WOMEN IN INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION

OF RELATIONSHIP INTIMACY

THESIS

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents who have continuously encouraged, supported and loved me through all my endeavors. To my mother, whose endless wisdom and courage has given me the strength to explore new paths. To my father, whose perseverance and dedication have inspired me to accomplish my goals.

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I would like to express a heartfelt thanks to the 11 women whose contributions made this study possible. Their willingness to discuss themselves and their relationships, their openness in answering questions, and their enthusiasm for the topic, provide the foundation of this project.

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ABSTRACT

WOMEN IN INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION

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This study explores the concept of intimacy within the context of interracial

relationships. This study was particularly interested in exploring the concept of intimacy

from the perspectives of women in interracial relationships. A total number of 11

women, currently in an interracial relationship were interviewed. An analysis of the data

revealed that interracial relationships possessed a number of universal processes of

intimacy found across all relationships. In addition, themes that were distinct and unique

to interracial relationships also emerged. The themes of negotiating cultural differences,

overcoming unique stresses such as family opposition and societal prejudice were

significant. Finally, participants reported an increase in intimacy as a result of feeling

affirmed and supported by external sources such as family and friends.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore the significant aspects of intimacy

experienced by women in interracial relationships. A total number of 11 women who

were involved in a heterosexual, romantic, interracial relationship were interviewed using

a qualitative research methodology with an emphasis on feminist and phenomenological

approaches. A review of the existing literature on intimacy is presented in Chapter II

along with a review of the literature pertaining to interracial relationships in the United

States. A discussion of general qualitative research, feminist research, and

phenomenological research methodologies will also be presented in Chapters II and III

along with a description of the methodology utilized in the present study in Chapter III.

Finally, results and a discussion of the key elements of the study will be presented in

Chapters IV and V.

Social scientific research has repeatedly explored and studied multiple aspects of

romantic relationships. Due to the sheer volume of research in this area, researchers have

dedicated entire journals and formed organizations for the sole purpose of studying

romantic relationships (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). However, it is not possible to

study these relationships without examining the society in which they exist. Like many

areas of life, society plays a large part in influencing the nature of romantic relationships.

Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that changing trends in society will lead to changing trends in romantic relationships.

The United States continues to evolve as a multicultural nation and society. The increase in cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity has resulted in an increase in diverse romantic relationships (Shibazaki & Brennan, 1998). Interracial relationships are one example of diverse romantic relationships. The topic of interracial relationships has been explored in a variety of settings ranging from scholarly journals to mass media. Researchers agree that there will be a rise in interracial marriages (Mok, 1999) and relationships in the future. Thus, it becomes important to examine these changing trends in romantic relationships.

In recent years, research has focused on numerous aspects of interracial relationships that range from factors in partner choice (Mok, 1999) to comparisons between interracial couples and same-race couples (Gaines Jr., Granrose, Rios, Garcia, Youn, Farris, & Bledosoe, 1999). Furthermore, recent researchers have also compared marital quality of interracial (Asian-White) couples with same-race (White) couples (Chan, 1997) and marital satisfaction in interracial marriages (Orgel, 1999). However, there is limited research that has explored intimacy in interracial relationships.

Research on romantic love has repeatedly emphasized the concept of intimacy (Moss & Schwebel, 1993; Schaefer & Olson, 1981; Sternberg, 1986). Although the experience of love has been described in abundant terms, researchers have repeatedly used three central concepts for its definition: intimacy, passion, and commitment (Lemieux & Hale, 1999; Marston, Hecht, Manke, McDaniel, & Reeder, 1998; Sternberg, 1986). Intimacy is valued in popular culture (Schaefer & Olson, 1981) and it is a central

component of long-term romantic relationships (Sternberg, 1986). Intimacy is often used as a measurement of evaluation in romantic and other close relationships (Moss & Schwebel, 1993). Because intimacy is a core concept in romantic relationships, investigation of this topic in the context of interracial couples is primary.

A large body of literature on the topic of interracial relationships has focused on outsiders' perspectives of interracial relationships with little known about the experiences of people involved in these relationships (Shibazaki & Brennan, 1998). It is only in the recent years that an emerging body of research has focused on the perspectives of the couples (Chan, 1997; Dianton, 1999; Gaines, et al., 1999; Gaines, Rios, & Granrose, 1999; Hill & Thomas, 2000; Lewis, Yancey, & Bletzer, 1997; Orgel, 1999; Rangel, 1999; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995; St. Jean, 1998; Stevenson, 1995).

Furthermore, there has been a limited number of research studies that have focused solely on the women in interracial relationships (Hill & Thomas, 2000). Research on women and intimacy reveals that intimacy plays a significant part in predicting relationship quality for women (Connolly, 1998). The present study aims to explore this very issue of women's perceptions of intimacy in their interracial relationships.

Due to the limited knowledge on this topic, there is a need for additional research tools and designs that move away from quantitative research to more qualitative research (St. Jean, 1998). This study utilizes a qualitative research method in order to explore the issues of intimacy in interracial relationships from the perspective of women. The use of qualitative research is justified due to the paucity of research on the topic, along with the fact that the nature of the study is descriptive (Hill & Thomas, 2000). In addition, this method is unique because it allows individuals in underrepresented and underresearched

populations (women in interracial relationships) to narrate their stories in their own voice (Connolly, 1998).

A review of the literature that follows defines the central concepts of the study along with highlighting the historical and current perspectives of interracial relationships. In addition, key definitions and perspectives of intimacy are explored along with the unique factors related to intimacy that are experienced by women in romantic relationships. Finally, a description of the methodology along with the results and discussion of the study are provided.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A general overview of intimacy is initially provided in this chapter. Research

studies examining intimacy in romantic relationships are summarized. In addition, a brief

review of research on gender differences and intimacy is provided. Following the

discussion on intimacy, this chapter will discuss important issues relevant to interracial

relationships.

A review of the literature reveals that past research has, in general, regarded

interracial relationships in terms of dysfunction (Gaines et al., 1999). However, in recent

years, a newer, more strengths based trend seems to be emerging. A historical

background of interracial relationships is provided. In addition, prevalent theories

regarding interracial couples and families are presented. Other considerations such as

family support, experiences of multiracial children, experiences of interracially partnered

women, and implications for therapy with interracial couples and families are explored.

Finally, a summary of the literature on qualitative research methodology is presented.

<u>Intimacy</u>

Intimacy is a complex dance. In intimate relationships we are continually

taking steps back and forth. We move toward someone, or away from them,

based on what is going on inside of us, circumstances outside of us, and what

is going on between us. As we go through this series of adjustments, the

relationship develops a tempo. When we focus on what we are doing and

what is around us, the dance can be beautiful and flowing (Berk, 1994, p. 21).

Defining Intimacy

Society places a high emphasis on intimacy. The social science discipline itself has

given much importance to this concept (Register & Henley, 1992). Theorists such as

Erik Erikson have emphasized the need for intimacy as an important developmental

milestone on the road to adult life. Similarly Abraham Maslow incorporated the concept

of intimacy in his hierarchy of needs while Harry Stack Sullivan described the need for

intimacy as "the need for collaboration with at least one other person" (Schaefer &

Olson, 1981, p. 48).

Intimacy has been conventionally defined in terms of sexual interaction between

two people. The assumption here is that the greater the sexual involvement, the greater

the level of intimacy in the relationship. However, over the past few decades, research

has turned away from this rather narrow view to incorporate additional aspects of life

(Schaefer & Olson, 1981).

Although a number of researchers have emphasized the concept of intimacy, there

is little agreement on the actual definition of this concept (Register & Henley, 1992;

Harper, Schaalje, & Sandberg, 2000) and limited work has been dedicated to measure and

validate its existence in relationships (Schaefer & Olson, 1981). Many researchers have

argued toward a multidimensional definition of intimacy (Hatfield & Rapson, 1987;

Schaefer & Olson, 1981; Sternberg, 1986; Waring 1988). However, once again there is

little agreement as to which factors are important in intimacy.

Some researchers have conceptualized intimacy on the basis of three important components: self-disclosure, communication of affection, and the ability of partners to develop interdependent behavioral patterns. The concept of behavioral interdependence can be broadly defined as physical bond and connection experienced by couples in intimate relationships (Marston et al., 1998).

Hatfield and Rapson (1987) proposed a corresponding conceptualization of intimacy. According to this model, intimacy was divided into three components: cognitive intimacy, emotional intimacy, and behavioral intimacy. The first component, cognitive intimacy, is based on the partners' willingness to reveal themselves to one another. Therefore, cognitive intimacy is related to the concept of self-disclosure. Secondly, emotional intimacy is based on how deeply partners care about one another. Thus, communication of caring and affection are central to the experience of emotional intimacy in a relationship. Finally, behavioral intimacy is based on the level of comfort experienced by partners when in close proximity (Hatfield & Rapson, 1987). It can be argued that this last component is related to the concept of behavioral interdependence. In order to experience this "bondedness," partners must be comfortable with each other in close proximity.

Other researchers have argued that there are a larger number of factors that contribute to the experience of intimacy in relationships. Waring (1988) outlines eight central factors that are essential in the creation of intimacy. These eight factors are affection, expressiveness, compatibility, cohesion, sexuality, conflict resolution, autonomy, and identity.

Register and Henley (1992) conducted a qualitative study asking participants to describe the experience of intimacy. Participants were asked to describe an intimate moment when they had experienced. These accounts of intimate experiences were then analyzed for common themes. Results revealed seven major components or themes of intimate experiences. These components included nonverbal communication, presence, time, boundary, body, destiny/surprise, and transformation. Nonverbal communication included actions, gestures, facial movement etc. Presence was described "like an essence, in that it is not limited to, or solely expressed by, one element (e.g. physical presence) of a person" (p. 473). Time was an important theme in the experience of intimacy. Therefore, in order to describe the intimate experience completely, participants felt it necessary to describe the experience in the context of the time in which it occurred.

Register and Henley (1992) discovered that as a result of the intimacy being experienced, most participants also described a removal of physical and psychological boundaries between the individuals. The theme of body encompasses a wide range of bodily touching from gentle brushing of body parts to sexual encounters. The theme of destiny/surprise was defined by the authors as the awareness that "intimacy is somehow both surprising and spontaneous, and yet, feels natural or destined" (p. 475). The final theme of transformation suggests both interpersonal and intrapersonal changes in individuals due to the experience of intimacy. This study was unique in that it not only incorporated conventional methods of studying intimacy, but it also allowed participants to describe intimacy across all contexts of relationships.

In an effort to create a single, unifying definition of intimacy, Moss and Schwebel (1993) discovered approximately 61 definitions of intimacy by conducting a meta

analysis of the existing research on intimacy. These definitions were then organized into three broad categories of definitions. The first category comprised of general definitions where intimacy was defined using global terminology. These general definitions were those kinds of definitions that are generally subjectively derived and lacked empirical support. For example, the definition of intimacy as "the feelings of closeness experienced by two people in a romantic relationship or a friendship" is a general definition based on the author's interpretations.

Multidimensional definitions make up the second category of definitions. These definitions are partly based on an empirical foundation. These definitions define intimacy as a construct that incorporates several smaller constructs. Finally, the third category is operational definitions. Operational definitions are those that define intimacy through the use of a behavioral measurement (Moss & Schwebel, 1993). An example of a behavioral instrument that operationally defines intimacy is the Miller Social Intimacy Scale (MSIS) which measures present levels of experienced intimacy from a social psychological perspective (Barba, 1997).

After a careful examination of each of these categories along with predominant themes that emerged from these definitions, Moss and Schwebel (1993) created a formal definition of intimacy, emphasizing five components. The first component is commitment or the intended permanence of the partners. The second component is affective intimacy, which is defined as feelings of shared emotions. The third component, cognitive intimacy, is defined as an individual's awareness of their partner's values and goals. The last two components are physical intimacy and mutuality, which is defined as

the reciprocity of intimacy between partners. The formal definition proposed by Moss and Schwebel (1993) states that,

> Intimacy in enduring romantic relationships is determined by the level of commitment, and positive affective, cognitive, and physical closeness one experiences with a partner in a reciprocal (although not necessarily symmetrical) relationship (p. 33).

Through the years several researchers have attempted to find methods of measuring intimacy in loving relationships. One example is Schaefer and Olson's (1981) Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR) Inventory. This 36-item, self-report inventory measures both real and desired levels of intimacy in all kinds of loving relationships including family, friendships and romantic relationships. Schaefer and Olson (1981) distinguished five areas of intimacy to be measured through the PAIR. These five areas are emotional intimacy, social intimacy, sexual intimacy, intellectual intimacy, and recreational intimacy (Schaefer & Olson, 1981). The PAIR is a useful assessment tool for many marriage and family therapists and allows one to assess "both the individual (intrapersonal system) and the relationship (interpersonal system) in terms of perceived and expected intimacy" (p. 57).

Theory of Love

In order to examine the concept of intimacy it will be helpful for the reader to study Sternberg's triangular theory of love (1986) which is "a tripartite theory [that] deals with the nature of love and with loves in various kinds of relationships. The triangular theory of love holds that love can be understood in terms of three components that together can be viewed as forming the vertices of a triangle" (Sternberg, 1986, p. 119). Sternberg's

three essential components are intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment. In his

theory, Sternberg describes intimacy as "feelings of closeness, connectedness, and

bondedness in loving relationships. It thus includes in its purview those feelings that give

rise essentially to the experience of warmth in a loving relationship" (p. 119). Sternberg

lists additional feelings that are typically a part of the intimacy component. However he

argues that one does not have to experience all of these feelings in order to experience

love (Sternberg, 1986).

In addition to feelings, the triangular theory of love also emphasizes action.

Sternberg contends that, "it is one thing to feel a certain way but another thing altogether

to express these feelings, and often the feelings fail to be communicated because of the

inability or unwillingness of the individual to translate the three components of love into

action" (p. 131). The actions for each component are unique and it is important to

understand that actions can affect the level of the components in the relationship at

present. Sternberg presents some actions or ways in which intimacy can be expressed.

These actions include but are not limited to communicating empathy for the other,

offering emotional and material support to the other, and sharing one's possessions, time,

and self (Sternberg, 1986). Therefore, the primary message here is that it is essential to

understand not only how the individual experiences the three components of love, but

also understand how they express these components to one another.

Sternberg argues that the function of each of his three components differ according

to the properties of the relationship (e.g. whether it is a long-term or short-term

relationship). Sternberg conceptualizes intimacy as derived from emotional investment

in the relationship. Therefore, in a short-term relationship, passion might be a

predominant component while intimacy plays a moderate role. On the other hand, the intimacy and the decision/commitment components play a rather large role in long-term relationships.

The triangular theory of love also states that the intimacy component is unique because it is at the core of all types of loving relationships (parent-child, friendship, romantic, etc.), whereas the passion and decision/commitment components exist only in romantic relationships. In addition, Sternberg and Grajek (1984) suggest that one could predict, to a limited extent, the amount of love one feels toward another based on the amount of love that same person feels towards someone else. This was mostly true in loving relationships in the nuclear family where "the amount of love one experiences for one member of the nuclear family (mother, father, sibling closest in age) tends to be predictable from the amount of love one feels for another member of that nuclear family" (p. 122). However, the amount of love toward a member of the nuclear family cannot predict the amount of love one experiences for a member outside the family.

