sometimes difficult to know the origin of a particular behavior or attitude. Untangling that which is purely learned or gained from a grandparent from what can be learned or gained from other individual is impossible.

Relational Identity

The above material, suggests that the ideological mindset of a family and the social identity it promotes are vital to how relationships will be perceived regardless of the races involved in creating the identity of the couple.

Baldwin and Hecht (1995) suggest that partners negotiate their individual identities as they "develop relationships, especially as a relationship gains its own identity" (p. 69). Understanding the relationship identity of an interracial couple requires examination of norms and values of the family culture from which each member of the relationship originated. Interpersonal relationships that cross social boundaries, such as

"taboo lines of race," may have difficulty establishing their identity, as society has promoted a particular mindset that has deemed such relationships as not acceptable. Ultimately, Lampe (1981) explains, "Despite the espousal of freedom and equality as cherished values in the United States, mate selection inevitably is influenced by centuries-old customs and myths" (p. 97). Part of the obstacle mentioned by Lampe is highlighted by Moran (2001), who notes that the freedom to love across the color line is considered a recent phenomenon in American history. Because of this obstacle set before interracial relationships concerning identity and social boundaries, it is a surprise that some couples persevere at all.

Steinbugler (2012) elaborates on this perception of perseverance and other difficulties experienced by interracial couples. In her interviews, multiple bi-racial couples mention the stares and comments received in public outings, in their areas of Brooklyn, Boston, and Philadelphia, although these areas are known for progressive stance on diversity. The couples view these stares and comments as "offensive and annoying." One couple shared an instance in which a stranger made an unnecessary comment, "'It's so good what you are doing,' as though we are doing a community service project that promotes racial harmony" (p. 22). Such comments may seem harmless; however, one Black female, whose husband is White, revealed a weariness from having to look past these stares and shrug off these comments on a consistent basis.

Couples who have chosen to repeat the structure and cultural forms of their families of origin result in creating a new path that balances the two cultures in some way (Tseng, 1967). Gaines, Chalfin, Kim, and Taing (1998) states, "Intercultural partners who adopt such a balanced view of their similarities and differences, are likely to interact in a

way that respects partners' unique cultural heritages while simultaneously establishing a basis for mutuality in experiencing and expressing love" (p. 169). This quotation suggests that individuals who have chosen to be part of an interracial couple have welcomed and accepted the relational identity associated with the relationship. Gaines (1995) describes how, at the same time, a partner in an interracial marriage—

> regardless of his or her own minority status—could conceivably internalize values associated with his or her own 'native' culture; contesting that the coexistence of two or more sets of cultural identities is not problematic, arguing that the relationship process often involves partner's efforts to find a basis for cultural common ground. (pp. 81-82)

This concept of common ground for establishing the couple's culture and understanding the possible emotional reactions associated with their own culture will play a key role in how the couple will build the foundation for their common ground.

Accounts of Family Reactions. A team of scholars, Rosenblatt, Karis, and Powell (1995), set out to study whether or not families' attitudes towards interracial relationships and marriages reflected those of the past, or whether time had changed family mindsets. They interviewed 21 interracial couples in committed relationships, with a focus of finding what each couple had experienced, through family and society reactions, as their relationship progressed. The couples elaborated on the specific issue of their families' emotional reaction to the announcement of their engagement and later marriage (p. 56).

The couples reported perceiving greater acceptance if their families had been exposed to and witnessed interracial relationships in their community, city, and even

social networks, thus, reinforcing the idea that exposure to relationships on this level helps to broaden a family's view of what is within the realm of possibilities for relationships and marriages. Shame, fear, anxiety, disappointment, and rejection were expressed by some partners who felt they were disowned by their family. Such emotions were more commonly felt when the partner came from a White family without any experience with interracial relationships that negatively expressed their reaction to the union. Families with a conservative background and living in a predominately White environment viewed such unions as unacceptable based on the assumptions established decades ago by society that the joining of different races would result in low economic status and scorn by the outside world (Rosenblatt et al., 1995, p. 74). On the other hand, the reactions expressed by African American families resembled an air of welcoming, acceptance, and the occasional kind word.

More recently, Steinbugler's (2012) interviews with interracial couples reveal that "whether interracial couples accept stereotypes as true or not, they encounter them frequently in everyday life" (p. 103). Further building on this notion, Steinbugler (2012) expresses that interracial couples have been viewed as "racial mavericks" who have escaped prejudice; however, partners in these couples have a tendency to position the other partner in a way that relieves discomfort for family and friends through techniques such as highlighting the partner's best qualities (p. 110). The discomfort individuals outside of the relationship experience could range from a slight unease to refusing to be alone with one member of the relationship due to prejudice.

Parenthood and Children. Two different aspects of interracial marriages that have received little scholarly research are the art of parenthood and how the biracial

children adjust in a society where the color of a person's skin still dictates his or her identity. Herman and Campbell (2012) found that, although interracial marriages are highly examined, the studies of these relationships do not include questions about interracial childbearing, "limiting the amount of information we have about attitudes toward this family" (pp. 345-346). The struggle to be viewed as an ordinary couple, when they have crossed racial boundaries is obvious in a world in which the norm still is to have a marriage that is endogamous (Moran, 2001, p. 178).

The modern myths of today do not take into account the underlying battle bi-racial children face. Moran (2001) explores that children of interracial marriages voluntarily accept the likelihood that parents can be of different ethnic backgrounds, but their acceptance of diversity can be challenged by a society "where race still matters" (p. 155). Bi-racial children must possess an ability to somehow find an invisible balance in which they do not identify themselves more with one ethnic heritage than the other. Partners in interracial marriages may "worry that a biracial child will be treated as a human being," bringing to light the dream first presented by Dr. King, that society should judge people based on the content of their character and not the color of their skin (Moran, 2001, p. 155).

Regardless of how the world views the identity of their biracial children, the parents in Lawton, Foeman, and Brown's (2013) study viewed their jobs as parents to be their most important obligation, and many saw it as "a culmination of success of an interracial marriage" (p. 229). One husband (White) expressed:

> I just assumed I would be accepted. However, I know what it feels like to be
> stared at because my wife is African American. I also know that my children will

experience more of what she has experienced rather than what I have experienced. Therefore, I am very aware of racism because of my marriage. I want my children to go to a school where they see others like them. (p. 227)

American society has in a way created a method of distinguishing what is acceptable and what is not, without having to explicitly state it. As mentioned above, years ago, the Civil Rights Movement aimed to eliminate these categories of segregated individuals; however, the above quote suggests that a country cannot rid itself of inequalities in mere decades when they had been in place for centuries. It appears that modern America prefers to consider the crossing of the color line for partners as a sign of rebellion rather than the simple notion that love should not have a color.

Summary and Research Questions

The previous literature of family communication and dynamics relating to interracial relationships supports one of two notions. First, previous literature discusses family narratives and legacies; however, most research in this area only relates to Caucasian Americans. Second, the previous literature on interracial relationships supports that intolerance against biracial couples may still be an issue within society and the general community. Specifically, this literature highlights that several issues exist as a threat to the family inheritance and to the family finding a unique, healthy identity.