Intimacy and Gender

Differences in gender can lead to differences in the perception and experience of intimacy. Historically, when studying gender differences, some researcher believe that men and women were completely "opposite" in every aspect of life (Gilbert & Scher, 1999). It is important to acknowledge that with the changing society and the changing definition of "male" and "female," these gender differences may not be as extreme. Therefore, in reading this section it is important for the reader to understand that the findings or theories outlined can by no means be generalized to all men and women.

Before initiating a discussion of gender as a variable in intimacy, it is crucial to understand the role of gender socialization in society. Heller and Wood (1998) comment that the general patterns of gender socialization across cultures emphasize themes of dominance and power for men and themes of nurturance and beauty for women. Gilbert and Scher (1999) argue that girls and boys, from a very young age, are taught different life expectations and expectations about self. In the traditional ways of gender socializing, "girls are taught to have 'roots,' or a sense of relatedness, and boys to have 'wings,' or a sense of freedom and self-direction" (p. 27).

Due to these very different messages, men and women often develop incompatible values, personality characteristics, communication styles, and perspectives of the world. These antithetical ways of being in the world compel men and women to "live in two separate cultures . . . [and] assign different roles and hold different expectations for relationships" (p. 3).

These differences might lead toward a difference in perception and definition of intimacy for men and women. While many men are defined by their primary function in the workplace, which lacks an environment for close personal relationships, many women function within the sphere of the home (Heller & Wood, 1998). Carol Gilligan (1982) distinguishes between intimacy experienced by men and the intimacy experienced by women. She argues that intimacy is strongly connected with identity for women.

Women, in general, define their identity through their intimate and caring relationships and perceive their self in relation to other. On the other hand, men in general create their identity through their independence, separation and power. Therefore, intimacy becomes a distinct developmental stage for a man after establishing

identity while intimacy and identity develop simultaneously for a woman. Coontz (1992) argues that for women, "the process of falling in love is not so much a loss of control as it is a socially acceptable way of exploring her own powers, challenging herself, finding the simultaneous transcendence and self-absorption that men find in work" (as cited in Heller & Wood, 1998, p. 3).

An inherent problem with the definitions of love and intimacy are that they are based solely on the experiences of women and pay little or no attention to the way men experience and express love and intimacy. In order to clarify the concept of intimacy, Heller and Wood (1998) conducted a study examining the ways men and women differ in their experiences and expressions of intimacy. Based on Schafer and Olson's (1981) definitions of intimacy, the results of the study revealed some significant gender differences in intimacy.

There were a significantly higher number of feelings of intimacy reported by women. Women were also more able to predict their partner's intimacy in three of the five areas: emotional, intellectual and recreational. Heller and Wood (1998) attributed this finding to the fact that women are more "trained" through their gender socialization toward "greater attunement to others' inner lives. . . . From a social-historical perspective, because of their financial and social dependence, women have developed expertise and skill in predicting their spouses as a tool for survival" (Heller & Wood, 1998, p. 8). This study reported that men were better at predicting the sexual and social intimacy in their partners. The results of these studies strengthen the argument that men and women experience and perceive intimacy in different ways.

Harper et al. (2000) examined intimacy in mature marriages in the context of daily stress and marital quality. Findings from the study revealed a stronger connection between intimacy and marital quality for women than men. However, the study also revealed that emotional intimacy was the strongest predictor of marital quality across gender.

In another study Lemieux and Hale (1999) attempted to examine gender differences while measuring Sternberg's (1986) Triangular theory of love. In examining the gender differences, Lemieux and Hale found that women rated intimacy and commitment factors as more representative of love than men. However, in testing for Sternberg's theory of love, the researchers found that both men and women believed the three factors of intimacy, passion, and commitment to be associated with relationship satisfaction.

McCabe (1999) examined intimacy in relation to relationship functioning and sexuality among men and women. The results of the study revealed more similarity than differences between genders. In fact, there was only one difference reported between genders. This difference was on the self-reported levels of relationship functioning and intimacy, where females reported higher levels of sexual intimacy than men. These results are helpful because they provide some evidence that the experience of intimacy and love may not necessarily be too adverse between the sexes.

Research on gender differences in the experience, perception, and expression of intimacy is very limited. There is a strong need for more research in this area. It will be helpful for researchers and readers to acknowledge the impact of gender socialization on intimacy. In addition, researchers must work to develop definitions and

conceptualizations of intimacy that incorporate the views of both genders (Heller & Wood, 1998).

Intimacy in Enduring, Romantic Relationships

Although intimacy exists in various kinds of relationships, it is particularly sought in enduring, romantic relationships and is often used as an evaluative tool to measure the quality of the relationship (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999; Moss & Schwebel, 1993). A number of studies have focused on examining intimacy and other central aspects of romantic relationships.

In order to understand the concept of intimacy within the context of romantic relationships, researchers have attempted to gather data through more subjective methods. In their qualitative study, Marston et al. (1998) asked participants to describe their experiences of intimacy and other essential factors in their relationship. An analysis of participant responses revealed six different ways of experiencing intimacy. Intimacy was experienced through openness, sex, affection, supportiveness, togetherness, and quiet company.

The experience of openness included both behaviors such as self-disclosure and also acceptance from partners. Marston et al. also note that previous research has often excluded sex from their definition of intimacy, while the participants in their study " view sex as an important way of experiencing intimacy" (p. 26). For the participants, affection was a separate factor from sex. Affection included both verbal and nonverbal ways of expressing affection. Participants experienced togetherness through spending time together and also by experiencing closeness. Finally, quiet company included time that the couple spent together without any communication (Marston et al., 1998).

Robinson and Blanton (1993) conducted a study with long-term married couples in order to assess the strengths of their relationships. Their results indicated five principal characteristics of enduring relationships. These characteristics were intimacy, communication, commitment, congruence, and religious orientation. The authors found that "intimacy grew out of involvement with one another through the good times as well as the bad and was facilitated by mutuality, interdependence, support, and caring" (p. 40). This study also supported past contentions of intimacy as a balance of connection and autonomy. The results of this study showed that physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy are all crucial factors in an enduring romantic relationship.

Robinson and Blanton's factors of intimacy closely resemble the five levels of intimacy outlined by Moss and Schwebel (1993). In addition, Moss and Schwebel's components are also heavily supported by other research providing evidence that individuals involved in intimate relationships (both friendships and romantic relationships) have a tremendous capacity to understand their partners at a deeper cognitive level. This is due to the increased level of self-disclosure and information sharing that is part of the intimate relationship. The authors contend that "increasing the amount of cognitively based information spouses exchanged increased the level of intimacy they experienced" (p. 34). The authors conclude that the five factors of intimacy are highly interrelated. Therefore, couples who experience high levels of one component are also likely to exhibit higher levels of the other four components.

Kaslow and Hammerschmidt (1992) conducted a study investigating the "essential ingredients" of successful long-term marriages. They found that there was a relationship between high satisfaction and intimacy in marriage with successful resolution of tensions

and conflicts. The results of the study indicated "that those who ranked as highly satisfied in their marriages had resolved whatever trauma they experienced, either prior to marriage or early in their time together, and had been able to cope with crises and transitions when they occurred in adult years" (p. 16).

Harper et al. (2000) conducted a study examining daily hassles, marital quality, and intimacy in older couples. In this study, the authors defined intimacy as "feelings of closeness and sharing" (p. 3) in the five main areas of intimacy as outlined by Schaefer and Olson (1981). The results indicated that intimacy was a strong predictor of marital quality. The results indicated that the level of marital quality increased when intimacy was perceived as being high in a relationship. Therefore, even the perception of intimacy seemed to have an impact on marital quality for the couples. Another important finding of the study was that the marital quality of the couple could be affected just by the perception of intimacy of one partner. This finding may somewhat contradict the contention made by Schwebel, Moss, and Fine (1999) who examined intimacy changes over time in a relationship. They argued that "an individual's appraisal of intimacy in a particular relationship cannot be considered equivalent to the *actual* amount of intimacy," (p.519). Therefore, these authors believed that individual appraisal may be necessary but not sufficient in itself to measure the intimacy in a relationship. Thus, intimacy moves from an individual to a dyadic and interpersonal construct.

Rosenbluth and Steil (1995) compared women in heterosexual and homosexual relationships and the intimacy experienced by these women in their relationships. They note that intimacy "is not a state, but a process of shared emotional engagement by which a dyad attempts to move toward more complete communication and mutual

understanding" (p. 163). Results of the study revealed that respect, support, mutual trust, and supportiveness were crucial factors in the experience of intimacy (Connolly, 1998).

Another important aspect of intimacy that has received much scrutiny has to do with the changes in intimacy during the time of a relationship. Intimacy changes over time have been attributed to various factors by researchers. Some researchers believe in a time phase approach (Around & Pauker, 1987; Coleman, 1984; McWhirter & Mattison, 1984) to intimacy. This approach attributes intimacy changes over time as a result of the length of the relationship. In other words, a couple experiences various stages throughout their relationship (e.g. the honeymoon phase or the disillusionment phase) where levels of intimacy fluctuate between high and low. The relationship is maintained as a result of the couple negotiating the stresses and factors that are related to each stage. Therefore, according to the time phase approach, couples sustain their relationship as a result of constantly adjusting the experiences and expectations of intimacy in the relationship (Schwebel et al., 1999).

The second approach used to explain intimacy changes in relationships is called the event related approach. This approach is briefly described below.

Over the course of a couple's existence, partners encounter a variety of significant events. The partners must adjust to meet the challenges presented by these events. In contrast, during the periods between events, partners and their relationship function in relatively stable ways (Schwebel et al., 1999, p. 523).

The family life cycle is an example of the application of this approach (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988; Duvall & Miller, 1985). Other studies have found that intimacy

levels fluctuate from high to low during events such as the birth of a child and other such significant events. Thus, according to this approach, intimacy levels change during a specific event and then return to their original level after the event has occurred.

Schwebel et al. (1999) attempt to explain intimacy changes in a relationship by integrating both the approaches described above. They propose that changes in intimacy can be understood by examining how the cognitions of both partners change over time and as a result of events significant to the relationship. Therefore, it is not only important to understand how the individuals' cognitions are altered as a result of time and events in the relationship but also how partners negotiate these cognitive changes. This approach seems more holistic in its explanation of intimacy changes over time incorporating both time and events as determinants of intimacy change. In addition, this approach examines intimacy both within the context of the individual (examining individual cognition changes) and also within the dyad (how the couple negotiates the cognition changes).

<u>Interracial Romantic Relationships</u>

In the past, research on interracial relationships was divided into two antithetical perspectives (Erickson, 1987). The first perspective focused on and argued for the negative psychological and social consequences of such relationships (Brayboy, 1966; Lehrman, 1967), while the second perspective attempted to defend and offer "healthy" reasons for interracial relationships (Smith, 1966; Weinberger, 1966). In recent years, a third trend in interracial relationship literature has emerged that is primarily interested in studying strengths based factors in interracial relationships (Foeman & Nance, 1999). The current study adheres to this subsequent perspective.

In reviewing the literature on interracial relationships, it will be important to consider some of the issues and difficulties with the existing literature. Firstly, the majority of the interracial relationship literature focuses solely on interracial marriages (Shibazaki & Brennan, 1998). Therefore, any generalizations to interracial dating must be made with some caution. One reason for the prevalence of interracial marriage literature may be attributed to the vast amount of statistical information available about marriages through the U.S. Census Bureau along with numerous population surveys (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995).

A second issue to consider is that a majority of these studies have examined interracial relationships between African-Americans and Anglo-Americans (Erikson, 1987; Sung, 1990). Although intermarriage between African-American and Anglo-American individuals represents only a small percentage of the total rate of intermarriages in the U.S., it is by far the most controversial and thus has been the focus of much research (Wehrly, Kenney, & Kenney, 1999). However, relatively little attention has been paid to other combinations of interracial relationships (Negy & Snyder, 2000). Only in recent decades has there been a rise in studies examining Asian/Asian - American and Anglo-American relationships (Fujino, 1997; Kitano, Yeung, Chai, & Hatanaka, 1984; Mok, 1999; Sung, 1990). However, there still remains an urgent need for research exploring other combinations of interracial couples (Solsberry, 1994). Therefore, once again, any generalizations made from the literature presented should be made with caution.

A third important consideration is the difficulty in finding a uniform method of defining and understanding terms relevant to interracial relationships. For example, Mok

(1999) discusses the problem of comparing rates of intermarriage between Asian-Americans and Anglo-Americans before 1980. Before 1980 there were only three racial distinctions – "Black", "White", and "Other". However, these distinctions were modified and expanded after 1980. Therefore, it is impossible for researchers to present with absolute certainty the number of interracial marriages between Asian-Americans and Anglo-Americans before 1980.

The issue that is at the heart of this problem in studying the history of intermarriage has to do with the evolution of the concept of race. Race is central to the current study and before proceeding any further, it is important for the reader to gain an understanding of this concept within the context of this study.

<u>Race</u>

In North America, the term "race" has been narrowly conceptualized as Black and White. This conceptualization may be a result of the predominance of European and African ancestries in the country, in addition to the complex race relations between these two racial groups (Hodges, 1999). However, the conceptualization of race is far more expansive and complex. Although there is general consensus that race is an important concept, there seems to be little or no agreement among scholars over its definition (Omi & Winant, 1998). Race has often been perceived as a nominal category used to classify people in one group or another (Helms & Cook, 1999). Over the years, race has been viewed as a biological, sociological and psychological concept. An example of a biological definition of race was offered by Krogman (1945) where he defined race as "a sub-group of peoples possessing a definite combination of physical characters, of genetic origin, the combination of which to varying degrees distinguishes the sub-group from

other sub-groups" (Krogman, 1945,as cited in Helms, 1993, p. 45). This definition of

race implies that it is a fixed and stable concept that is determined biologically and has no

social significance (Helms & Cook, 1999). Omi and Winant (1998) argue for a larger

more dynamic conceptualization of race. They remark,

> We tend to view race as something fixed and immutable – something rooted
>
> in "nature." Thus we mask the historical construction of racial categories, the
>
> shifting meaning of race, and the crucial role of politics and ideology in
>
> shaping race relations. Races do not emerge full-blown. They are the results
>
> of diverse historical practices and are continually subject to challenge over
>
> their definition and meaning (p. 17).

Thus, according to these authors, the meaning of race takes its shape within the context of

the personal, political, social, and economic dynamics in society.

Helms and Cook (1999) organize definitions of race into three categories: formal,

historical, and cultural. Formal definitions are those that define race as a simple,

observable, and stable characteristic without any other significance. Historical

definitions focus on the implications of race on history, politics and power. Finally,

cultural definitions of race examine attitudes, values, beliefs, etc., of diverse groups,

attempting to examine the "subjective culture." The present study will primarily utilize

this last definition of race as it examines the subjective experiences of women in a

minority culture of interracial couples.

Defining Interracial Relationships

Interracial relationships are a subset of a larger group of relationships where the

individuals marry or date, "across racial, ethnic, religious or national lines or a

combination of them" (Cerroni-Long, 1984). In discussing intermarriage, Cerroni-Long (1984) argues that there exist "three main lines of cleavage separating endogamous groups in society" (p. 29). These three areas are religion, race, and ethnicity. Accordingly, the three primary forms of intermarriage are interfaith, interracial, and interethnic marriages.