While the research provides a foundation for understanding the significance connected with family communication and dynamics, it fails to assess how partners in interracial couples incorporate the identity and narratives of the family of origin within the couple's own family identity. In other words, research has gathered the material to support the notions that American society continues to possess discriminative attitudes

towards interracial couples, but has done little to inquire about how partners in such couples make sense of the information they receive from family and society.

Literature overlooks the possibility that interracial couples may experience apprehension when confronted by involuntary family members (i.e., the family of origin) who do not accept the voluntary family member (i.e., the interracial spouse) into the previously established family identity. Additionally, the same involuntary family members may see a shift in family identity as challenge to family unity, resulting in them fully disowning the couple's own relational and new family identity. These implications can be related both to the couple's relational identity and to the development of community for the grandchildren.

Although interracial couples may suffer greatly psychologically, research should seek to better understand how internalized relational disregard directly affects the interracial couple's communication and development of family identity. In light of family narratives it is important to understand that some interracial couples may not be able to continue supporting the narratives of their family of origin. Those narratives are ones that do not support the relationship. At the same time, we should also explore the experiences of the relational partners who experience a threat to their family identity as an interracial couple. Thus, the following research questions will be addressed in this thesis:

RQ1: What expressions of tolerance, support, or threat have partners in interracial
    marriages received from their families of origin?

RQ2: To what extent did a previous family narrative and family identity contribute to the
    identity expressed in one's interracial relationship?

RQ3: What do participants in interracial relationships see as the communication pattern

of their families of origin?

RQ4: In what ways do the participants in interracial relationships borrow from or resist

their family identifies as they create the identity of their interracial relationship?

RQ5: If the family of origin rejects the relationship, in what ways, if any does the family

develops a support community to represent a sense of extended family?

For the first research question, I must assess the intolerant or tolerant reactions to the interracial relationship to understand the implications it holds for how the interracial voluntary family members initially reacted. Secondly, in order to have an understanding of how interracial couples create their own relational and family identity, I will ask one member of the interracial couple to supply descriptive narratives of how his or her own family identity affects the current relationship. Moving into the next research question, I wish to better understand how the interracial partners allow their own internalized family identities to contribute to the next generation's identity (that is, to their children). Finally, for the last question, I will inquire about the role of extended family in the interracial couple's network, and, in the absence of such family, what the partners have done to create a sense of community for their own family. Through these research questions, I may better understand the interworking of how interracial couples create a common cultural family identity that pays tribute to both to the family and cultural identities of both parents.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the scholarly literature on interracial relationships, the history of how such coupling was established, and attitudes towards this relationship type. I discussed family dynamics, more explicitly the finely woven framework shared by a group of intimates, and how such a framework will undoubtedly impact any future interpersonal connection an individual will possess. One such connection could potentially be an interracial relationship, specifically a marriage between two individuals of different races. The foundation of family and the woven framework as the partners see it will be factors in such a relationship. In order to obtain answers to the previously stated research questions, I employed a braided narrative style interview (Tracy, 2013). This was a suitable method for this study even though the topic area has the potential to be sensitive and requires participants to provide explanations and examples for the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the content at hand. A braided narrative style interview will benefit this study as I develop themes and categories from the written response that more accurately demonstrate the issues I have examined

Participants

The participants I gathered for this research study are spouses in interracial couples. Specifically, I searched for Black and White males or females who have united in marriage. Research suggests that such a relational and family dynamic has been neglected. We also do not know the family identity or narrative that partners in interracial marriages bring to form a new identity with their spouse. Sampling did not consider other demographic factors such as age (although participants had to be 18 years of age or older), or socio-economic status.

In order to recruit the participants, I utilized a snowball sampling. First, I sent out an email to friends and family with known connections to interracial couples, explaining my research interest (see APPENDIX A). This email requested them to forward my information to individuals who might wish to volunteer as participants in my study. Through this method, I hoped to reach a more diverse audience of interracial couples than I may have encountered within my own social network. Therefore, in addition to snowball sampling, my sampling method was designed to meet the sampling goal of maximum variation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). In an effort to avoid potential coercion and to address ethicality, I did not ask individuals I know personally to take part in my study.

I located ten participants for the study. Six White females, two Black males, and two Hispanic males constituted the racial diversity of the participants. Eight individuals have a bachelor's degree, two are currently working towards a master's degree, three have their master's degree, and one has a Ph.D. The participants range in age from early 20s to early 60s, providing perspectives from multiple generations.

Data Collection

I used braided narrative, open-ended, one-on-one interviews (Tracy, 2013). I specifically asked individuals to explain their family of origins' communication style growing up, the involvement of their parents' in their grandchildren's lives, what specific value, belief, or tradition they wanted to pass onto their children (elaborating on ones from their upbringing), and their attitudes towards how interracial couples are represented and viewed in our society.

Each participant chose the location of the interview, with most occurring in the person's home, public coffee shops, or the participant's office. Interviews ranged from 20 to 70 minutes in length. One interview had to occur over the phone due to scheduling issues between the participant and me.

Participants signed an informed consent form prior to the start of the interview (see APPENDIX A). This form provided the general topic of the study, the pledge of confidentiality, the potential risks involved with participating, and they completed a separate questionnaire regarding the demographics of themselves, their parents, and their partners (see APPENDIX B). This was done in order to provide a profile of each participant.

Once the forms were completed interviews, commenced in a partially structured format. Due to the possible sensitive nature of the topic of interracial families, the interview began with me describing the reason behind researching this topic, resulting in ideally establishing a sense of connection to the participant (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

I used an interview guide when speaking with each participant (see APPENDIX C). An interview guide allowed me the freedom to address comparable questions to each

participant, while still adjusting the order of the interview based on the discussion with

each individual (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I asked non-directive questions, which allowed

the participants to define their own experiences. The following Table provides an

overarching view of the participants and each individual's demographic.

Table 1

Participants Characteristics

Name	Sex	Age	Education	Race	Marriage	Children in the home
Roberto	Male	32	Some College	Mexican	7 years	Yes
Mary Catherine	Female	36	Masters	Caucasian	9 years	Yes
Shane	Male	37	Associates	Mexican	8 years	Yes
Ashley	Female	23	Masters	Caucasian	Engaged	No
Michelle	Female	31	Some Masters	Caucasian	7.5 years	Yes
Albert	Male	61	Ph. D	Black	27 years	No
Gary	Male	43	Masters	Black	9 years	Yes
Rhonda	Female	29	Some Masters	Caucasian	8 years	Yes
Emmory	Female	30	Masters	Caucasian	4 years	Yes
Morgan	Female	47	High School	Caucasian	10 years	Yes

The main questions in the interviews were as follows: First, I asked the participant

to recall situations related to what their family was like growing up, followed by, "As a

family, how did you communicate?" Responses to these questions were later coded into

forms of tolerance or intolerance. The third question addresses extended family and

grandparent's role in lives of their grandchildren. The responses provided by the

33

participants describe the type of role the grandparent plays. When the grandparents were uninvolved, a fourth question inquiring about what extended family the participant felt existed in their life. Creating a simple structure of what the participants' upbringing was like allowed me to build and introduce my participants to more sensitive questions. The perceived identity of the participants and their narrative was determined through eliciting remembered stories passed down from their parents or grandparents. These stories presented a window into the process of their continued family identity. Participants provided detailed explanations of the content of what their family narrative consists of or, if they had no children or only very young children, will consist of. The sixth question explored how the individuals' identity assisted in creating the marital identity, and what part or aspects of the identities of their families of origin were used.