According to Gordon (1964), interfaith marriages are those marriages in which "the parties to the marriage were born and reared in families, each of which has identified with a different religion" (p. 1). Interethnic marriages are between two individuals who were born and raised in two or more different cultural environments. The cultural environments of the two partners may differ on a number of factors including religion, nationality, and language. For example marriage between a Japanese-American and a Korean-American will be considered interethnic even though both groups are included under the Asian-American racial category. Finally, interracial marriages and relationships are those relationships where both partners belong to two different racial groups. For example a relationship between an African-American and an Asian-American individual will be considered interracial even if they were raised in similar cultural environments and also belong to the same religious groups.

In discussing cross-cultural marriages, Falicov (1995) divides and defines intermarriage along the same three broad categories. Demographically, interethnic marriages are most prevalent in the United States, followed by interfaith and interracial marriages, with interracial marriages being the least prevalent (Falicov, 1995; Gordon, 1964). Although these findings are exclusive to intermarriages, one can apply them to a certain degree to cross-cultural dating.

Other common terms utilized in studying the phenomenon of intermarriage are inmarriages or intragroup marriages and out-marriages or intergroup marriages. In their discussion of Asian-American intermarriage, Kitano, Fujino, and Sato (1998) define in-group/intragroup marriages as those marriages occurring between individuals belonging to the same ethnic backgrounds. On the other hand, out-group/intergroup marriages are all marriages occurring between individuals belonging to distinct ethnic groups. Thus, according to these researches, both interracial and interethnic marriages would be subsets under the umbrella of intergroup marriages. Although these terms are helpful, certain difficulties may exist in their definitions. For example, it is unclear whether interfaith marriages can also be included under the category of intergroup marriages. In other words, would a marriage between a Japanese-American male and a Japanese-American female, belonging to different religious affiliations, be considered an intragroup marriage or an intergroup marriage? The answer to this question may depend on whether one believes religion to be a part of one's ethnicity.

Some researchers argue that the term "interracial" relationships can be limiting in describing relationships involving partners belonging to distinct groups. Instead, these researchers suggest employing the term "interethnic" in order to include a broader, more diverse group of relationships (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). They argue that most researchers studying these relationships have focused exclusively on "Black-White or Asian-White relationships - groups traditionally viewed as both socioculturally and phenotypically distinct" (p. 342).

On the other hand, Gaines and Ickes (1997) make a clear distinction between interracial relationships and interethnic relationships. They define interracial

relationships as "a distinct subset within a larger class of interethnic relationships" (p. 199). These authors argue that other forms of interethnic relationships, such as interreligious relationships, greatly outnumber interracial relationships in the United States. Therefore, it may not reasonable to perceive interracial relationships as synonymous with interethnic relationships. In addition, interracial relationships are unique because of the fact that racial differences in society are more salient than other differences (i.e. religious and ethnic differences). Levinger and Rands (1985) discuss some very rigid factors associated with interracial marriages. They state,

> Given the flexity of race and the plasticity of religion, intermarrying racially
> versus religiously has quite different implications: interracial partners retain
> their public skin differences, whereas interreligious partners can either
> privately de-emphasize their religious beliefs or change toward a common
> orientation. Further, whereas the offspring of interracial unions are marked
> visibly by their parents' genetic makeup, children from interreligious
> marriages can develop their own personal faith in their own unique fashion
> (Levinger, & Rands, 1985, as cited in Gaines & Ickes, 1997, p. 200).

Definitions for interracial couples continue to evolve as they become more prevalent in society. Rosenblatt et al. (1995) define the participants of their study in the title of their book as "multiracial" couples. This term seems more accurate at a time when an increasing number of individuals belong to multiple cultural and racial backgrounds. Therefore, the term "multicultural couples" seems to describe not only the racial differences between partners, but also the rich racial diversity within individual partners.

The present study employs the descriptor "interracial" in describing the relationships of the women interviewed. Therefore, the partners in these relationships may belong not only to distinct ethnic backgrounds but also racial backgrounds.

Historical Perspective on Interracial Relationships

One of the first recorded interracial marriages in the history of the United States was that between Englishman, John Rolfe and the American-Indian princess, Pocahontas. The only "controversy" in this interracial marriage was the doubts of King James I who "fretted only about whether a commoner such as Rolfe was entitled to wed the daughter of a king" (Nash, 1999, p. 10). During the period of the Rolfe-Pocahontas wedding, interracial unions between American-Indians and Anglo-Americans were commonplace and acceptable. In fact, many politicians of the time such as Thomas Jefferson were advocating for the further mixing of the races through marriage. Nash (1999) also states that during early 17th century, the word, "miscegenation" did not exist, strongly symbolizing the absence of opposition to interracial unions. Instead, the word "mestizo" was employed and defined as racial intermixture of all kinds. Mestizo marriages between American-Indian women and English, French, and Spanish traders were the norm till the 19th century. There are numerous examples of prominent traders and other businessmen whose businesses thrived among the people due to their wives.

> Irish trader John Johnson could hardly have done business in Indian villages without his Ojibway wife O-shaw-gus-so-day-wayquack, daughter of an Ojibway leader. Nor could Michael Laframboise, a French immigrant, . . . [who] boasted about having a high-ranking wife in every Indian tribe inhabiting the region . . . Equally fabled Kit Carson had four wives: an

Arapaho, a Cheyenne, a Mexican, and a Taos-born Indian-Mexican woman. The fur traders, and trail blazers are poignant examples of a frontier that should be conceptualized as a zone of deep intercultural contacts rather than as a line that divided two societies, one advanced, and the other primitive. The frontier, as it involved White settlers and native peoples, is indelibly etched in our national consciousness as a battleground, but it was also a cultural merging ground and a marrying ground. Nobody left the frontier cultural encounters unchanged. (Nash, 1999, p. 13)

In addition to intermarriages between Europeans and American-Indians, intermarriages between American-Indians and African-Americans became prominent and continued to rise during the revolutionary era. These marriages were a result of escaping slaves who found refuge among American-Indians. These interracial unions also continued to increase during the latter part of the 18th century and into the 19th century as a result of the adoption of slavery by the Cherokee Indians (Nash, 1999). However, it is impossible to estimate the actual number of marriages between American-Indians and African-Americans during this period. Many couples cohabited together but were not legally married due to the laws against intermarriage along with the general discrimination faced by both of these marginalized groups during this period of history (Mandell, 1999).

Intermarriage between American-Indians and African-Americans is one example of interracial relationships between two marginalized groups in the history of the United States. There are numerous other examples of intermarriages between two minority groups. One example can be traced back to California's San Joaquin and Imperial

valleys where anti-miscegenation laws applied to the large number of immigrants entering the region. Among the new immigrants were thousands of Sikh laborers from the Punjab region of India (Nash, 1999). A majority of these laborers worked as farmers in the cotton fields of the valley. These laborers were also subject to the immigration laws that prohibited immigration of women from their countries. In addition, Sikh laborers, who were generally classified as non-White, were subject to California's anti-miscegenation laws. Intermarriage was strictly prohibited especially between the Sikh laborers and Anglo women (Leonard, 1992).

At the same time, a large number of Mexican immigrants were relocating to this region as a result of the Mexican Revolution. The Mexican immigrants found work primarily in the cotton fields of California. Most Mexican women and children worked alongside with the men. It was in the cotton fields that the different immigrant groups worked side by side and became acquainted with one another. "Thus cotton was the crop that brought most [Punjabi-Mexican] couples together" (Leonard, 1992). Despite the rigid laws around intermarriage, marriage licenses could be obtained as long as the bride and groom had "similar skin color." This crucial factor in the law led to a large number of marriages between the California Sikhs and the Mexican immigrants. By the year 1948, 80% of the Asian Indian men in this region were married to Hispanic women.

> The numbers of Mexican-Asian Indian Californians involved are not very
> significant, but they represent a powerful theme in American history that has
> been largely hidden-that people of many kinds in every era and in every
> region of this country, have found loopholes in the ruling system of racial
> division and classification. The silence in our history books on the topic of

multiraciality reflects the antimiscegenist attitudes supported by the law. In

fact, about three-quarters of African-Americans today are multiracial, and

perhaps one-third have some Indian ancestry. Virtually all Latino-Americans

are multiracial, so are almost all Filipino Americans, so are a large majority of

American-Indians, and millions of Whites have multiracial roots (Nash, 1999,

p. 16).

The Punjabi-Mexican families of California were originally formed as a result of

the laws of the dominant society. These laws limited the choice in partners for the Sikh

laborers. However, through the years, the Punjabi-Mexican families have become the

model of family life for many immigrants coming to the United States (Leonard, 1992).

Punjabi-Mexican marriage is one of many examples of intermarriage between immigrant

groups in the United States. A thorough description of all these relationships is beyond

the scope of this paper.

The Anti-Miscegenation Laws

Purity of public morals, the moral and physical development of both races,

and the highest advancement of our cherished Southern civilization, under

which two distinct races are to work out and accomplish the destiny to which

the Almighty has assigned them on this continent, all require that they should

be kept distinct and separate, and that connections and alliances so unnatural

that God and nature seem to forbid them, should be prohibited by positive law

and be subject to no evasion. (Wallenstein, 1995, p. 38).

The above words are those of Virginia Supreme Court Judge, Joseph Christian, who

presided over a trial in 1874 that supported the conviction of Mr. Andrew Kinney. Mr.

Kinney, an African-American man, was convicted and sentenced to pay the maximum fine of $500 for breaking the law by marrying an Anglo-American woman. Shortly after this 1878 trial the Virginia General Assembly modified its laws concerning interracial marriages. The modified laws declared that both partners in an interracial marriage would be subject to the same prosecution, which was a sentence of two to five years in a state penitentiary (Wallenstein, 1995).

The case of Andrew Kinney is not an unusual one. The sentiments expressed in the passage above were shared by most states in the United States at one point or another. These sentiments and beliefs were the foundation of the anti-miscegenation laws that were enforced from the 1660s to the 1960s (Bardaglio, 1999). The first anti-miscegenation law was formed in the state of Maryland. This law prohibited Anglo-Americans from marrying American-Indians and African-Americans (Frankenberg, 1993). The primary motivation behind the anti-miscegenation laws was preservation of the economic and racial superiority of the White ruling class (Erickson, 1987) along with aggrandizing the White man's sexual control over both White and Black women (Bardaglio, 1999). Another important purpose of such laws was to reduce the number of mixed-race children that were being born as a result of interracial unions (Foeman & Nance, 1999). Thus, in the eyes of the dominant group, these laws prevented the "inferior" group access to White ruling class' wealth and power (Heer, 1966). Researchers note that the anti-miscegenation laws existed in 40 out of the 50 states at one time or another (Foeman & Nance, 1999; Kalmijn, 1993;Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995; Wallenstein, 1995; Weinberger, 1966).

The anti-miscegenation laws were implemented not only to control interracial relationships but also to maintain the economic and political superiority of the Anglo-American group. Frankenberg (1993) examines the underlying reasons behind these laws through the lens of structural racism. Structural racism defines economic, political, and social hierarchies according to racial hierarchies. Therefore, in order to maintain their economic and political control in the country the Anglo colonizers also forced their superiority among social matters.

> Anglo colonizers of what was to become of the United States brought with
> them arguments for White racial superiority articulated in the language of
> Christianity. These were succeeded by, and absorbed into, so-called scientific
> racism, and biology-and evolution-based theories of race hierarchy. Each in
> turn laid the foundation for anti-miscegenation laws on the grounds of
> essential difference between groups defined as racially different from one
> another. Consonant with the notion of essential difference was the idea of
> "mongrelization" as the dread outcome of interracial sexuality and procreation
> (Frankeberg, 1993, p. 73).

> Historically, views and reaction to racial miscegenation varied on the basis gender.

For instance, sexual relations between an Anglo male and an African female were somewhat acceptable and preferable in contrast to sexual relations between an Anglo female and an African male (Bardaglio, 1999; Erickson, 1987). The rationale behind this "preference" was based on the mother-child bond. "Thus, the cohabitation of an Anglo male with an African female would result in a child with African blood, thereby exonerating the Anglo male's social responsibility. The opposite situation with the birth

of a child with some African blood to an Anglo female would result in racial confusion undermining the caste system" (Erickson, 1987, p. 4).

In addition, it has been argued that slave owners often raped their female slaves not only to assert their power and gain sexual pleasure but to also insure the existence of a continuous slave population. Hence, while the anti-miscegenation laws served to prohibit Anglo women from interracial relationships, they also served to maintain the economic power of the Anglo plantation owners (Frankenberg, 1993).

In addition to these laws, violence was also used often in order to prevent intermarriage or interracial relationships. Anglo slave owners practiced lynching on male slaves who were even suspected of having lustful thoughts about an Anglo woman. An example of the use of violence used by the slave owners to ensure their power over the African male is provided below.

> The gun, whip, rope and torch were symbolically as well as practically
> suitable for this purpose. In reading verbatim accounts of some of these
> primitive rites, it becomes obvious that much more was going on at a lynching
> than the mere killing of a man as a warning to others. The preoccupation with
> emasculation was so great that it overshadowed everything else. The killing
> became almost incidental and in some cases was not carried out (Brayboy,
> 1966, p. 181).

The racial groups affected by the anti-miscegenation laws varied among states. Some states included a variety of racial groups such as Asians, Native-Americans, and African-Americans in their statutes, while others focused only on African-Americans. Weinberger (1966) comments that although these statutes varied from state to state "the

sole racial group (other than White persons) affected by all. . . statutes is the Negro" (p. 160). In addition to prohibition of marriage, the laws also declared all offspring of interracial couples illegitimate and took away their right to receive any property bequeathed by will (Weinberger, 1966).

The Supreme Court: *Loving v. State of Virginia*

By the 1960's most of the states had repealed their anti-miscegenation laws. By 1966 the states that still practiced the anti-miscegenation laws were all the Southern states. The states which had repealed the laws "have done so not to facilitate marriage per se, but rather to eliminate laws which may represent infringement of the individual's civil rights, his [sic] social equality, or his [sic] freedom of choice in marriage" (Smith, 1966, p. 170). The period around the 1960s was also additionally significant because of the civil rights movement, which contributed in large part to the stand against the existing anti-miscegenation laws.

After almost a hundred years since the case of Andrew Kinney (above), states such as Virginia still upheld the anti-miscegenation laws. However, these laws came under heavy attack once again with the case of Richard and Mildred Loving. Richard Loving was an Anglo man and his wife, Mildred, was an African-American woman. Both were natives of a small town in Virginia. The couple decided to get married in Washington D.C. instead of Virginia because the anti-miscegenation laws were in affect in Virginia. After getting married they returned to their home state, only to be arrested within a matter of months and sentenced to one year in jail. This sentence was suspended on the condition that the Lovings leave the state and not return to the state or county together for the next 25 years. After less than 10 years, the Lovings decided to take a stand against

these laws. They appealed against these laws and through a long legal process, finally procured justice in the U.S. Supreme Court (Pascoe, 1999). *Loving v. State of Virginia* was a landmark case in the history of interracial relationships (Wallenstein, 1995). The year 1967 marked the end of the anti-miscegenation laws in all states. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that anti-miscegenation laws were unconstitutional because they violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (Davidson, 1992).

Incidence in cases of intermarriage almost doubled after the 1967 Supreme Court ruling. Monahan (1976) conducted a study that examined the rate of intermarriages in 35 states between the years of 1963 and 1970. This study revealed that between the years of 1963-1966, 1.4% of the total marriages were mixed. However between the years of 1967-1970, the proportion of mixed marriages catapulted to 2.6%. In addition, the most dramatic rise in mixed marriages was seen in the Southern states, where anti-miscegenation laws were still in effect till 1967. However, it is important to note that the largest proportion of intermarriages in the United States at this time were between Anglo-Americans with other races rather than with African-Americans.

The Immigrant Experience

There is a vast accumulation of research regarding the historical context of intermarriage and discrimination against African-Americans in the U.S. However, little research has been conducted in order to examine the anti-miscegenation laws in relation to the different immigrant groups in the United States. By the turn of the twentieth century, anti-miscegenation laws, that had originally prohibited Anglo-Americans from marrying African-Americans or American-Indians, now incorporated a larger group of people (Pascoe, 1999). In 1880, California modified its anti-miscegenation laws to

prohibit legal marriage from occurring between an Anglo-American individual and "a Negro, Mulatto, or Mongolian" (Kitano, et al., 1998). Once again, this law was extended to include the Asian immigrant group as a way of maintaining White economic and political power. It is speculated that the application of the anti-miscegenation laws in California was a direct result of an economic decline in California, where Chinese immigrants were blamed for the lack of jobs (Frankenberg, 1993). The anti-miscegenation laws were then also extended to include all the Hispanic immigrants coming into California during the 1800s.

It is crucial to acknowledge that although the different racial groups that existed in the United States often shared the common experience of racial discrimination, the history of these groups was different, thus creating differing contexts for their discrimination (Kitano et al., 1984). There are two important factors to examine while studying racism encountered by various immigrant groups in the U.S. These two factors are internal and external factors, each of which are unique to each specific ethnic and racial group. Factors that are internal to the group include, but are not limited to, cultural characteristics, the historical context of the group's migration, and the country of origin in relation to the international context. On the other hand, external factors of the group include the political, sociocultural, and economic context of the United States during the time of immigration (Young & Takeuchi, 1998).

Kitano et al. (1984) examine the historical circumstances of discrimination for the Asian immigrant group. However, even within this larger category, one finds significant differences in experiences and events. What follows is an examination of some immigrant groups that were affected by the anti-miscegenation laws.

The first wave of Chinese immigrants arriving in the United States between 1850 and 1882 marked the beginning of Asian immigration to the United States. One of the most damaging immigration laws passed for the Chinese was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited all Chinese immigration till 1943. This Act made the Chinese the first immigrant group to be legally barred from the United States (Young & Takeuchi, 1998). Because the majority of the Chinese immigrants at this time were male, the Exclusion act resulted in extremely high male to female ratios among this immigrant group. This act was finally repealed in 1943 as a result of the United States - Chinese alliance during World War II. The Chinese were also the first group of immigrants to be subjected to the anti-miscegenation laws when they were extended in California (Frankenberg, 1999). The most recent Immigration Act of 1965 has resulted in higher number of Chinese women immigrating to the U.S. The higher number of Chinese women has also been attributed to the pattern of intermarriage between U.S. males going to Taiwan or Hong Kong in search of a mate.

The first immigration period for the Japanese was between 1890 and 1924. Like the Chinese, Japanese immigration was also affected by the 1907 Gentleman's Agreement, which limited Japanese immigration. Japanese immigrants were once again included in the anti-miscegenation laws around this time. During World War II, thousands of Japanese-Americans faced large-scale discrimination purely because of their race and ethnicity. Approximately, 100,000 Japanese-Americans were relocated and imprisoned in concentration camps (Young & Takeuchi, 1998). It was not until 1952, that the Japanese were allowed unrestricted entry into the U.S. Once again, as in the case of the Chinese, the new influx of immigrants was greatly disproportionate with Japanese

women outnumbering Japanese men. World War II and the subsequent American occupation of Japan led to a staggeringly large number of interracial marriages between American men and Japanese women and the immigration of these "war brides" to the U.S. (Lee & Yamanaka, 1990).

The history of the Filipino immigrants is the most unique among all the Asian groups. As a result of the Spanish-American war of 1898, Filipinos were considered American nationals and therefore excluded from all immigration laws until 1934. Filipinos were also excluded from all anti-miscegenation law till 1933, when the law was amended to include individuals from the "Malay" (the name given to Filipinos at the time) race (Frankenberg, 1993). However, before this time, this group, comprising mostly of Filipino single men was allowed to marry interracially. Statistics indicate that Filipino men, during this period of time had an intermarriage rate of 70.1% (Kitano, et al., 1998).

In summary, it seems that a majority of Asian immigration started in the late 1800s with a large influx of Asian men. During this time anti-miscegenation laws applied to these Asian immigrant groups in many states. However, these laws did not exist in most U.S. states when the second wave of immigration began in the mid-20th century. During this period of immigration, the majority of Asian immigrants were women and a large percent of these women were "war brides" or "picture brides" who were married to American men (Kitano et al., 1984)

One cannot fully comprehend the immigrant experience without discussing the unique experiences of the Latino immigrants. Unfortunately, there is paucity in research regarding the impact on the Latino immigrants during the period of the anti-

miscegenation laws. Furthermore, there is little or no research regarding the unique experiences of the different groups that belong under the umbrella term "Latino." The only exception to this trend is the Mexican immigrant group. This may be because historically and currently, Mexican Americans make up the largest number of Latinos in the United States (Fernandez, 1992). Many authors have attempted to describe the experiences of the Mexican immigrants in the United States.

Historically, many regions in the United States were originally part of Mexico. These regions included areas in California, Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico. As a result of the Mexican war, these regions became a part of the U.S. Consequently, the majority of the Mexicans in this area chose to continue residing in the region. Through the years, these once native Mexicans became a minority with little economic, political, or social power. This was especially true in California (Jiobu, 1988).

Historical patterns of intermarriage between Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans seem to be very similar to those patterns between American-Indians and Anglo-Americans. During the era of the Mexican aristocracy, many Anglo settlers married daughters of prominent Mexican aristocrats in order to enhance their social and economic status (Murguia, 1982). Through marriage, many Anglo settlers were able to trade and establish their businesses along with obtaining land.

As a result of the transference of power from the Mexican aristocrats to the Anglo-Americans, the Mexican population was transformed into the immigrant laborer class. Most Mexican immigrants worked in the farms or on the railroad. Ironically, despite living in a land that once was theirs, the Mexicans in the United States were ultimately

treated as foreigners and were subject to many immigration and labor laws along with the anti-miscegenation laws in various states (Jiobu, 1988).

Myths Surrounding Interracial Relationships

Even though the anti-miscegenation laws were repealed in 1967, the sentiment against interracial unions is still strong and is often evident in the academic literature on interracial relationships. Foeman and Nance (1999) note that much of the theory on interracial relationships was developed during the period of the 1960s and 70s. In addition, most of these theories focused on unions between African-Americans and Anglo-Americans. Therefore, the emerging conclusions focused primarily on these two racial groups. Foeman and Nance (1999) identify five general areas of psychological mythology that surrounded Black-White interracial couples during this period. These five areas were: "(a) Black sexual acting out, (b) Black status seeking, and (c) White neurotic acting out. The fourth area relates to negative genetic outcomes of interracial coupling, and the fifth addresses the psychological shortcomings of interracial children" (p. 2).

Prior theories concerned with interracial relationships were often based on individual cases or extremely limited samples. There are numerous theories regarding interracial relationships that were originally promoted by psychiatrists. These "theories" were a result of their work with clients who were involved in interracial relationships (Lehrman, 1967). Therefore, these earlier theories were derived from an extremely small sample of subjects who may not have accurately represented individuals in interracial relationships (for examples, see Beigel, 1966; Brayboy, 1966; Lehrman, 1967).

Most of these early theorists examined interracial relationships through the popular lens of psychodynamic theory. A majority of these theories concluded that individuals

involved in these relationships were "acting out" some form of psychopathology. Some of the psychological factors that were often attributed to these individuals included "an unresolved oedipal complex . . .hostility as a result of disappointment of unconscious incestuous love impulses, often accompanied by masochism . . . narcissism, exhibitionism...counterphobic and fetishistic attitudes and choices which defend against castration anxiety" (Lehrman, 1967, pp. 80-81).

Furthermore, earlier theories were often speculative and more anecdotal than theoretical. An example of such speculation is provided in the views of an African-American psychiatrist who perceived interracial relationships as "arenas for hostility, control, and revenge" (Porterfield, 1982, p. 22). Another researcher discussed the deep-seated psychopathology of individuals in interracial unions.

Like other forms of psychopathology it is determined by the nature of the early mothering relationship, childhood experience and later the influence of the culture and society. Persons manifesting this type of behavior are not prone to introspection and often "act out" their conflicts rather than trying to work them through by self-understanding. . . . The pattern which I am describing is provoked by the irrational authority of public taboo and discriminatory laws. An interracial sexual situation occurring in this country at this time offers a unique opportunity for acting-out many neurotic complexes and resulting in just such behavior. The psychological mechanism involved is simply that all behavior is motivated by unconscious factors and not determined by chance. The sex act may have little or nothing to do with tenderness, love, or even lust but instead may, for instance, become an arena

for expressing negative feelings such as contempt, revenge or irrational guilt

(Brayboy, 1966, p. 179).

Thus, interracial sexuality was perceived by this and other authors as an expression of

one's neurosis.

Other "motivating" factors to interracial relationships include a low self-esteem,

feelings of guilt, and inferiority (Kitano, et al., 1998). Although, these myths and

theories were mostly in relation to interracial relationships between African-Americans

and Anglo-Americans, they help the reader in providing some insight into perceptions of

interracial relationships between Anglo-American and members of other minority groups.

These areas of mythology still exist, to some degree, in present society (Solsberry,

1994). However, the opposition to interracial relationships and marriage is less overt and

more sophisticated in the present times. Some of these more sophisticated arguments

include the belief that interracially married individuals have a desire to project more

liberal views about race relations than others around them (Porterfield, 1982). Another

very modern argument against interracial relationships states that the children from these

unions are "doomed" to a life of depression and unhappiness due to a constant struggle

between their two cultures (Comaz-Diaz & Greene, 1994a; Wehrley et al., 1999). Other

important motivations for interracial relationships have included racial self-hatred and an

obsession with the exotic (Wehrly, et. al, 1999). Foeman and Nance (1999) argue that

often researchers have promoted these negative stereotypes by selecting only those

interracial couples that display some form or degree of instability in their relationship.

Other "portraits" of individuals in interracial relationships include the belief that

these individuals are rebellious toward their families and society as a whole, and are

confused, insecure, and self-hating (Aldridge, 1978). In addition, some researchers have

also proposed that interracial dating and marriage are primarily sexual in nature and that

the partners are sexually curious about each other instead of valuing each other for factors

influencing partners in same-race relationships (Davidson, 1992). These sexual

stereotypes have been perpetuated by the media in movies such as "Jungle Fever" where

the affair between a married African-American man and his White secretary is perceived

by others as interracial sexual curiosity (Milan & Keiley, 2000).

Prominent Factors Contributing to Stress in Interracial Relationships

Over the years, research has revealed that the factors for partner choice in

interracial relationships are very similar to factors in intraracial relationships (Fujino,

1997; Lewis et al., 1997; Mok, 1999; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). One of the most common

reasons cited for entering a relationship - both interracial and intraracial- is that the

partners were in love (Fujino, 1997). Other reasons include interpersonal attraction and a

similarity of interests (Dianton, 1999; Lewis et al., 1997; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). The

21 couples that Rosenblatt et al. (1995) talked with in their study perceived their

relationship as "ordinary" and very similar to other intraracial relationships.

> Most [couples] volunteered that the race of their partner made no difference to
>
> them. Most also said that they saw themselves as like other couples in dealing
>
> with the ordinary challenges and opportunities of a couple relationship, in
>
> working toward conventional goals, and in struggling with the everyday issues
>
> of making a living and maintaining a household. . . . Many emphasized that
>
> they were in their relationship because of love, companionship, compatibility,

and other positive aspects of relationship that anyone might want, not because the relationship was interracial (pp. 24-25).

However, these couples perceived tensions from sources that were external to the relationship. Oftentimes, these perceptions of others cause the interracial couple to experience special issues and circumstances that are not necessarily experienced by intraracial couples.

Erin Burnette (1995) argues in her article in the *APA Monitor* of the American Psychological Association that "some mixed-race couples actually have stronger relationships as a result of the unique experiences they endure" (p. 1). She lists family alienation, societal discrimination, cultural differences, and language barriers as some of the unique challenges faced by interracial couples. She further continues to argue that "because they have to discuss and endure such painful realities as racism and conflict with extended family members and others, they may have an easier time negotiating the day-to-day struggles of any marriage" (p. 1).

Cerroni-Long (1984) divides the various stress factors in intermarriages into three broad categories: personal, external, and random factors. Personal factors or stressors occur between the two partners and affect the dynamics of their relationship. Some of these factors in intermarriages may include the cultural differences between partners, sense of alienation and isolation from one's background, including friends and family, and difficulty in interpersonal communication. Another crucial stress factor in this category may be an unbalanced distribution of external stress between the partners where one partner may be a marginalized member in society (e.g. woman, ethnic, or racial minority).

External factors are defined as "stress deriving from the interaction between spouses and outsiders" (Cerroni-Long, 1984, p. 41). These factors include prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination of the couple by society at large, disapproval and/or lack of support from family and friends, hostile attitudes towards children of the couple, and "vicarious suffering through offspring's problems of adjustment in the community" (p. 41).

Finally, random factors are "unforeseeable personal or historical events or from processes of socio-cultural changes" (p. 41), and may include events that directly affect the status of the group the one or both of the spouses may belong to (e.g. civil rights movement, women's movement etc.)

Prejudice

Prejudice is the most severe stressor experienced by interracial couples. Rosenblatt et al. (1995) describe prejudice toward interracial couples as involving "beliefs that exist prior to knowing the couple, that are adverse to the couple, and that might lead to action directed at the couple. The prejudicial belief might be that mixed-race relationships are immoral or vulgar" (p. 3). Till the latter half of the 20th century, prejudice toward interracial couples was often very overt and manifested itself in the form of various laws that declared interracial marriages illegal, or declared children of interracial couples as illegitimate. Violence toward interracial couples was an extreme form of prejudice that was often reported in earlier research (Smith, 1966).

In recent years, acts of prejudice towards interracial relationships have taken on a more subtle quality. Stereotypes regarding interracial couples are prevalent in society. These stereotypes range anywhere from ideas about sexuality of an individual based on

their race to the idea that the interracial relationship is helping one individual gain social status. Other forms of prejudice toward interracial couples include staring at the interracial couples. Gaines and Ickes (1997) write:

> On any given day, virtually all interracial pairs - whether same-sex or mixed-sex, romantic or platonic-may be subjected to a variety of stares, disapproving murmurs. . . . Such unrestrained reactions by outsiders serve as constant reminders to insiders that, regardless of their implicit or explicit commitment to each other, outsiders often take it upon themselves to challenge that commitment (p. 216).