Towards the end of the interview I asked the participants whether they would change any particular misrepresentations of interracial marriages, and if so, what it would be. Finally, I closed with a loose-end question (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), allowing the participants to comment on any material that was not covered.

Data Analysis

Each interview was audio-recorded and kept on my personal computer in password-locked files. I transcribed all of the interviews, and the transcriptions were a verbatim representation of the interviews. There were a total of 60pages of transcripts, single-spaced. Once the interviews were transcribed, I unitized them to develop themes and categories from the responses. Unitizing refers to the breaking down of the responses into basic ideas, which were "expected to emerge from the inquiry." Using the data I

collected, I strove to "uncover embedded information and make it explicit" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 203).

For categorization, I utilized domain analysis by describing the relationship between the categories of meaning. That is I sought "to define the set of Xs that are kinds of Y, parts of Y, causes of Y, effects of Y, reasons for doing Y, and so forth" (Baxter, 1991, P. 245). For example, I developed categories to determine kinds of tolerant or intolerant expression, kinds of grandparent involvement in the interracial family, and so on. Furthermore, I conducted a thematic analysis in order understand relationships between domains (Baxter, 1991).

The material provided by the participants generated themes of verbal tolerance and intolerance, cycles of family narratives, family communication strategies utilized by the interracial couple, and lastly the involvement of grandparents. The combination of these methods provided greater insight into family dynamics within interracial relationships.

Summary

In this chapter I reviewed the method that allowed me the best understanding of the construct of interracial family dynamics. This method assisted me in answering the research questions and allowed my participants to express their unique perspectives. In turn, I was able to analyze the data inductively, which allowed me to create a description of the unique family dynamics in conjunction with the participants' experiences.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

In the previous chapter, I reviewed my methodology, which elaborated on descriptions of the braided narrative open-ended interviews. In total, I gathered ten interviews, each lasting roughly 20-70 minutes in length. After transcribing and analyzing my data for themes and categories, I was able to arrange the responses for the following review of findings. In this chapter, I will analyze the findings from interracial couples and those family dynamics that exist within a family environment. The findings will be presented in the order of the above research questions. I will elaborate on the categories and themes that emerged in response to each question. I will begin with acts of tolerance and intolerance, followed by family narratives and identity cycles, then family communication styles, finally elaborating on the roles of grandparents.

Descriptions of Tolerance and Intolerance

The first research question explores the aspects of tolerant, support, or intolerant forms of communication interracially married couples experience when communicating with biological family members. While at times both intolerance and tolerance were experienced from within the same family, the majority of the findings indicate that biological family communication primarily falls into one of these two categories.

Tolerance

Tolerance emerged as a category related to RQ1; this category refers to explicit comments family members gave to indicate approval of the relationship. The dominant

theme of acceptance and positivity refers to forms of communication directed toward

partners in an interracial marriage by the families of origin that communicated approval

of the union. One White female participant, Emmory,[1] recalled her parents' positivity to

her marriage:

> They never set boundaries, and I think it goes back to our upbringing—my older
>
> sister Ashley is married to an African American/Hispanic man. And then my
>
> older brother is married to a woman who is Korean, Indian, and African
>
> American, so we come from a very cultured family.

The past family acceptance allowed the participant to grow up knowing that race was not

an obstacle for her in her search for a suitable mate. Additionally, one Black male,

Albert, remembered his parents' reaction: "From my parents' point of view, there was no

anxiety about marrying outside of the race, never, not an issue; so it was extremely

positive." In relation to positivity, a White female participant, Morgan, experienced

acceptance of her marriage from her in-laws, but not from her family of origin. She

recounts, "My husband's side was very accepting of me. My in-laws are…the greatest

people." In contrast, when speaking about her own family, Morgan says, "I don't hear

from [them] anymore." Eventually, with the birth of their first child, her parents came to

embrace the marriage. In each situation, the families' communication of their sentiments

regarding ethnic diversity prior to the child finding an interracial partner allowed the

marriage partners to perceive the family of origin as supportive of the relationship.

Conversations throughout childhood engrained a sense of acceptance of all, allowing for

the individuals to feel free to explore an interracial relationship.

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[1] All names of participants are pseudonyms.

Intolerance

However, not all communication was positive. Partners sometimes experienced intolerance. Intolerance is defined as any communication that participants perceive to be derogatory or insulting. Two themes involving a *Questioning* and *Rejection* emerged throughout this category. The first theme of a *Questioning* emerges primarily through words and phrases that question the relationship decision and question the individual's ability to make the *right choice*. One White female participant, Mary Catherine, recounted a conversation she experienced with her single mother:

> It was absolutely implied that this is not going to go down, like, "This is not the way it was ever imagined for you—this is not what I ever thought you would end up doing." She would say, "Are you really serious? He has two kids, you are 23 years old—are you making the right decision?" The fact that I was dating this Black man wasn't great. I mean she wasn't thrilled, or like, "Oh good let's meet him."

While the emotional pain from these types of questioning comments in not as apparent as rejection, they do establish a sense of distrust between the parent and child. The parent is expressing concern that the child has not considered every possible ramification of entering into an interracial union. This woman was not the only one to experience her family of origin questioning her decision. One African American male, Gary, restated the comments directed to him from his mother and extended family: "My mom had an issue with it; I remember my aunt asking me—her thing was, 'Don't you like Black women? Why didn't you date Black women?' My mother was the same way." The underlying

tone expressed from Gary's mother and aunt reflects an attitude of "what is wrong with our race?" They are implying that he should marry someone of his own race.

In this example, the White female participant, Ashley, remembers her parents and soon-to-be in-laws both expressing questioning tones to her and her fiancé. She said, "My parents, and even his parents were like, 'Do you know that you will have 'mixed-raced' kids? Have you thought about how that will make them feel?'" Her family, and soon-to-be relatives, were fixated on the idea of mixed kids. They continued to ask her questions, such as, "Have you thought about what people will say about you having mixed kids or what they will experience?" It is apparent that the parents are impressing upon the couple the sense that they are different and that this will make it harder on any future children, in an attempt to instill a sense of uncertainty. Another White female participant, Rhonda, described her extended family's reaction: "My grandparents and cousins, they were raised in the south, in a very small town. It was more extended family where I felt more racial tension, especially my grandparents." Here, Rhonda highlights that the era an individual was raised in can influence perceptions of an interracial relationship.

The second theme of *Rejection* refers to the ultimate form of non-acceptance, where there is little to no contact with the couple. There is little to no contact between the family of origin and the partners. Morgan (White female) mentions that her extended family rejected her relationship. She recalls that "there were a few that didn't appreciate it, and that I don't hear from anymore." In expressing this rejection, some family members in Morgan's family disowned her as a member. Mary Catherine, who experienced questioning from her mother, also experienced outright rejection from her father. She elaborated by recounting the situation:

To my dad I sent a letter saying "I haven't explained it to you, because I knew that it was going to be an issue, this is happening, this is not my issue this is yours, so find your way to deal, and let me know when you are ready to deal." So after I sent the letter, there was absolutely no communication for at least three years. I mean, he didn't come to my wedding; my brother gave me away.