Family

Another major source of stress for interracial couples is reported as being lack of support from the families of the partners. This negative response from the family can often be a result of racism, discrimination, and stereotyping. Often parents are against their child's intermarriage due to a fear that their child will not be treated fairly in the relationship. Many families also stress the negative impact of the intermarriage on the children from these marriages. They argue that interracial children will suffer from identity problems. However, research disputes this fact and indicates that interracial children are as well adjusted as children of intraracial relationships (Burnette, 1995, p. 3).

Research in the area of family support has revealed that in general there is a larger amount of family opposition in Anglo families than African-American families. Furthermore, there tends to be less support by families of women in interracial relationships rather than the families of the males in the relationship (Erickson, 1987; Porterfield, 1982; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). In their study of family support, Lewis and

Yancey (1995) discovered that the immediate family members of the couples were generally supportive of their relationship. However, fathers were perceived to be less supportive than their mothers. Out of the total participants in their study, 12% believed that their family members either rejected their relationship or merely tolerated it. In addition, this study also revealed greater levels of support from African-American and Mexican American families than from the Anglo-American families. The results of the study revealed a large degree of support from family members of all racial backgrounds reflecting the changing attitudes of people about interracial relationships (Lewis & Yancey, 1995; Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

Theories on Interracial Relationships

As with the majority of the interracial relationship literature, theories regarding interracial relationships have also almost exclusively focused on interracial marriages and on African-Anglo relationships (Negy & Snyder, 2000). However many of the fundamental ideas in these theories may be applied at times to explain the dynamics within other types of interracial couples.

Theories that have examined the reasons for intermarriage can be roughly organized into four categories (Fu & Heaton, 2000). The first category examines the demographic characteristics (relative group size, sex ratio, and marriage market) of a group that can lead to intermarriage. This theory has been used to show the strong inverse relationship between relative group size and intermarriage (Kalmijn, 1993). The smaller the proportion of a group, the greater the likelihood of intermarriage between groups. This example is true for the Asian-American community, which has one of the highest percentages of intermarriage rates in the United States. Interethnic dating in particular is

prevalent among younger Asian-American generations as they gradually move away from regions with a high Asian population (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). Studies on Asian-American intermarriage also indicate that there is a larger number of intermarried Asian-Americans who live away from the two states that have the largest Asian populations – California and Hawaii (Lee & Yamanaka, 1990).

Two concepts are imperative for discussion under this initial category of theories. The first concept has to do with the physical distance or propinquity between groups. Propinquity between racial and ethnic groups can serve to either increase or decrease interactions between individuals belonging to different groups. If the physical distance between groups is smaller, there will be an increase in interactions between groups. However, if propinquity is very large, the number of interactions will be greatly reduced. Empirical studies have revealed that propinquity can also lead to attraction between groups (Fujino, 1997). Therefore, with propinquity, individuals from diverse groups have an opportunity for increased interactions and attraction, which can ultimately lead to a greater number of intergroup relationships. The idea of propinquity also emerges in some other theories. One of these theories will be described in detail in the latter part of this section.

The second important concept to remember is acculturation. Mok (1999) defines acculturation as "change occurring as a result of continuous contact between cultural groups" (p. 105). Through the process of acculturation, a member of a minority group integrates into the society of the dominant group. Intermarriage, according to this theory, should then be the ultimate symbol of acculturation into the majority group (Fujino, 1997). Studies conducted on intermarriage rates among the Asian-American population

reveal a greater number of Asian-American women intermarrying than Asian-American men (Kitano et al., 1984; Lee & Yamanaka, 1990; Sung, 1990). Similarly, research suggests that Asian-American women tend to acculturate at a faster rate than Asian-American men do (Mok, 1999). Therefore, the concept of acculturation may in part explain the reasons for the higher rates of intermarriage among Asian women.

The second category of theories examines the ways in which the social and political ideas of a society influence the rate of intermarriage (Fu & Heaton, 2000). These theories have carefully studied changes that have taken place in society and that have directly affected the rates in intermarriage. Some of these important social and political factors include the *Loving v. Virginia* case that challenged and ultimately helped eradicate the anti-miscegenation laws, the Civil Rights movement (Porterfield, 1982), the women's movement, and the gay rights movements. All these movements and events are important because they not only challenged existing laws and ideas, but were also responsible for bringing about legislative change that helped empower marginalized members of society (Wehrly et al., 1999).

There are other theories that examine intermarriage in relation to a third perspective. These theories perceive intermarriage as a result of different cultural groups sharing important values and beliefs. Fu and Heaton (2000) remark, "It seems that every ethnic group has developed a gradient of preferences about who is a better choice in an outmarriage. This hierarchy is based on many factors, ranging from skin color to cultural compatibility, but similar criteria tend to be emphasized by all ethnic groups" (p. 2). Fujino (1997) also addresses this perspective and labels this as the similarity theory where "birds of a feather flock together." Some studies have revealed evidence in favor

of this argument. For example, in the case of Asian-American interethnic marriages, researchers have discovered that a large percentage of outmarriages among Asian-Americans were interethnic rather than interracial (Kitano et al., 1984).

Finally, the fourth category of theories examines the socioeconomic exchange that takes place as a result of outmarriage (Fu & Heaton, 2000). The status exchange theory is the most prominent theory belonging to this final category. This theory is presented in more detail in the following section. There are also additional theories presented below that cannot be classified under any of the four categories but are nevertheless crucial regarding interracial relationships.

Status Exchange Theory

The status exchange theory primarily attempts to explain the reasons for relationships between African-Americans and Anglo-Americans (for exception, see Fu & Heaton, 2000). This theory proposes that all individuals strive to maximize their gains and minimize their losses in all of their relationships including marriage (Fu & Heaton, 2000). In every relationship, individuals seek to find those that possess desirable resources that can be procured in exchange for resources that belong to the individual (Fujino, 1997). Because Anglo-Americans are regarded as the dominant group in North American society, they possess a higher racial status than all minority groups. Therefore, individuals belonging to a "lower" racial status may discover an "unbalanced" set of resources and seek out a mate that will balance out these resources in exchange for other important characteristics that they might possess. Due to this reason, Anglo women in interracial relationships with African-American men are assumed to have "traded" their high racial status for a higher economic status provided by the more educated and

prosperous African-American male (Davidson, 1992; Davis, 1941; Foeman & Nance, 1999; Kalmijn, 1993; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). Thus, according to this theory the process of marriage between the races becomes a "bargaining table" where some form of exchange is necessary (Erickson, 1987). These assumptions from the status exchange theory have become known as the hypergamy perspective. Hypergamy is defined as the process whereby an individual belonging to the minority group moves upward in the social structure.

The hypergamy perspective has also pervaded popular media. Brunson (1984) discusses the images of male-female interracial relationships in the movies. He argues that films tend to reinforce many of the prevalent stereotypes and negative beliefs about interracial relationships. There are especially numerous images of African-American and Anglo-American relationships that have reinforced the hypergamy perspective. A popular image of interracial relationships that stands out in the media is Spike Lee's movie, "Jungle Fever," where an African-American man has an affair with his Anglo-American secretary. Not only does the movie portray the affair as a result of sexual curiosity between the two individuals, but it also helps in strengthening the hypergamy perspective. The movie portrays the imbalance in resources between these two people with the African-American male possessing a higher educational, economic, and occupational status but a lower racial status. On the other hand, the Anglo female belongs to a higher racial status but places lower in the educational, economic, and occupational hierarchy (Milan & Keiley, 2000).

In the television show, "The Jeffersons," one sees another interracial couple. In this show, the husband, Tom, is White and is portrayed as being stupid while his African-

American wife Helen is portrayed as intelligent, attractive, and successful. In both cases, the images portrayed are that of couples where the racially superior individual lacks certain resources that the racially inferior partner possesses. Researchers also argue that the media images repeatedly suggest that many African-American athletes and celebrities who are financially successful also tend to be married to a larger number of White women (Milan & Keiley, 2000).

Though the hypergamy perspective appears to provide some insight into reasons for intermarriage, it also helps to promote some negative conclusions. It casts minority members as opportunistic and preoccupied with attaining majority privileges (Bradshaw, 1994). There are additional drawbacks to this perspective. One important problem with this perspective is that it fails to explain the motivations behind relationships between smart, successful Anglo (who are also racially superior) and African-American women.

Filter Theory

Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan (1995) argue that most research in the area of intergroup relations has not been "theory-driven." Instead, conclusions about intergroup relations have been driven by larger theoretical constructs.

One example of this is the filter theory proposed by Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) as a result of their work with college couples who were contemplating marriage. The theory is based on the assumption that individuals choose their partner based on a number of "filtering factors" that may be either external or internal. The process of mate selection is typically divided into two stages. In the early stage of the relationship, social status variables such as class, religion, and education are predominantly operating. After this early stage, consensus on values becomes a basis for further establishing the relationship

(Kerckhoff & Davis, 1962; Gaines & Ickes, 1997). In addition, couples may also emphasize other internal factors at this stage such as the ability to show affection and love to problem-solving skills, and sharing similar interests. Therefore, according to the filter theory, the process of mate selection is not based on simply finding one desirable characteristic in a potential mate. Rather, it is a procedure that requires a careful appraisal of oneself and one's potential mate.

In relation to interracial relationships, the filter theory allows for the possibility that "partners will choose each other on the basis of internal as well as external characteristics other than race" (Gaines & Ickes, 1997, p. 214). Thus, this theory, when applied to interracial relationships, can help identify if and when race was considered as a factor in mate selection and what importance was placed on this characteristic in relation to other important characteristics that are either internal or external. This theory is significant because it disputes the common myth surrounding interracial relationships, in asserting that partners in these relationships choose each other purely due to the novelty of dating or marrying someone from another racial background. Therefore, this theory is useful because it moves away from portraying interracial relationships as deviant and instead focuses on the factors that are important for all intimate relationships.

Contact Hypothesis

While a number of these perspectives portray interracial couples as deviant or abnormal, there are some theories that are unbiased in their view of interracial relationships. For example, one early theoretical perspective on interracial relationships is Allport's contact hypothesis. The contact hypothesis was constructed in order to examine different kinds of interracial relationships between African-Americans and Anglo-

Americans. Allport (1954/1979) proposed that as the economic, educational, social, and political barriers between African-Americans and Anglo-Americans are torn down to give way to more integration between the groups, there will also be a corresponding decrease in the social distance between the two groups. This decrease in social distance will lead to an increase in social interaction between members of the two groups. Ultimately, these interactions will give rise to more interracial relationships. Although Allport's contact hypothesis primarily focused of African-American and Anglo-American relationships, it can be used in order to explain the increase in Asian-Anglo and Latino-Anglo relationships in the recent years (Gaines & Ickes, 1997). In addition, this theory incorporates the concept of propinquity, which was discussed earlier in the section.

Interracial Relationship Development

In recent years, researchers have labored extensively to study and describe interracial relationships from a strengths based perspective. Emphasis is placed on examining the ways these relationships are functional and the successful ways couples maintain and enhance their relationships (Foeman & Nance, 1999). A number of researchers have proposed that interracial couples experience a unique process of relationship development in addition to the development they experience as part of being in a relationship. Foeman and Nance (1999) propose a model that highlights the stages of development that may be encountered by couples in interracial relationships. These authors divide relationship development into four stages: racial awareness, coping with social definitions of race, identity emergence, and maintenance. The first two stages of this model are prevalent in the general literature on relationship development for interracial couples. However, the last two stages are unique in their emphasis on the

strengths based perspective. Additionally, these later stages convey a sense of positive and strong transformation for the interracial couple as a result of successfully negotiating through the first two stages.

During the first stage, the partners begin getting acquainted with the similarities and differences between each other. They also begin to learn some of the unique qualities of their partner and their general way of being in the world. Couples who are successful at this stage learn to operate in the world with four parallel perspectives - a perspective of their own, their partner's perspective, their racial group's perspectives, and the perspectives of their partner's racial group. One of the most important tasks for the couple at this stage is the ability to communicate in order to address the issues that they encounter. Successful communication at this early stage creates a strong foundation of trust and communication for the couple.

Couples often find themselves forced into the second phase of relationship development. This is due to stress they experience from external sources such as family, friends, and society as a whole. Some typical stressors confronted by couples include opposition from family and friends, predictions of negative outcomes for the couple, and open challenges to choices that have been made by the partners. Therefore, in order to respond to these external pressures, it is not unusual for the couple to develop a deeper sense of commitment and closeness at an earlier stage than they had anticipated.

> During the coping stage [the second stage], the couple develops proactive and
> reactive strategies. The couple learns to insulate itself when possible from
> people and situations that are potentially harmful. For example, the couple
> may choose not to attend a family reunion. They will also learn to negotiate

potentially threatening situations when necessary. To appease a parent, one

partner might agree to attend a family reunion without the other-race

companion. As the couple begins to become proficient in the process of

insulation and negotiation, they begin to work together to establish sets of

characteristic responses to a variety of situations. They select public places

that are more diverse and welcoming, or learn to respond to questions about

their group loyalty in a de-escalating or curtailing manner (Foeman, & Nance,

1999, pp. 7-8).

During the third stage, the couple begins the process of finding a unique definition

for their relationship. "Interracial couples may choose to see themselves as exceptional

or different but, ultimately, as existing in their own right and on their own terms rather

than as an inadequate subset of what is deemed desirable by others" (p. 9).

Finally, during the fourth stage the couple seems to have successfully found a

definition for themselves, their relationship, and their families. They may often become

advocates and supporters of other "inadequate subsets" of relationships in society.

The developers of this model stress that the stages are not rigid and couples may

revisit each stage from time to time. In addition, it is also possible for partners in the

same relationship to be in different stages from one another. This model can be applied

to all types of interracial couples. Although broad and general, this model of interracial

development provides an important foundation for future models of development.

Theories on Multiracial Children

The number of multiracial individuals in the U.S. has more than doubled in recent

years. According to the 1990 U.S. Census, there are approximately one million biracial

children in the U.S. (Milan & Keiley, 2000). However, researchers feel that these statistics may still be underestimating the actual number of individuals belonging to two or more different racial backgrounds (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). Researchers have also used a variety of words to describe children of interracial relationships. Two of these terms are "biracial," which implies the combination of two racial backgrounds, and "multiracial," which implies the integration of two or more racial backgrounds. The present study will employ the term, "multiracial" in the discussion of children whose parents belong to two or more different racial backgrounds.

Despite the dramatic increase in the multiracial population, little research has been conducted to study the unique aspects faced by multiracial individuals and families (Milan & Keiley, 2000). Past research has examined these individuals through a lens of negative and narrow myths and stereotypes, highlighting dysfunctionality through questionable and invalid research methods (Wehrly et al., 1999). Similar to theories on interracial marriages, psychological theories regarding multiracial individuals are based on case studies of individuals in therapy that fail to represent the multiracial community in general. In addition, most of these earlier theories were derived in an anti-miscegenistic context (Root, 1994).

Past researchers have often argued their position against interracial relationships by addressing the issue of children of interracial couples (Wehrly et. al, 1999). Some descriptors used for multiracial children include "incomplete", not belonging to either racial group, or psychologically unstable (Erikson, 1987; Foeman & Nance, 1999). These negative views and myths have not only prevented individuals from intermarrying but have also been a main reason why so many interracial couples have been childless

(Erickson, 1987). A number of researchers have emphatically pointed out the "terrible fate" that awaits multiracial children. Gordon (1964) asserts that most children of intermarriage experience life accompanied by feelings of emotional instability and insecurity, confusion, guilt and maybe even resentment towards their parents. He further argues that these children may express these feelings of insecurity by being overly sensitive, irritable, hostile, anxious, and overly suspicious of others.

> If a child cannot come to terms with the social values of his parents and his
> environment his chanced of unhappiness and insecurity are increased. Mixed
> marriages where each parent represents a distinctive way of life is likely to
> induce problems involving the ego of the child, who may react in a variety of
> ways that both the parents and society may regard as negative. In spite of that,
> parents may insist that, insofar as they are concerned, their marriage is both
> happy and successful. . . . Whether people, however much they love each
> other, have a moral right to create such a problem for a child is, of course,
> debatable. It is my belief that interracially intermarried parents are committing
> a grave offense against their children that is far more serious and even
> dangerous to their welfare than they realize (Gordon, 1964, p. 323, 334).

Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) outline other prevailing myths and stereotypes regarding multiracial individuals in our society. Some of these myths originate as far back as the period of slavery. During this time, interracial relationships were considered an act of "racial pollution" and children born in these relationships were given labels such as "mulatto" (half mule) and were considered a half-breed and therefore officially given the status of a marginalized population. This has resulted in the stereotype of the "tragic

mulatto" that now encompasses all multiracial children across all racial backgrounds. This stereotype perceives multiracial individuals as being rejected across all racial groups and therefore marginalized in society.

Children of interracial couples are placed in a unique situation from a very young age because they are repeatedly faced with the question of their racial identity. They are innately forced to resolve the "confusion" that is a result of the different cultural backgrounds of their parents (McGoldrick, Preto, Hines, & Lee, 1991). Therefore, these children not only have to face normal developmental milestones, but in addition must also deal with the pressure to define their self in terms of one race (Diller, 1999; Root, 1994; Spickard, 1992). This pressure originates partly from the mulatto myth that a child born of one White parent and one parent from another racial group must define itself as belonging to the racial group of the non-White parent. This societal rule can have severe negative impact on multiracial children who may experience a lack of power and control as a result of not having a choice in defining themselves (Kerwin & Ponterotto 1995). In addition, society's view of race as simplistic and rigid has led to various forms of oppression such as alienation, marginalization, and invisibility for multiracial individuals (Root, 1994).

Another myth surrounding multiracial individuals involves the belief that these individuals do not want to discuss their racial identity under any circumstances. In fact, research indicates that most of these individuals do not mind inquiries regarding their racial heritage as long as these questions are asked in a nonjudgmental manner. In addition, some research found that Japanese-White biracial youths felt scrutinized when

questioned about their racial backgrounds while Black-White youths often perceived these questions as signs of acceptance and support from others (Milan & Reiley, 2000).

Other stereotypes include perceiving multiracial individuals as "sexually immoral" (similar to interracial couples) and psychologically unstable and abnormal (Wehrly et al., 1999). Physical stereotypes perceive multiracial women as exotic and sexually mysterious (Root, 1994) and both genders of multiracial individuals are perceived as beautiful and handsome.

Current research on multiracial children and individuals has dedicated itself in studying these individuals within the context of their families, societies, and other unique aspects. Researchers have also attempted to reframe the experiences of these children from the negative stereotypes to more strengths based perspectives. Diller (1999) remarks, "psychologically, they [multiracial children] are unique entities. They are not merely reflections of their two or more sides but rather unique integrations of them" (p. 88). He highlights some of the strengths found in multiracial children. One of the strengths found in these children is the early development of awareness around race and racial differences due to their exposure to these issues within their own families. While this awareness can be noticed in multiracial children as early as ages three and four, it is developed much later in monoracial (where both parents belong to the same racial category and background) children (Diller, 1999).

Developmental issues pertaining to multiracial children have been the focus of some recent research. The issue of identity is especially controversial for children belonging to two or more racial backgrounds. Due to this reason, multiracial children are forced to start exploring their identity as early as when they enter school, while parents

are compelled to contemplate on this issue before the birth of their children. Thus,

identity development of the multiracial child can begin even before their birth. In

addition, success with developmental tasks for multiracial children can be further

complicated due to the racism they may encounter (Wehrly et al., 1999). This dilemma is

especially real during adolescence. Adolescence itself is an extremely stressful period in

a young person's life and can be especially challenging for the multiracial teenager

(Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). For the multiracial youth race becomes a critical issue in

defining their identity. They may experience an enormous sense of isolation from peers

and parents because of their belief that no one understands them (Root, 1998a).

Despite the racism and discrimination that multiracial children may experience,

they also have the potential to develop many unique abilities. A study conducted on the

quality of social adjustment in multiracial youth revealed that these individuals did not

experience any greater difficulties in social adjustment that their monoracial peers. In

addition, the multiracial youth in the study reported similar levels of peer relations and

family support than the monoracial individuals. Finally, there were no significant

differences in reports of life stress and psychological distress between the two groups

(Cauce, Hiraga, Mason, Aguilar, Ordonez, & Gonzales, 1992). One important lesson

that multiracial children learn is to successfully relate to different kinds of people and

adjust to new situations at a very young age (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Multiracial

children can also find ways to develop a healthy integrated racial identity if they helped

in this process by their parents and an open learning environment.

In recent years, many researchers have developed models of identity development

for multiracial individuals. A majority of these models have been concerned with

multiracial children and adolescents. Therefore, there seems to be a need to study

identity in the context of future life cycles beyond adolescence (Root, 1994). Kerwin and

Ponterotto (1995) have developed a model of biracial identity development. This model

presents an integrated framework of examining the process of identity development for

multiracial individuals throughout the course of their lives. This model comprises of six

stages. These stages are preschool, entry to school, preadolescence, adolescence,

college/young adulthood, and adulthood.

During the preschool stage, the multiracial child's racial awareness is typically

based on physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, etc. Once the child

enters the school milieu, he/she is confronted with questions such as "Who/what are

you"? In order to answer these questions multiracial children start to explore using

various labels in order to describe themselves to others. The success with which the child

will be able to find an appropriate label for her/himself at this point greatly depends on

the openness and acceptance in the family and school environment.

During the preadolescence stage, the child becomes increasingly aware of the

characteristics that are unique to different groups such as language, culture, and religion.

It is typically during this phase that the multiracial child also acquires full awareness that

his/her parents belong to different racial groups. This awareness is directly triggered by a

significant event in the child's life at this time. This event could be an incident where the

child experiences racism or discrimination for the first time. The adolescence stage can

be the most challenging time in the multiracial youth's life. One of the most significant

challenges faced is the pressure from peers to belong to one group and maybe even one

racial group (Root, 1994). This means having to reject one parent's racial group. This

period can also directly bring up racial tensions for the adolescent due to dating choices and issues. Due to society's expectations that one should only date within their own racial group, the multiracial youth may question which racial group would be appropriate to date.

The multiracial individual may experience a change in their racial identity during the college/young adulthood stage when the individual has established a more secure personal identity. Due to this secure identity, the multiracial youth may find her/himself rejecting the expectations of others and accepting their own unique multiracial heritage and starting to find ways of integrating their multiple cultures and backgrounds. During this time, the multiracial individual may also be able to recognize both the advantages and the disadvantages of being multiracial. Finally, the adulthood stage is marked by a continuing integration of the multiple racial and cultural heritages in one's family. If the earlier stages were successfully resolved, the individual will continue to be open to experiences in new cultures and people from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).

Jacobs (1992) also explored identity development in multiracial children ages three-eight. Although the focus of this research was on children with one Anglo-American and one African-American parent, many of the findings may be relevant to the larger group of multiracial individuals. The research examined these children at play with different colored dolls (for a detailed description see Jacobs, 1992). The results of this study revealed that young multiracial children progress through three distinct stages of identity development. Stage I is called the pre-color constancy stage where the child has not attained color constancy. During this stage, children are able to accurately identify their

skin color. In addition they explore color through their play. During the second stage or the post-color constancy stage, children begin to gain awareness that their skin color is fixed and unchangeable. During this time the multiracial child begins to develop his/her own racial concept with the help of parents. Ambivalence toward one parent's skin color is a central task at this stage. This ambivalence is a necessary developmental milestone for the child and is a result of the child's attempts at understanding his/her racial classification. Finally, in the final stage, the child begins to understand and make a distinction between skin color and racial group membership. The child gains awareness that racial classification is not just determined by skin color only (Jacobs, 1992; Root, 1994).

Counseling Interracial Couples and Families

Mental health professionals must access and develop their cross-cultural counseling skills whenever they encounter a client belonging to a different demographic group than the professional (Worrell & Remer, 1992). Due to the increase in multiculturalism in present society, mental health professionals are confronted with the task of reassessing their philosophical and theoretical orientations along with their approaches to helping (Sieber & Cairns, 1991). Therefore, practitioners encountering an interracial couple, multiracial individual or family must operate from a cross-cultural counseling perspective. Effective cross-cultural counseling entails that the practitioner be able to shift his/her therapeutic style in order to merge with the cultural aspects that are part of the client and the client's world (Sue & Sue, 1990). Cross-cultural counseling requires the practitioner to acknowledge and understand that different clients possess different styles of communication and helping styles. Sue and Sue (1990) assert:

As practicing counselors who work with a culturally diverse population, we need to move decisively in educating ourselves as to the differential meanings of nonverbal behavior, and the broader implications for communication styles. We need to realize that proxemics, kinesics, paralanguage, and high-low context factors are important elements of communication; they may be highly culture-bound; and that we should guard against possible misinterpretation in our assessment of culturally different clients (p. 71).

Likewise, practitioners must also examine their own styles of interaction and cultural ways of communication. Experts addressing the issue of counseling multiracial individuals and families agree that one of the primary tasks of mental health professionals is to examine their own attitudes, beliefs, and biases about interracial relationships and multiracial families (Durodoye, 1994; Solsberry, 1994; Sue & Sue, 1990; Wehrly et al., 1999). In order to work with multiracial individuals and families, the mental health professional is often confronted with the task of "navigating" between multiple racial, cultural, ethnic, and religious contexts (Wehrly et al., 1999). It is also essential for mental health professionals to develop and procure a positive sense of their own racial and cultural identity. Wehrly et al. (1999) maintain that this is a crucial step if mental health professionals are to successfully comprehend their clients' racial, cultural and ethnic identities.

In order to be competent in multicultural counseling mental health practitioners must also continually develop their knowledge about multiracial individuals. Practitioners must become aware of the issues experienced by multiracial individuals along with the social, political and cultural implications of being a multiracial individual

in present society. Practitioners working with these individuals have to operate at some level from a social-constructionist perspective in order to perceive the influence of sociocultural factors on the individual and on the presenting issue (Milan & Keiley, 2000). If the practitioner fails to acknowledge the impact of the sociocultural factors, he/she runs the risk of perceiving the multiracial individual or family as pathological or psychologically aberrant.

<u>Counseling Multiracial Individuals</u>

Similar to working with interracial couples, practitioners must also constantly examine their attitudes and ideas regarding multiracial individuals. In addition, practitioners must also attempt to develop an understanding of what it means to be an individual with more than one racial, ethnic, and cultural background (Wehrly et al., 1999). Mental health professionals must also become aware of some of the salient issues that are confronted by multiracial individuals from very early developmental stages.

Some of the primary issues and themes that emerge for multiracial individuals include the issues surrounding uniqueness, which for the multiracial individual may not be positive (Root, 1994). Multiracial individuals are often perceived as different from others because of their failure to fit into the rigid labels and categories formed by society (Milan & Reiley, 2000). In addition, multiracial individuals are constantly faced with questions of their identity based on their physical appearance. Therefore, physical appearance once again sets the multiracial individuals apart from the majority. Due to this uniqueness, these individuals may have been misinterpreted as different and maybe even pathological. This may lead to an absence of connection and a sense of acceptance. Without a sense of belonging and acceptance, it may be challenging for multiracial

children to develop a strong self-esteem and identity during the crucial stages of development. All these different issues may repeatedly interact with one another in manifold ways and may be encountered by these individuals throughout the different stages of their development (Root, 1994).

Interventions and counseling approaches with multiracial clients will vary according to the age of the individual. In working with young children, school counselors must be aware of possible underlying racial or cultural problems in addition to the child's presenting problem. School counselors must also attempt to educate teachers and administrators in cultural sensitivity and the unique challenges encountered by multiracial children. Whenever possible parents and siblings must be encouraged to be a part of the helping process (Wehrly et al., 1999).

Milan and Keiley (2000) propose a narrative family therapy approach in working with biracial youth. This approach is based on a social constructionist philosophy that places emphasis on the sociocultural aspects of the environment that influence an individual. This perspective views every culture possessing a unique and distinct set of narratives that are prominent in the individual narratives of the members of that culture. Narrative family, thus, becomes a collaborative effort between the therapist and client where the client is the "expert" in his/her story, while the therapist's role includes asking meaningful questions of the narrative and facilitate client insight. Through the narrative approach the therapist aid the family in exploration of the prominent issues that are confronted by multiracial individuals. For example, through this approach, the multiracial family and youth in particular are allowed to decide a name for their own classification and identity (Milan & Keiley, 2000).

Other interventions in the narrative family therapy include the making of a cultural genogram by the parents of the biracial youth. Through this genogram, the therapist helps the family understand the different traditions, coping strategies, and stories that have impacted their lives. Similarly, a practitioner working with a multiracial individual, instead of a family can also use a genogram. Wehrly et al. (1999) include the use of a genogram in an approach called the ecological approach. Apart from the genogram, the ecological approach utilizes the ecomap, a map that uses lines and symbols to represent relationships, in order to help individuals explore the meaning of their multiraciality.

Interventions with multiracial families must consider the effect of various factors on the family. The practitioner must also assess factors such as family and couple life cycle, boundaries and parent-child relationships. Therefore, it is essential for mental health professionals to constantly operate both from a systems orientation and a cross-cultural counseling perspective.

Counseling Interracial Couples

Falicov (1995) concludes that the task of the interracial couple is to arrive at a point where they perceive their similarities and differences equally. By gaining a balanced view in the relationship a couple can appropriately deal with their differences and similarities and find ways to integrate and negotiate their cultural preferences.

In order to work with an interracial couple, the mental health professional must facilitate therapeutic change from the client's own worldview and belief system. This initially entails gaining knowledge of the client's worldview and belief system. Therefore, an assessment examining each partner's worldview and cultural context must be conducted during the early stages of therapy (Ibrahim & Schroeder, 1990). This initial

assessment is interactive in that it helps the client in gaining insight about his/her worldview. In addition it also reduces the risk of the practitioner making inaccurate assumptions regarding the client's worldview based on his/her race and ethnicity.