This shows that two individuals from the same household can interpret a relationship in different ways, resulting in Mary Catherine managing the middle ground between her two parents. In the next example, Albert shared the response received from outside sources that was non-accepting: "There have been a few people along the way who didn't approve, and they drifted out of our lives. Some of my wife's high school female friends were not happy about it, and they drifted away." These quotations illustrate the notion that individuals with family-like status can exhibit mindsets of intolerance and inflict emotional pain on the receiver. This category and these themes naturally developed from the participants providing unbalanced results with negative comments evident in more of the interviews than positive comments. The themes highlight that, even though our society attempts to perpetuate the belief that as a country we are beyond race, couples in interracial marriages still seem to be stigmatized by their families and the surrounding culture.

Family Dynamics

The creation of a family environment is exceedingly complex and dynamic. Throughout the interviews the participants noted that it is crucial to establish a foundation for a peaceful and cooperative atmosphere. Each research question revealed categories and common themes among the participants and will be discussed below. Specifically,

this section will detail the way family narratives and identities are continued or

abandoned and the evolution of new stories.

Family Narrative and Identity Cycle

Research questions 2 and 4 addressed the contribution of previous family

narratives and identities to the newly forming marital relationship of the interracial

couple. Additionally, the questions inquire about the ways interracial couples borrow or

resist the identity of their family of origin while creating their own identity. As the

findings for these two questions turned out to overlap in more than one area, they will be

treated as one here.

Participant responses to the interview questions revealed that positive and

negative perceptions would lead to the abandonment or perpetuation of family cycles. If

the couple maintains aspects of their family of origin's narrative or identity, this reflects a

positive perception of that identity and the desire to replicate it. Conversely, if the

narrative or identity is not replicated, this suggests a negative perception or belief that the

practice does not fit the narrative or identity of the new relationship.

Family Practices

The category **Family Cycle** focuses on those elements in families, such as

narratives and identities that create a sense of familial inheritance. The continuation of

stories, traditions, and practices from generation to generation exemplifies inheritance.

Continued Cycles, *Abandoned Cycles*, and *New Cycles* emerged as the main themes for

this category.

The theme of *Continued Cycles* contains elements that participants gladly sought

to inherit from their childhood and pass on to their children in an effort to reproduce

perceived positive aspects of life. Mary Catherine recalls how her identity was shaped by what she inherited from her mother:

> She raised me to be that strong, independent, outgoing, woman with strong self-conviction, I mean we were taught that you know within you what is good and right, and you just do it. And thankfully that has been passed, that is a common thread with my husband and I; I mean you see it in the 7-year old already.

Emmory recounts the notion that her parents wanted her to be "well rounded—they wanted their kids to be morally, ethically sound, learn how to interact with people, I remember my mom talking to everyone and anyone, and I feel like I'm almost like that now, too." She went on to mention that even at her daughter's young age she has been able to pass that on to her: "She's only two-and-a-half, but she is very friendly, she talks to anyone, likes to interact with people," proving that what her parents instilled in her is making a lasting impact in her daughter's life as well. Emmory elaborates on the last continued cycle that she plans on instilling in her children, stating "I want my kids to be open to many different types of people, from many different backgrounds. I want them to be open to be used to that, that they won't know any other way." She earnestly seeks to maintain that open mind concept and, of being tolerant and non-judgmental towards anyone. Albert described the one element his parents passed on to him:

> So what we did pass on to our children was a love of learning, an expectation that they would be well-educated and would be good students. The expectation that they would be college-educated and would go on to have professional careers.

Albert elaborated regarding his daughters, "They met our expectations in a big way," bringing to light that he and his wife continue the family practice of earning a higher

education. Rhonda recounted that the one thing she would continue with her children would be "to tolerate everyone. That sense of openness, how I felt, that open mindset that I had growing up. My husband and I do communicate that better than my parents did." This simple, yet meaningful narrative, presents the notion that significant elements in life are found in the message, not the delivery. A Latino male, Roberto, describes the aspect of a cultural identity being passed on as follows:

> Coming from a Mexican culture we are big on traditions. For us, Christmas was not about Santa Claus; it was not about getting toys and stuff for the children. It was more about spending time together with family, because we didn't know if we were going to have each other for the next one. They have experienced Christmas there, and I wish that is one of them that I would like to keep.

Roberto mentioned that he has been able to expose his daughters to one element of his cultural identity; however, he also stated that he did not know whether or not the tradition will survive in an America.

The second theme of *Abandoned Cycles* refers to family elements that the participant in the interracial relationship initially shared, but they eventually stopped subscribing to the practice or belief. Whether the element was originally viewed as normal or typical, in time the cycle did not fit into the new family dynamic, causing the participant(s) in the interracial relationship to resist and to break the cycle. For example, while Mary Catherine willingly passed on a cycle, she also explains that there was one element she chose to break after attempting to continue it. She recounts that:

> To my mother, everything was the kids. That was instilled in me because that was all I saw, was my mother came home from work, and her whole life was us. "I

had these kids, this is my responsibility, and I don't do anything else." I started

that cycle, but it has been hard to break—that cycle to see that, oh, we can have

other things in life. We can still have our lives and go out and do things.

She resisted the cycle of limiting her identity to that of a parent, and sees that she does,

indeed, have a life beyond that of her children. Michelle provides another example of a

broken cycle:

I have tried a lot over the last couple of years to get away from expectations,

because I saw myself starting to repeat that cycle of that—of my mom's side of

the family, their expectations. They all have higher education, they are all very

accomplished, and they are business professionals with very strong careers. I

thought I had to follow in that footstep for a long time, and then I started to expect

things from my girls too, and I saw that kind of repeating itself. So, I have tried to

be very cognizant of trying to not repeat that, to catch myself.

Both Mary Catherine and Michelle highlight the notion that breaking a cycle also brings

a sense of shame that they have essentially showed their parents that the method used in

their upbringing was not the best it could be.

In addition to breaking a parental technique, Ashley relates her desire to establish

free religious choice, for she wants to resist the nature of forcing a specific belief onto her

future children. She restated that, "for both of us, faith is very important"; however, she

wants to resist the element "where it was forced, I just felt so, overwhelmed by it."

Ashley added, "I feel that kids need to make their own decision. For my kids I want them

go to church out of their love for Jesus. I don't want it to be something that is forced."

This experience shows that a shared belief is still part of the her relational identity with

her fiancé; however, the original element of going to church with her parents, which is normal to her, will not be continued as a forced family cycle with Ashley's children. A Latino male participant, Shane, reported that his family cycle centered on "prejudice towards African Americans. You can hang around them, and joke with them, but you're not allowed in the family." In breaking this cycle of prejudice in his newly formed interracial family, which consists of three adopted biracial children that are African American and White, his concern is to pass on to his children that, "no matter what happens, no matter what you do, no matter who you marry, or what aspect of religion, hopefully we have put you in the right direction, that we are still going to love you." Lastly, Shane shared one more story:

> Something for them not to experience would be the family issues that I grew up with, inside the family, where there is turmoil and bullying and using family members against one another. We want them to know, to instill that in our kids, to not look at color we have to look at their inside.

Shane's personal narrative provides an example of a painful past. Due to his experiences, Shane aspires to foster a feeling of family trust within his children, an element in his upbringing that was strongly lacking. Through his guidance Shane hopes his children will never experience the distrust of their family members that he was forced to face.

The third theme of *New Cycles* pertains to new familial elements that the interracial couples have begun to instill or wish to instill in their children. These new aspects are born out of perceived inconsistencies in how the participants were raised. Furthermore, the couples believed these new elements would build a more balanced family foundation for their children. The concepts of *openness* and *unity* make one

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subtheme, which references the communication styles and perspectives of the couple, emerged through the interviews. Ashley expands on the openness she plans on instilling in her children as a new cycle, explaining:

> I want to take my kids to places, to visit, and to experience these cultures, and to become culturally competent, and learn to love all people, they should need to be more open-minded, and to see the beauty of every culture, and it's not like you need to stick within your own culture. I think that there is so much to learn, and to embrace from other cultures.

Ashley's stated desire for her children reflects much of the previously mentioned openness and being culturally competent in the society in which we live. She is determined to instill in her future children a more ethnically tolerant mindset, and hopefully a less biased perspective. Mary Catherine joins the other women in her statement that:

> I would say more openness, more than what I had growing up, that openness in communication. I wish I had had discussions about race growing up, I would hope it is a little more with us and our family. It's not just racial issues. I would say more openness, that whatever you are choosing, for you and your life, if this is what you want, then we are 100% fully behind you, just that openness in communication.

Mary Catherine adds the additional element of having open communication with her children, not only about racial issues in our society, but also for her children to know that she believes open communication among family members is the best. Additionally, Morgan proclaims what her new family cycle centers on:

The most important is not to judge other people, to be open to what their

background is, or their ethnicity, or their religious background, and we have tried

to instill that in them, to not judge other people to be open and accepting.

Morgan's new family narrative emphasizes the same aspect that other participants are

longing to establish in their children: openness. Rhonda does claim that she wants her

children to "have the openness to come and talk to us about things—to be open and to see

other people as people, no different than them." However, additionally she explains that

she is nervous about what open communication will involve with her children. She

expounds on this by stating:

I do wonder as they get older what questions they will have, because there are

racial differences that you can't deny, and I do want to be talk to them. If they

have questions. I want them to know that they are loved.

Rhonda provides an interesting insight into parenthood. She wants to create a sense of

openness with her children in terms of contact and point of view; however, there is the

underlying concern that the ability to extend this narrative may be more difficult in the

end than she anticipates.

The male participants spoke of family unity in different ways from the females.

Their responses provide unique insights into how they see the impact they have on their

family legacy. Describing the communication between his children, Gary strongly stated,

"I would like more of a sense of togetherness, I think the four of them when they are

around are fairly close, and that they keep that closeness, and to keep the family

closeness going on." He revealed this story because, in his upbringing, his parents were

working multiple jobs to provide economic stability for him and his sister, but Gary

realizes that, for his family, he wants something different. Roberto brought to light his view on the importance of "family itself, to grow up in a family where we are very united." His desire aligns well with what other participants stated. Additionally, Roberto describes how, with his family of origin being in a different country, he is determined to make sure his created family stays unified. This is an element in his upbringing that was very important to him, and under his guidance he hopes they will experience this.

Communication Styles

Research Question 3 treated how participants in interracial relationships see their family of origin's identity through communication style. As part of interview questions, each participant was asked to elaborate on his or her family communication style. As noted in the review of literature by Root (2001), the category of *Communication Style* has four themes, *Open*, *Pseudo-Open*, *Closed*, and *Pseudo-Closed*. By describing the communication styles, Root (2001) explains how communication and acceptance of the interracial partner illustrated by the family are interrelated, and they work also to characterize general communication patterns. The participants used multiple comments to create and to piece together a unique description of how their families communicated.

The *Open* family views family communication as a two-way street, with children growing up into independent individuals capable of making decisions that have the potential of going against what their parents believe or see as important (Root, 2001, p. 94). Emmory recalls her family environment as "very laid back, open. They weren't really strict. We all really had open communication you know. It was a nice growing up." She emphasizes the open communication as being relaxed in nature, reiterating her previously mentioned parents' idea of being a well-rounded individual, and stressing the

need not to conform to society. Mary Catherine states as well, "My mother and I were very open; the typical single mom working two jobs. As we got older and this topic of boys and marriage happened, the communication was very open." Mary Catherine elaborates the concept of two-way communication by providing examples to demonstrate that not one area was off limits. Ashley describes her family communication as open as well, with an additional element: "It was open, try not to be easily angered, be kind to each other. My parents, were definitely the parent, they didn't let us just do whatever we wanted." Here, Ashley hints at a component of authority, as she describes her family as open but with respected limits. Albert's description is reflective of Ashley's statement. He speaks of "family communication as nothing unusual, it was very open. The only thing that would be a little different is that their code of conduct for their kids was very restrictive." This statement highlights a similar view of authority, though there is a sense of more permanent limits to what constitutes acceptable codes of conduct. Michelle elaborates from her upbringing that, "I am very close to my parents; we were always very open, kind of direct about things. They always included me in conversation until the point where they would have to tell me to not respond." These narrative descriptions are parallel to Root's illustration of parents eventually having the viewpoint that their children grow up to be adults.

The second theme, *Pseudo-Open*, refers to families where the parents provide sets of guidelines and consider themselves free of racial prejudices. The family environment appears open, but upon closer examination there are underlying tones that make it closed (Root, 2001, p. 94). Rhonda shares that "the communication wasn't always open. My parents wanted me to feel like it was open, and to come and talk to them, I think my mom

wanted that but I don't think it was comfortable talking to them about it." A family environment is not always so definable, and Rhonda expresses that what her parents thought they were showing her and how they actually communicated was different. Therefore, Rhonda has made it part of her new family narrative to attempt to be more open in communicating to her children about the daily struggles of life, and eventually the serious aspects that accompany maturity.

The third theme of *Closed* reflects families that make distinctions concerning who is acceptable and who is not apparent from very early on in childhood. The parents have strict rules and guidelines that have their family as the in-group and people of different ethnic backgrounds as the out-group. This rigidity stems from their uncontested prejudices and/or their unrealistic expectations of their children's potential partners and lifestyle choices. To a closed family, interracial dating is explicitly forbidden, and they do their best to pass on this line of thinking (Root, 2001, p. 95) Based on Morgan's explanation about her family communication style regarding other races, it is a closed communication style. She states:

> I grew up thinking I could talk to my parents about pretty much anything, although they did have strong values and beliefs. I have to say both of my parents were brought up to be prejudiced people and they passed that on to me, but I made up my own mind not to be. In fact it was obviously that a White person should not have a relationship with a Black person. That was how I was brought up.

Closed narratives are rigid. Shane confirmed that, "if we didn't do something right, we got beat. It's my way or the highway type of thing. We didn't have any say in it. You just

did what you were told; if you didn't you got in trouble." He highlights how his family's closed communication had an underlying component of fear to instill correct behavior in their children. Roberto's statement is similar in nature: "We did what we were told. My mother wasn't very good at communicating. So it was very—if you learned about something, you did and there was no further explanation." Roberto elaborates that overall communication was simply limited to a need-to-know basis, and any knowledge beyond that had to be self-informed. Lastly, Gary recounts his family communication as well: "What they said went. Particularly my mother; it was her way or the highway. There was never really any open communication. We didn't really discuss anything." His story accentuates the limits that closed communication carries, especially the boundaries created by the parents between them and their children. These stories show that closed communication can possibly have lasting effects on the children.