Although the incidence of interracial relationships is increasing, there remains a lack of social support and education (Bradshaw, 1994). Solsberry (1994) defines the role of the mental health practitioner who is working with an interracial couple as "one of education, outreach into the community, and promotion of understanding of the issues faced by these interracial couples in an effort to decrease prejudices and discrimination" (p. 315). It is essential for mental health practitioners to be advocates in helping eradicate prejudice and racism in order to make meaningful connections with their clients in a social and political context. Through this connection, practitioners will gain insight into how these political and social events affect the individual lives of the interracial couple (Wehrly et al., 1999).

It is necessary for the mental health professional to acknowledge that the interracial relationship places both partners, regardless of their race, in a culturally different position than individuals who share each partner's racial background. In addition, the practitioner working with an interracial couple must also help the partners become aware of their own racism and prejudice and how this may affect their partner and their family (Solsberry, 1994). However it is also important to acknowledge that interracial couples experience the same kinds of stressors experienced by intraracial couples (Durodoye, 1994). Thus, it becomes necessary for the mental health professional to address the couple's presenting issues in a manner that is respectful and also appropriate for the couple's needs.

A majority of research on counseling multiracial individuals and families advocates that practitioners assume a strength-based approach to counseling instead of a more problem-focused approach (Watts & Henricksen Jr., 1998). A strengths based intervention may be especially empowering for interracial couples who may have encountered challenges in gaining acceptance of their relationship from family and friends. In order to operate from this perspective, practitioners must gain awareness that interracial couples are attracted to one another for the same reasons as intraracial couples. By emphasizing these similarities, the interracial couple may feel validated and supported by the therapist (Davidson, 1992).

It is also important for the couple to acknowledge the negative myths and stereotypes that are related to interracial couples. The therapist can help the couple examine these myths through a realistic perspective. For example, Davidson (1992) addresses one of the prevalent views about interracial relationships.

> In dealing with issues about sexual curiosity, couples may consider how long-lasting they expect their relationship to be and whether their alleged curiosity is diminishing, leaving the relationship without spark or interest. Sexual preoccupation, or the reduction of one's spouse to the status of a sexual object, is a problem that exists in same-race marriages and, no doubt, in some interracial marriages. As such, it should be dealt with primarily as a relationship dilemma and not as a racial issue (p. 154).

Davidson (1992) also suggests involving family members of the couple. By involving the family clients can determine who owns which part of the problem involving the interracial relationship. Oftentimes, this process reveals the racism and prejudice that

exists within the family members. By discovering the reasons behind the opposition the couple receives reinforcement that their relationship is not abnormal or weak, rather the problem lies in the ideas of the family members.

Ibrahim and Schroeder (1990) propose a developmental, psychoeducational intervention for working with interracial couples. This intervention is multidimensional because it explores the culture of the therapist and the clients along with the interaction of these cultures within the therapeutic setting. In addition, this approach also investigates the effect of culture on the individual developmental stages of each of the partners and the effect of culture on the couple's stages in the family life cycle. The psychoeducational component of this intervention guides the couple in developing skills such as cross-cultural communication, problem solving and decision-making strategies along with enhancing intimacy and trust within the relationship (Ibrahim & Schroeder, 1990).

Another tool to utilize in counseling interracial couples is the interracial couple questionnaire or the ICQ (Watt & Henricksen Jr., 1998). The ICQ attempts to examine both the perceived negative influences and the strengths of the couple. In addition it also helps the couple reflect on the possible solutions and strengths that they may already possess within their relationship. This questionnaire can be used to help the practitioners understand the worldviews of the client. In addition this can be an effective tool to aid the partners gain awareness of each other's worldviews along with their own attitudes toward interracial relationships (Watts & Henricksen Jr., 1998).

In summary, interventions in working with interracial couples must assume a strengths based perspective while attempting to help the couple achieve a balanced view

of both their differences and similarities. Interventions with interracial couples must also examine the stage of the couple in the family life cycle and the unique challenges that exist in that stage for the couple (McGoldrick, et al., 1991). In addition, therapists must constantly examine their own attitudes and beliefs about interracial relationships along with understanding the societal context and implications for the interracial couple. It is also important for practitioners to help their clients find sources of support and resources for the couples in the community. Practitioners can also help interracial couples by establishing support groups for couples and families in order to provide an environment where certain issues may be addressed (Solsberry, 1994).

Women in Interracial Relationships

The initial impetus on researching women's issues was a result of the women's rights and the civil rights movement. Since then women researchers have attempted to bring forth issues relevant to women's lives through their own voices and the voices of other women. However, a majority of research conducted on women has been based on the experiences of White, middle-class women (Miller, 1994). Therefore the predominant voice in women's research has been that of the Anglo-American woman. In recent years, women of color have found their voice and have written about numerous issues concerning women of color. These contributions have revealed that women of color are indeed culturally and emotionally diverse (Comaz-Dias & Greene, 1994a). In discussing experiences of women in interracial relationships, one must acknowledge and honor the experiences of both the interracially partnered Anglo-American woman and the interracially partnered woman of color.

When examining gender in interracial relationships, studies reveal that Latinas, Asian-American, and American-Indian women have the highest rates of intermarriage while African-American women have the lowest rates of intermarriage. Statistics presented by Lee and Yamanaka (1990) revealed that the Asian-American population has the highest number of intermarriages in the U.S., exceeding over 23%. In relation, only 2% and 13% of the intermarried population was African-American and Hispanic respectively (Lee & Yamanaka, 1990). Although these figures may have increased in the last ten years the trend observed in 1990 remains the same, with Asian-Americans having the highest intermarriage rates in the U.S. (Mok, 1999). Statistics also point out that over 90% of intermarriages among Asian-Americans are interracial. The majority of these interracial marriages across all Asian-American groups are Asian-Anglo intermarriages (Lee & Yamanaka, 1990; Mok, 1999). Compared to the high interracial marriage rates, only 8% of Asian-American intermarriages are interethnic (Lee & Yamanaka, 1990). In other words, there seems to be a stronger trend among this population to intermarry across racial lines rather than ethnic lines.

The highest rates of Asian-American intermarriage are among Asian-American women, especially Japanese women (Fujino, 1997; Lee & Yamanaka, 1990; Mok, 1999). This trend seems to also hold true for the dating literature on Asian-American men and women (Fujino, 1997; Mok, 1999). Mok (1999) speculates that this could be attributed to the higher levels of acculturation among Asian women than Asian men. "Researchers have speculated that ethnic minority women pose less of a threat to society than do ethnic minority men. Asian-American women, therefore, might be more accepted by society and acculturate faster than Asian-American men do" (Mok, 1999). On the other hand,

statistics indicate that Asian-American males generally marry females from their own groups or tend to intermarry more frequently across ethnic lines (Gardyn, 2000; Lee & Yamanaka, 1990). Another factor associated with higher intermarriage rates in Asian women has to do with the long history of wars, from the Spanish-American wars to the Korean War. During this time thousands of Asian war brides were brought to the U.S. by American soldiers fighting in Asia (Root, 1998b).

Fujino (1997) provides an additional possibility for higher intermarriage rates for Asian-American women. She argues that while a larger number of Asian-American men may date interracially, a majority of these men eventually marry someone from their own ethnic and racial background. This could be due to the expectation put on the son in the patriarchal family structure that is prominent in most Asian-American cultures. This patriarchal family structure views the daughters as separating from the family after marriage while expecting the sons to bring in their wives and children and carry on the family name and traditions (Jayakar, 1994).

A limited amount of research has focused solely on women's issues in interracial relationships (Hill & Thomas, 2000). The majority of research cited in this section has examined women in Black-White interracial relationships. However, some of these experiences may be parallel to experiences of women in other types of interracial relationships.

Oftentimes, the challenge for the interracially partnered woman is to somehow integrate her own cultural and racial identity along with that of her partner (Bradshaw, 1994). Hill and Thomas (2000) conducted an exploratory study examining the racial identity development of women in Balck-White interracial relationships. This research

uncovered an important finding related to both Anglo and African-American women.
The interracially married women in their sample often found themselves banished from
their racial groups as a result of their marriage. Thus, there seems to be a common theme
of being disowned from one's cultural and racial group for both Anglo and African-
American women.

> Not only do Black and White women in Black-White interracial relationships
> experience racism, but they also experience it in ways unique from those
> experienced by Blacks and Whites in same-race partner relationships. Blacks
> partnered with Whites often have their Blackness, or racial identity,
> challenged by other Blacks. . . . Whites partnered with Blacks, likewise, lose
> their White status, while simultaneously having their awareness of their
> Whiteness more heightened than ever before. At the same time, they are not
> given full status as a member of their partners' race (p. 2).

Thus, women in these relationships report a common experience across racial lines,
which is the experience of being isolated from members of their own race and those of
their partner's race. It would seem then that women in interracial relationships
experience a unique form of discrimination. This discrimination seems qualitatively
different from the discrimination faced by other marginalized groups. The difference lies
in the fact that women in interracial relationships are rejected from two racial groups,
thereby losing the support from their own cultural group.

On the other hand, being isolated from two or more racial groups makes the
experience of the interracially partnered woman somewhat similar to the experiences of
the woman of color. Pinderhughes (1994) remarks that women of color are a " double

minority" existing in a racist and patriarchal society. Their stories and experiences take place within the context of oppression. These women are not only oppressed within a racist society but they are also oppressed due to their gender. Similarly, the interracially partnered woman regardless of her racial classification also becomes a double or even triple minority (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). She is a minority firstly because she is a woman and secondly due to her status of either being a woman of color or being partnered with a man of color. The confusion of not belonging in either racial group may not be unique only to women in Black-White interracial relationships but also to women in other kinds of interracial relationships.

Another important finding related to women in interracial relationships emerged during a study of 21 Black-White couples conducted by Rosenblatt et al., (1995). All women in this study reported overt opposition to their relationship by their family members. On the other hand, not all the men in the study confronted this opposition in their families. The researchers speculated that gender might be an important variable in initial family opposition to interracial relationships. They hypothesized that women may be more protected and guarded by their family members than men. This assumption seemed true in the case of all the African-American women in the study who reported feeling more protected, guarded and, in turn, restricted in their families than their brothers (Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

Another important finding in studies on interracial marriages has to do with the Anglo-American woman's experience. A common theme of loss seems to emerge for these women in their interracial marriage experience. A majority of Anglo-American women in interracial relationships have reported experiencing their family opposition as

traumatic (Frankenberg, 1993; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). In addition the opposition was also experienced as a loss of parental love and support. These findings may be generalized to women in other types of interracial relationships. It would seem that many cultures and families tend to protect and guard their daughters more than their sons. Due to this extra protection, women in interracial relationships may experience initial family opposition as more traumatic than men in interracial relationships.

Frankenberg (1993) described similar experiences of family opposition from the Anglo-American women in her research sample. A number of these women described their experiences of being disowned from their families as a result of their choice of partner.

> The act of disowning makes the statement that "you are no longer my child," a symbolic severing of genealogical ties to a family member who has, in the parents' eyes, joined the "wrong" genealogical group. Like refusing to publicly acknowledge a marriage, disowning attempts to resolve a perceived contradiction or impossibility - the tying together of two groups seen as utterly separate - by rejecting and symbolically "unwhitening" the White family member (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 104).

According to the self-in-relation model of female development, a woman's sense of self develops and evolves within the context of her interpersonal relationships (Comas-Diaz, 1994b). Relationships with family members are thus crucial for a woman's sense of identity. As a result of their expulsion from their family and social groups, these women experience a profound loss of their family and community ties, which inevitably impacts their sense of self. An additional theme that seems to emerge from the passage

above is the theme of separation between the races. By choosing a non-White partner, the Anglo-American women are perceived to have abandoned their race and joined with the "other." Therefore, the act of being disowned by her family is also an act of being "unwhitened" (Frankenberg, 1993). This act of being "unwhitened" once again places the Anglo-American woman as a double minority.

Research on women in interracial relationships can be helpful in understanding the dynamics of these relationships along with exploring the ways women exist in these relationships. There is a strong need to examine the dynamics and interactions between gender, race, and ethnicity in the context of interracial relationships (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994b). Hill & Thomas (2000) argue that exploring women's issues in interracial relationships may help empower women and provide them with positive strategies for creating and recreating their identities in the context of these relationships.

<u>Researching Women in Interracial Relationships - Alternative Research Paradigms</u>

Miller (1976) calls for a new language in psychology. This language should be grounded in the personal experiences and images of women as opposed to the dominant patriarchal model that dictates self-sufficiency, independence, and autonomy as standards of mental health (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). Westkott (1990) remarks, "Women have not only been largely ignored in traditional approaches to knowledge; where women have been considered at all we have been measured in masculine terms" (p. 56). In recent decades many researchers have attempted to break these traditional approaches and create a new language for women. For example, Gilligan (1982) speaks in this new language as she brings forth the distant voices of the women in her studies through the method of interviewing.

Furthermore, apart from women, the voices of other marginalized groups in society have been silent in a majority of mental health research. When researched, these groups have been studied within the "Euro-American" research paradigm (Tanaka, Ebreo, Linn, & Morera, 1998). This paradigm attributes "psychological normality to Euro-American males and abnormality to all persons who were not Euro-American males (i.e., females, members of racial/ethnic minority groups) . . .[defining] the psychologically healthy person as being individualistic, competitive, materialistic, and masculine" (pp. 37-38). Therefore, there is an urgent need for research that investigates relevant issues of minority groups. In order to effectively conduct research with diverse populations, researchers also must move away from the "Euro-American male" research paradigm. Thus, there is also a need for the utilization of diverse methodologies in researching marginalized groups (Sue, 1999). In order to articulate the voices of the participants, this study employs a qualitative approach, with interviewing as its central method of data collection.

Since the present study utilizes qualitative research, specifically phenomenological and feminist approaches, the following sections will provide a general background in research methods along with outlining major differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods. Finally, a detailed explanation of qualitative research will follow, with an examination of feminist and phenomenological research methods.

Dominant Research Trends

Scientific research and theory have been dominated by two main schools of thought. The first is rationalism or the belief in absolute logic and reason. The second school of thought is empiricism or the idea of finding truth through the observation and recording

of events in the world (Nielson, 1990). It is on the basis of these concepts that the "received" or the "traditional" view of science was constructed. Richardson (1996) argues that the "traditional" view of science involves four main assumptions. These assumptions are

> [First,] objects in the natural world are objective and real, and they enjoy an existence independent of human beings. Human agency is basically incidental to the objective character of the world 'out there.' [Secondly,] it follows from this that scientific knowledge is determined by the actual character of the physical world. [The third assumption is that] science comprises a unitary set of methods and procedures, concerning which there is, by and large a consensus. [Finally,] science is an activity that is individualistic and mentalistic. (The latter is sometimes expressed as 'cognitive') (p. 13).

It is this view of science that guides quantitative research methods. For many years, quantitative methods have largely dominated social science research (Nielson, 1990). Quantitative research methods are defined as the study of the varying degrees of a phenomenon through the use of standardized measures and rigorous analysis. The aim of quantitative research is to control and predict phenomena. Quantitative research adheres to the received view of science in that it "focuses on efforts to verify (positivism) or falsify (postpositivism) a priori hypotheses, most usefully stated in mathematical (quantitative) propositions . . . expressing functional relationships"(Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 196).