The fourth theme, *Pseudo-Closed*, has the appearance of the closed family previously described; however, once the parents learn that their son or daughter might enter into an interracial marriage anyway, despite their objections, they fear losing their child and begin to attempt to open up more (Root, 2001, p. 95). Describing her parents, who at first disapproved of her relationship, Morgan elaborates:

> What changed their mind was the birth of my first son, because that was their first grandchild, so they had to change their view or they weren't going to see their grandchildren, and I think they realized that that was how it was.

Her statements reflected the definition of a pseudo-closed family. She illustrates that it is possible for parents to change their communication patterns, to allow for situations in life to bring a different frame of mind.

Grandparent Roles

RQ5 examines the role of extended family in the marriage, or whether a community has been created to represent a sense of extended family. Harwood (2007) defines *Grandparent Roles* as essential to a child's transition into adulthood. The interviews revealed the themes of *Involved* and *Not Involved*.

The first theme *Involved* is composed of grandparents having an active role in their grandchild's life. When asked whether her grandparents were involved in her life or not, Rhonda enthusiastically declares, "Oh yeah, definitely yes. And my parents are completely devoted to their grandchildren. I never thought that my family would treat them any different because of their race." She frames the idea that being a grandparent is not limited to only those grandchildren who share the grandchildren's race, but rather being a grandparent has the potential to include any ethnic background Michelle shares in Mary Catherine's sentiment as well by stating, "We just had dinner with them, we have family dinners once a week." Michelle fully explains the concept of very actively involved grandparents as those who consistently have input into their children lives. Emmory concurs, mentioning that her parents are "very active with all of the grandkids. I have two kids and they watch them a couple times a week. Both my parents are retired. So they are very involved in their grandkids' lives." Having active grandparents, according to Emmory, is expressed through them spending one-on-one time with the grandchildren. In addition, even though Albert's parents are deceased, he states that, "they were very, very active with their grandkids. They were very excited about them, and were definitely a huge part of their grandkids' lives." Albert's ability to recall his parent's involvement with his children even though they are no longer living contests to just how active they were in their grandchildren's lives. Gary's situation has an additional

element—his parents are divorced—but in regards to his mother's involvement, he states, "My mom is very involved, she is very active, wanting to be around for the kids, talking to them." In his position, Gary may only have his mother to associate with the role of grandparent; however, she is actively pursuing the need to impact their lives.

The next two narratives share the common thread of initially dealing with opposition from one or both parents, only to have that opposition change upon the arrival of grandchildren. This grandparent role does have the sense of a pseudo-closed mindset mentioned above. Morgan recalls the past and present by stating, "They are active now once they changed their view on my marriage." Morgan's association with grandparent involvement is first and foremost linked to their acceptance of her children, before they became fully involved grandparents. Mary Catherine recalls a related experience with her father: "He is now involved—he comes over every morning and puts Justin on the bus for me, and he comes over single afternoon and gets Justin off the bus for me." Previously, Mary Catherine had expressed her father's intolerance of her marriage; now his role as a grandfather is fully active, and he is willing to be a constant figure in her children's lives after not being involved for three years. In regards to her mother, Mary Catherine had a quick response: "She instantly went into grandma role. She loved Miles, she took care of him and helped us whenever. Only family has kept the boys." Mary Catherine's children have never been a part of day care; rather, family has watched them. Her statement demonstrates that parental views can vary greatly depending on the individual.

Respondents replied quickly and shortly if the role of grandparents fell into the second theme of *Not Involved*. Gary expresses, "My father isn't involved. He is completely standoffish to the point where he doesn't know the kids' names." The refusal

of Gary's father even to know the names of his grandchildren expresses not only a desire to remain uninvolved in their lives, but also rejection of the family unit as a whole. Lastly, Roberto quietly speaks of his mother and explains that "she's really not [involved]. I'm not going to lie. It has been a challenge." The role of a grandparent is essentially a quiet validation by one's parents that their grandchildren carry importance and are of value to them. Choosing to remain detached reflects a parent's dismissal to what the children have established and call their family.

The second part of research question 5, refers to the aspect of developing a sense of community if extended family is not involved in the grandchildren's lives. The participants, in fact, did not share that this was the case. The participants equate community more to the area in which one lives and not to individuals who are not part of one's' family.

Messages and Recommendations to the Public

Upon complication of the planned interview questions, the participants were provided the opportunity to expound upon additional thoughts they found to be important. The participants explain that they would change misrepresentations of interracial families that they feel to be held by society. Albert elaborates on what he would change:

I would change the reluctance of the majority of the population to be comfortable around you. So, I wish the comfort level was just natural, and I don't think it is. Some people just see us as a couple that is just different, and so they don't engage with you in the way they do other people.

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He details the simplicity behind small acts and gestures that could create openness to interracial couples in social settings. Mary Catherine and Morgan expand on this idea of society's lack of being receptive to interracial couples. Morgan reports that "our children are aware of it. We don't protect them, but we do explain to them that there are people out there that feel that way, and to prepare them for it." She has made sure to have open communication with her children about this issue of race and how people will have different reactions to it. Mary Catherine provides a more detailed response:

> We have heard every comment, "What's he doing with that White woman?" The looks, just the constant looks, I mean we have seen it all, and heard it all. I think our area is very much Black and White, down to areas, down to neighborhoods, down to subdivisions, clubs, bars; there is not one that is just both. So where are we going tonight, the Black bar or the White bar? It's just very, very segregated.

She elaborated that at times in recent years individuals felt the need to give side comments regarding her marriage, which center on outdated points of view. Mary Catherine also reveals that public outings require deciding on what issue they want to deal with on a given night, such as which bar to attend or restaurant to go to—in terms of response to their relationship from the Black or the White community.

In having dealt with these whispers of opposition from society, these participants are taking it upon themselves to create a movement. The participants desire their children to grow up with a sense of racial and cultural competence. These individuals are aware that their children might deal with the same issues as they have, or even different ones, because of being biracial. These individuals, though still small in number when compared to same-race couples, are trying their hardest to show the world that interracial couples

are no different from same-race couples. The participants are hopeful that the outlook they are attempting to instill in their children will spread to others and continue for generations.

Highlighting the mindset that interracial marriages are no different from any other marriage, Rhonda mentions, "We are in a small group with a few other couples, and from time to time we have discussed marital issues we are all facing, and we have the exact same issues that the White couple has." Rhonda is trying to illustrate that the color of a person's skin does not affect the kinds of arguments or issues that a couple will face. Rhonda reacts to the question regarding her feelings individuals who perceive interracial marriages to be different from same race marriages by stating, "To me that just seems so uneducated to say that. It sounds like that is a judgment made by someone who has never experienced or dated someone of a different race." The continued notion that interracial marriages are different seems to stem from a lack of education regarding daily transaction in those marriages.

Summary

In sum, each research question provides insight into familial communication. The respondents reflected on personal elements of intolerance and tolerance expressed by family members, bringing to life the continued or abandoned family narratives and identities, they remember and recall situations from childhood to adulthood which create uniquely accurate descriptions of communication styles, and lastly these participants express the ultimate measure of significance by sharing whether or not their parents are a part of the lives of their grandchildren. The participants' answers revealed a unique family dynamic, which demonstrates the sheer complexity of family environments. The

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following discussion establishes the interplay between these categories, providing

practical applications to the data and directions for future research.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The previous chapter presented the categorized and thematized information provided by the respondents. This chapter summarizes and discusses those findings while presenting implications of the results. The chapter will conclude by addressing the limitations of the present study and offering suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings

The goal of this study was to address the lack of investigation into interracial family communication; this research provides a new perspective on interethnic coupling. Individuals need to see that America's demographic landscape is changing. America has changed over the past 10 to 20 years. The diversity of our nation is growing and expanding. A recent article highlights the growing trend in our country that, in another 45 years, White Americans will be the minority in America (Funderburg, 2013). Interracial marriages in the United States are on the rise: More and more couples are breaking traditional mindsets by embracing interracial relationships (Jayson, 2012). These individuals are choosing to break the mindset that the only culturally acceptable marriage is to marry someone of the same race.

Throughout this investigation the data revealed unexpected themes that enriched the findings beyond what was initially anticipated.

Tolerance and Intolerance

RQ1 explores the tolerant and intolerant attitudes associated with interracial marriages. Previous research by Lampe (1981) and Moran (2001) shows how, as a result of deeply rooted traditions and myths, marrying across the color line is a recent phenomenon in the US. Furthermore, Vernon and Buffler (1988) conclude that Americans are uncertain of what they have not experienced and are reluctant to be in situations that are unknown to them. Attitudes towards interracial marriage, whether positive or negative, are often experienced through interaction with families and in-laws of the partner and are reflected clearly in participant responses.

As noted above, Mary Catherine's mother, Ashley's parents, and Gary's parents gave remarks that made it evident that an attitude of certainty is still present. In contrast Mary Catherine's incident with her father and Morgan's experience with her parents' highlight that family rejection is still possible. What is newly apparent is that some family members, after a few years, realized that their harsh assessment and stereotypical judgment of the marriage was wrongly issued. The change in these family members illustrates that people can change over the course of time.

This current gradual shift towards reluctance and questioning and away from possible rejection does hint that society may be becoming more racially tolerant. It seems that even older generations are beginning to welcome individuals marrying across the color line. This trend is further established when parents from the previous chapter had no problems with the relationship and even encouraged it.

Communication Styles

RQ3 seeks to uncover the way in which partners in interracial relationships define their family of origins' communication pattern. In the review of literature, we saw Root's

(2001) four main communication styles *Open, Pseudo-Open, Closed,* and *Pseudo-Closed.*

At the beginning of the interview, the participants completed a demographic

questionnaire, selecting a form of communication style that they believe to best represent

their family of origins communication habits. However, during the interview, the way in

which the participants described their family of origins' communication pattern

sometimes differed from that which they had initially reported. This accentuates the

complexity surrounding the way in which communication patterns can be defined.

Furthermore, this phenomenon manifests in six of the ten interviews, in which the

participants selected the *Open* group, when their definitions allude to something else. The

additional data signify that communication styles notably overlap, and are not exact.

Therefore, in the future it will be interesting to note whether communication approaches

to children's interracial partners continue overlapping or revert back to more definable

group as Root (2001) provided years ago.

The purpose of RQ5 was to uncover whether or not a sense of community was

established if extended family was not involved. Essentially, past research states that

interracial couples surround themselves in a cocoon of stability in order to manage and

thrive in the day-to-day culture that views interracial marriage with a high level of

uncertainty. The couples' tendency to actively seek out those supportive social

engagements is a tactic used in order to live an ordinary life (Zebroski, 1999). Couples

have actively researched residential neighborhoods for their diversity percentage, in

hopes of finding a more balanced ratio of races, or at the very least to make sure the area

was liberal and pro-diversity (Steinbugler, 2012). My findings framed community as

neither a neighborhood nor section of a city, but rather as the town a person calls home.

This possible redefinition of community allows for the need to explore what community means to people, and whether it is possible to establish a smaller community within a larger community. It was surprising that partners whose parents were not involved did not talk more about church communities or groups of close friends that took over the roles left unfulfilled by uninvolved grandparents. The previous research posits that community is a selected area, such as a neighborhood, while new research suggests that a community is larger than that. Mary Catherine and Albert mention that the west coast, San Francisco, and Los Angeles are more accepting of interracial couples. They believe that an interethnic couple can walk down the street in these places and not receive one stare. This gives the possibility of migration of interracial couples to the west coast, where they can raise their kids in an environment or community where they will be accepted.

Based on these findings future research could focus on how communities communicate openness towards interracial couples. Additionally, scholarship can focus on how interracial partners become aware of welcoming communities that approve of their lifestyle. The findings illustrate that people possess the ability to change. In light of race tensions having been an issue for centuries, it is reassuring to know that some mindsets can morph over time. These people demonstrate that racial attitudes in society are not as rigid as once believed. The ability to change one's mindset is not a sign of weakness, but allows for the possibility to benefit from change.

The grandparent role holds the same sentiment as Rhonda's comment of "we are no different than any other couple." The "poor etiquette" category can apply to the grandparent role because of the scrutiny created by society when one is accompanied by an individual who does not resemble the person he or she is with. The grandparent

possesses the authority to decide the role he or she will play in the lives of the grandchildren. Mary Catherine explains the changing role of her father in the lives of his grandchildren, how he evolves from being uninvolved to fully involved. However, she highlights that it was his decision, it was not one she or anyone else could make for him or something anyone could force him to make. Furthermore, Morgan alludes to her parents' role as grandparents, as altering to accept her relationship first, in order to be involved in their grandchildren's lives. These illustrations show that for the grandparent role to be in place, the choice is once again, placed on the grandparent, as with any relationship, to decide his or her role.

While once interracial marriages were viewed as taboo, the respondents have hinted that those strong attitudes of racism are not as apparent as they were in the past. Additionally, they mention that the category of "poor etiquette" placed around interracial relationships has been replaced with this quiet underlying stigmatized racism that is linked with the looks of disapproval. RQ4, the New Cycles highlighted in the findings portion, identified the important of instilling a sense of openness in their children, a manner of being culturally competent, and accepting of any race. The participants know that some people still view interracial relationships negatively. Their desire to instill acceptance in their children goes hand in hand with the lack of acceptance associated with interracial relationships.

This taboo suggests that interracial relationships are different than same race couples when, in reality, as Rhonda mentions, these relationships are not different. The participants are part of a relationship that, as any other relationship, requires work, communication, and dedication to be successful.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

Strengths

This study has a few strengths. The first strength centers on the range of ages of the participants in the study. These participants vary in age from early 20s to early 60s, allowing for a variety of experiences that have crossed more than one decade. This variety provides a richer context for the data than if the participants had only been from one age group or generation. A view of the world from different vantage points that allows for well-rounded findings.

The rapport I established with the participants is the second strength. Lincoln and Guba (1985) mention that rapport between the investigator and a participant is an essential component to qualitative research. I was able to establish a personal rapport with each participant, allowing me the privilege of hearing his or her personal perspectives. These essentially provide richer data.

Limitations

While the study presented a number of strengths, a few limitations affect the findings. The first limitation is the sample size. I was only able to locate and contact ten participants who qualified for the study. Living in a small Midwestern town limited the number of participants to a narrow selection of individuals that lived in a specific region. A wider range of geographical locations would have provided differences in education and perspectives, allowing for richer data, perhaps with more diversity of categories and themes.

The four male participants were the individuals of color, and the six female participants were White. I initially sought to have only Black and White relationships, but

I did have two couples that were Hispanic and White. The study was centered on Black and White relationships; however, due to the limited number of couples who qualified, I chose to include all marriages that were interracial or interethnic. Ideally I would have liked to have found at least one couple where the female was the person of color. Since men and women experience situations differently, having a female of color's perspective may have provided another new insights for the research. Because of the lack of diversity in the ethnicity of the sexes, thematic development was narrow in regards to the items being discussed.

The educational level of the participants also limits the results. The majority of the participants had achieved at least a bachelor's degree and most had earned a master's degree. The lack of academic variety reflects Davis and Smith's (1988) notion that education is an indicator of the acceptance level for interracial relationships.

The last limitation revolves around RQ2 and RQ4, regarding the provided narratives from the participants. Narratives are very important as we understand our history through the narratives told to us, and come to appreciate their meaning though those that recount them to us (Kimball et al., 2013; Semerikova, 2013)., Receiving the questions prior to the interview, the participants were able to structure the narratives given. This may have helped their recall of different stories; but allowing the participants time to formulate their answer also meant that the participants may have revealed only the family elements they felt comfortable telling. Further, due to the study focusing on communication regarding interracial relationships, participants' responses focused their narratives on race and rarely anything else. There was discussion of some other family narratives, such as regarding religious choice or games in family relationships, but such

discussion was rare. This shows how responses can become too narrowly focused when a study is centered on a specific theme.

These limitations did establish a boundary on the claims that the study can make most because a less diverse sample may not provide the full range of responses, leading to deeper theoretical development among themes, that a more diverse sample might (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, I was still able to create a solid framework to describe family communication in interracial families The participants provided great data that supply enough substance to inform us how interracial families construct their lives.

Future Research

Future research could focus on in-depth discussions with the children of interracial relationships; gaining their perspective on family communication could reveal their unique take on family elements. They could have had to overcome situations or issues that their parents may not be aware of, which would provide a window into how biracial children are viewed. Focus groups might be used with Whites and Blacks separately and together, to see if comments between participants lead to more development of themes. Additionally, the parents of the couple could have initially expressed acceptance and positivity; however, behind closed doors they could have expressed to one another a different attitude. Essentially, research should try to determine whether parents' initial thoughts have changed over time. This information would provide another standpoint on how interracial relationships are viewed.

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Conclusion

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The way in which families are perceived today is changing. Family identity is not only Black and White, it is biracial and intercultural. It is difficult for some to admit that

there are perspectives strongly rooted in our society that have not gone away. While the outcome of my study may not change the mindsets of Americans, it at least spotlights those individuals who are actively working to alter misconceptions. In regards to the future of interracial relationships, the findings are definitely promising. Where we continue to go from here, I do not know, but a new path has been forged, and is it certainly hopeful.

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APPENDIX A

EMAIL MESSAGE/INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Baldwin in the School of Communication at Illinois State University. I am conducting a research study to understand the family dynamics within interracial couples. I am requesting your participation, which will involve 10 to 20 minutes of your time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, and it will not affect you in anyway. Your responses are confidential, and any information that might allow someone to identify you will not be disclosed. To participate, you must be at least 18 years of age.
There will be minimal risks involved with the participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. You may fear a loss of confidentiality due to the face-to-face interview process, but only the interviewer will know your identity. Also, you may feel discomfort discussing family background and structure and responses to your relationship. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, a possible benefit of you participation is furthering the development of interpersonal and family communication styles.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me at lmmarti@ilstu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Research Ethics & Compliance Office at Illinois State University at (309) 438-2529.

Regards,
Lisa Martin

_____
Please Print Name

_____
Please Sign Name   Date

Please sign here if you agree to have your interview audio-recorded:

 _____

Please mail a scanned, signed copy of this consent to Lisa Martin (lmmarti@ilstu.edu), along with the closed-ended demographic questionnaire prior to the date of your interview.

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you identify as male or female?
   ___Male
   ___Female
   ___Prefer not to disclose
2. Please indicate your age ____
3. Please indicate the racial identity(s) with which you identify.

   _____
4. Please indicate the racial identity(s) with which your spouse identifies with.

   _____
5. Please indicate the highest level of education you have achieved.

   _____

6. Is this your first marriage?
   Yes___   No____
7. The duration of your marriage:

   _____
8. Are there children in the home?
   Yes _____   No _____

Family Communication
There are a variety of ways that families communicate. While your family might use more than one of these patterns, please indicate the one that **BEST** describes your family of origin.

   A. The family views communication as a two-way street, with children growing up into independent individuals capable of making decisions that have the potential of going against what their parents believe or see as important. Family members respect an individual's decisions, showing respect by expressing that he or she has their own set of differences.
   B. The family has a mission statement established by past generations that certain relationships simply go against the code of life. The family considers themselves free of racial prejudices, and will set aside their objections of race and class, and will express openness to any potential spouse, jut not one who is not White.

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C. The family maintains a level of control through distinctions of who is acceptable and who is not. The parents have strict rules and guidelines that have their family as the in-group and people of different ethnic background as the out-group. The offspring of these families are required to marry the 'right partner,' and family members have a very narrow criterion for who is considered acceptable and will be welcomed into their family ranks.

D. The family has the appearance of the family previously described; however, once the family learns that their son or daughter might marry despite their objections, they fear losing their child. This family will change their stance if the potential in-law is an exception to existing stereotypes, or if the interracial marriage outlasts their predictions of how long they thought it would.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Role of Extended Family
1. In what ways **are** or **will** the grandparents be involved in their grandchildren's lives? In the future will the grandparents play a role in the grandchild or grandchildren's lives, if so to what extent? (e.g., will the grandparents be used as a baby-sitting service, only seen on holidays, will they play an active part)
    _____

2.   If the grandparents **are not** or **will not be** a part of their grandchildren's life, will an extended family be created for the child or children? If so, how will this be accomplished? (e.g., God-parents, members from the community)
    _____

Family Inheritance
The term family narrative and family identity center on the view of your family of origin that past generations have passed along—for example, stories that reinforce what the family is and represents. These stories center around values, beliefs, and traditions, ideally speaking of past generations in hope that future generations will continue the legacy that has been built.

3. Please describe the legacy that you would like to leave your children with. Does your legacy differ from the one your parents expressed to you? If so, how?
    _____

Marriage identity

4. As part of the information above, which values, beliefs and traditions you are bringing into your marriage to create an identity with your spouse or plan to have (and children, if you have any or plan to have in the future).
    _____
5. Which values, beliefs, and rituals will you not choose to use.
    _____

As a last thought

6. In light of how interracial marriages are viewed, if you could change one misrepresentation what would it be?
    _____