All research methods are grounded in paradigms. In order to understand the rationale behind these methods, the underlying paradigms must also be examined. A

paradigm is a basic set of beliefs that guide one's actions and helps individuals define their worldview (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Paradigms help define the nature of reality and the method of discovering this reality for the inquirer (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). One dominant paradigm that has influenced a majority of scientific discourse is positivism.

Quantitative research also adheres to this paradigm of "logical-positivism, which uses quantitative research and experimental methods to test hypothetical-deductive generalizations" (Patton, 1990, p. 37). A positivist paradigm stresses objectivity, logic, and certainty in the search for the "absolute" and "one" truth. Rene Descartes is considered a pioneer in the field of quantitative research (Hamilton, 1998). Descartes believed that "in search for truth, investigators should stand back from those elements of the world that might otherwise corrupt their analytical powers. [Therefore], Descartes claimed the importance of mathematics and objectivity in the search for truth" (p. 116). In order to preserve objectivity, a majority of quantitative research is conducted in a laboratory setting and various forms of control are utilized for the gathering of the most reliable data. In addition, quantitative research largely depends on the successful construction of the instrument that is employed to measure the phenomenon under study (Patton, 1990). Thus, the success of the quantitative study is largely dependent on its research instrument.

Qualitative Research Methods

On the other hand, qualitative research involves the study of the nature of phenomena. In contrast to an emphasis on analysis as in quantitative research, qualitative research focuses on the processes in life (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Qualitative

researchers study relevant phenomena against the backdrop of the natural world. The underlying belief in all qualitative research is that in order to fully understand human beings and relevant phenomena, they must be studied in context to their natural world (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Jaffe, Kling, Plant, Sloan, & Hyde, 1999). Hence, the importance of distance in quantitative research is not central for the qualitative researcher.

The goals of qualitative researchers are often very distinct from those of quantitative researchers. The goals of quantitative research include verifying predetermined hypotheses, fitting results into existing categories and theories, and generalizing findings. On the other hand, hypotheses and theories "emerge" out of the data instead of being constructed ahead of time. Qualitative researchers argue that the primary goal of qualitative research is to understand the meanings of experience through the perspectives of the participants and their cultures (Henwood, 1996). Furthermore, qualitative researchers "construct versions of the world through their activities as social and political subjects, and do not merely reflect facts with a self-evident objective reality" (p. 27).

Thus, qualitative research appears to have a three-fold focus of understanding society and culture, through the eyes of the members belonging to that society/culture, and with a focus of understanding the meaning of their experiences in that society and culture (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Generally, qualitative research is perceived as a separate and alternative research method to quantitative research. However, it may also be useful to understand qualitative research as a method of gaining new information which can "complement and extend

quantitative researchers' efforts to understand what people do and think on a large scale by exploring individuals' lived experience" (Jaffe et al., 1999, p.424).

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) define qualitative research as "multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (p. 2). Creswell (1998) provides a more detailed definition of qualitative research. He writes that,

> Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p. 15).

Therefore, qualitative research is multi-paradigmatic, multi-methodological, and multidisciplinary.

In order to understand qualitative research it may be useful to examine some of its underlying paradigms. While Descartes founded the method of quantitative research, his preferred method was confronted with powerful skepticism around the 18th century. One of the precipitating forces responsible for the emergence of qualitative research was German philosopher, Immaneul Kant (1781). Kant asserted that knowledge is gained through methods other than empirical inquiry. This resulted in the realization that knowledge may be acquires through a variety of methods including subjectivism, relativism, and idealism (Hamilton, 1998). Although Kant's ideas did not directly result in the development of qualitative research methods, they provided an impetus in the movement towards these alternative research methods.

Guba and Lincoln (1998) examine some dominant paradigms of qualitative research. These paradigms include but are not limited to positivism and postpositivism, a modification of positivism, which asserts that "objectivity" can only be partially attained in the search for truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In addition, critical theories are often dominant paradigms for qualitative researchers. These theories argue for multiple realities (vs. one, single "truth") that are created as a result of political, social, and cultural values. Critical theories seek answers to questions that are outside the realm of conventional ideology. The present study adheres to various tenets and principals of critical theory in its efforts to present the reality of women in interracial relationships as well as by advocating for a strength-based perspective of these relationships. Nielson (1990) describes the role of critical theorists as,

> Detecting and unmasking, or exposing, existing forms of beliefs that restrict or limit human freedom. . . . The critical theorists' approach is to emancipate - that is, to uncover aspects of society, especially ideologies, that maintain the status quo by restricting or limiting different groups' access to the means of gaining knowledge (p. 9).

Hence, critical theories discard the belief that knowledge is purely objective. Examples of critical theories include postmodernism, which believes in no one single paradigm or method to find the truth. Other perspectives of critical theories are feminist critical theory, and critical race theory. Both these theories are similar in that they each examine the oppressive structures in society and seek to emancipate and advocate for marginalized groups in society (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Due to the fact that the

present study employs many aspects of critical theory, especially feminist critical theory, a detailed description of this approach is provided in the following section.

Feminist Research Methods

Feminist research methods and theories are diverse and complex (Olesen, 1998). A thorough description of each theory and research method is beyond the scope of this paper. However, this author will attempt to outline important factors of feminist theory and research methods that are relevant to her study. Nielson (1990) defines feminist research as, "contextual, inclusive, experiential, involved, socially relevant. Multi-methodological, complete but not necessarily replicable, open to environment and inclusive of emotions and events as experienced (p. 6).

Although diverse in approaches, feminist research shares the common goal of examining women's lives and situations (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Nielson, 1990; Olesen, 1998; Rienharz, 1992, Wincup, 2001). This focus on women was and is essential due to the fact that women's reality was consistently absent from traditional social science research. Anderson, Armitage, Jack, and Wittner (1990) write that traditional research has often "suppressed, trivialized, ignored, or reduced to the status of gossip and folk wisdom" (p. 96). Thus, the tradition of scientific inquiry was itself a vehicle of oppression towards women for many years.

In addition to a focus on women, feminist research has been instrumental in shifting the focus of scientific research from issues relevant to men to those issues that are significant and crucial in the lives of women (Jaffe et al., 1999). Examples of such issues that are frequently the subject of feminist research include rape, pregnancy, sexual harassment, etc.

Feminist researchers have also examined certain avenues where there was a marked

absence or invisibility of women. For example, there was a strong movement of

researchers investigating women in different professions such as medicine, especially

nursing, and law (Olesen, 1998). Nielson (1990) comments that feminist research has

promoted the idea of "seeing women rather than men in center stage, as both subject

matter of and creators of knowledge." (p. 19). Furthermore, feminist inquiry has also

contributed to the field by challenging prevalent scientific theories.

One of the most popular examples of this aspect is Carol Gilligan's research with

women. Gilligan (1982) challenges the prevalent theories of development. In her

writings, Gilligan argues that for years, traditional research has ascribed to the theory that

women in general fail to "fit into" the prevalent models of human development. This

"failure to fit" has led to an assumption that there exists an inherent problem with female

development. Instead, she asserts that the dominant research methods have ignored

certain truths about women in conceptualizing these theories. Like Gilligan, feminist

researchers have enormously contributed to the field of research by approaching and

tackling issues *about* women and *from* the perspectives of women. Gilligan's work with

women is proof that researching women's lives and hearing their stories can, and does,

contribute to the practice of theory building.

Through Gilligan's work and other pivotal studies of women, feminist research has

been responsible in initiating the tradition of developing theory from oral history

(Anderson et al., 1990) or narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is an interdisciplinary

approach (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) that attempts to understand "how respondents in

interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in

their lives." (Reissman, 1993). There are various forms of narrative analysis including interviews, oral histories, personal narratives, and biographies. This tradition of narrative analysis provides an opportunity to collect rich information about women's experience, which may never emerge through the traditional and linear modes of research. In addition narrative analysis appeals to the feminist researcher as it validates women's experience and can create a connection between the narrator and interviewer and also between the narrator and reader (Rienharz, 1992).

In order to study the lived experiences of women, many feminist researchers realize the need to conduct research outside of the traditional realm of quantitative research. Feminist scholars have found that a common aspect across feminist research is a preference toward qualitative research (Wincup, 2001). However, this author does not wish to imply that quantitative and other "traditional" methods of inquiry are completely rejected by feminist research. Instead, feminist researchers strive to create a research design that can most effectively provide answers to their questions. In addition, since many issues relevant to women have been invisible in modern research, the first step is often to uncover the nature of these issues. Oftentimes, qualitative research methodologies seem most optimal for uncovering and discovering these relevant issues.

Qualitative research methodology is often more attractive to the feminist researcher because of the various shared values between these two methods. For example, both methods seek out the subjective experience of their participants instead of designing a research project that is based on objectivity, distance, and separation from participants. In addition, feminist researchers often create new and innovative research designs that

combine multiple methodologies. Kathlene (1990) comments on this ability to be

flexible on the part of the feminist researcher. She defines flexibility as,

> the willingness of the researchers to change or choose the methodological
>
> approach after the data collection has begun. . . . This approach embraces the
>
> notion of the researcher as a "participant-observer,". . . . It recognizes the
>
> continuous learning process, devalues the dichotomous subject/object
>
> distinction, and allows for a more open research approach (p. 241).

This flexibility also enables the researcher to create an environment of collaboration

where the researcher looks to the participants for helping with the direction of the study.

Collaboration is an important theme across the various genres of feminist research.

Maguire (1987) argues that alternative research paradigms often aim to find useful ways,

through the research, in improving the lives of the people who are the focus of research.

In order to help initiate this social transformation, researchers collaborate with

participants in which "control over both the research process and the product is more

equally shared between researcher and participant" (p. 24). Thus, the participant is no

longer perceived as the "passive subject" who is recruited for quantitative research.

Instead, in qualitative research, the individuals involved are active participants in the

creation of the research, who simultaneously with the researcher create meaning that

transforms into data (Olesen, 1998). The level of collaboration varies according to the

different approaches to research. In the present study, participants will collaborate in the

process of interviewing by guiding in the direction of the interview and the data that is

collected as a result.

Another significant theme of qualitative, feminist research is the issue of subjectivity. In empirical science and methodology, much weight is awarded to the notion of objectivity. Qualitative and feminist research contend that there rich and meaningful data can be gathered through subjectivity, closeness, and connection (Nieslon, 1990). In order to fully engage with participants and understand the phenomena under study, researchers have to often deal with a variety of human emotions. Gilbert (2001) writes that,

> researchers must draw on rational understanding while they also reach within
>
> themselves for their subjective views and personal experiences, looking for
>
> comparability of experience. Throughout this process, their reactions shape
>
> the direction and depth of their understanding of the lives of study participants
>
> (p. 11).

Thus, subjectivity can serve as a tool in the research through aiding the researcher in better understanding her data (Olesen, 1998).

As mentioned earlier, there is a medley of qualitative feminist research approaches ranging from interviews to ethnography and action research. The present study will employ the method of open-ended interviewing and attempt to present the voices of the participants. A detailed description of the interview process will be described in the next chapter. In addition to utilizing principles of feminist theory, the present author also approaches this through the additional qualitative research approach of phenomenology. The following section describes this approach in detail.

<u>Phenomenology</u>

One of the central aims of qualitative research is to study the nature of phenomena in the natural world. Therefore, it may come as no surprise to the reader that a crucial underlying paradigm in qualitative research is phenomenology. The word, phenomenon originates from the Greek word, *phaenesthai* (to flare up, to show itself) and *phaino*, which means to bring to light (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology in general dismisses the idea of an absolute truth and is more interested in a "careful description of ordinary conscious experience of everyday life (the life-world), a description of 'things' (the essential structures of consciousness) as one experiences them" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 114).

Phenomenology has been considered as part of a variety of disciplines. While some consider it a paradigm, others perceive it as a philosophy, and many others use this concept interchangeably with qualitative research (Patton, 1990). The present author perceives phenomenology as a paradigm that may be used in qualitative research. Thus phenomenology is a method of qualitative inquiry that attempts to holistically understand human experience. The present study utilizes a phenomenological method of inquiry in its understanding of the concept of intimacy.

Historically, phenomenology has roots in the tradition of philosophy. The concept of phenomenology evolved out of the work of German mathematician, Edmund H. Husserl (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990). Husserl was concerned with knowledge and the belief that knowledge can be attained through meanings and essences. Husserl defined phenomenology as "the study of how people describe things and experience through their senses" (Patton, 1990, p. 69). Thus reality is created through the subjective experiences of people and the meanings they attribute to these experiences. Husserl's conceptions of

reality contradicted the prevalent view that reality of an object is separate from the meaning that a subject attributes to that object. Instead, "the reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual" (Creswell, 1998, p. 53). This view of rejecting the subject-object dichotomy is called "intentionality of consciousness."

Giorgi (1985a) outlines four characteristics of the phenomenological method. These characteristics are also somewhat chronological in the process of data analysis (Creswell, 1998). Giorgi (1985a) explains that the initial aim of this method is to be descriptive or to describe the meanings that people ascribe to a certain phenomenon. The description in this method may also include a full description of the phenomenon from the consciousness of the researcher. The second characteristic is the act of reduction or the task of finding "a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements" (Creswell, 1998) from participants.

The third characteristic is the search for and construction of meanings and essences. Essence is constructed by examining the statements of participants. The researcher then describes the "what" and the "how" of the experience, and finally develops an overall description of the experience. The researcher arrives at the essence of the phenomenon through "free imaginative variation in order to discover what meanings must necessarily belong to the phenomenon in order for it to be a phenomenon of a certain type." (Giorgi, 1985a). Finally, the fourth characteristic is intentionality, which includes the act of presenting the essence and meaning of the phenomenon. This also includes the act of synthesizing and describing the essence of the phenomena (Anastoos, 1985).

Thus, a phenomenological approach is an attempt to understand the nature of a particular phenomenon by entering the worlds of those studied. The researcher initially enters the world of the individuals to be studied and records their individual meanings of the phenomenon. It is after this collection, that the researcher can examine, synthesize and articulate the phenomenon. This method of inquiry can be especially useful with underresearched populations (Connolly, 1998).

A vast amount of literature seems to exist on the subject or phenomenon of intimacy and factors associated with intimacy in romantic relationships. However, no research to date has examined intimacy in interracial relationships. In addition, although some research exists on the intimacy experienced by women, there is paucity in research that solely focuses on the experiences of intimacy with women in romantic interracial relationships. Given the history of prejudice and discrimination surrounding interracial couples, little research has been conducted about these couples, especially from a strength-based perspective. This researcher attempts to study women within the context of their interracial relationships, focusing on their narratives regarding their perceptions of intimacy in their relationships.

This study utilizes a feminist approach in its value of women, their perspectives, and their relationships through a phenomenological and qualitative approach to research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with women in interracial relationships. Eleven women were invited to share their experiences and perceptions of intimacy in their interracial relationships. These interviews were the primary methods of data collection. Transcripts from the interviews provided the raw data for the analysis. These transcripts were closely examined and were used to generate themes and patterns related

to intimacy in interracial relationships. A description of the study and its methodology is

provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to examine the nature of intimacy experienced by women in interracial relationships. To date, no research, either quantitative or qualitative, has examined how intimacy is experienced by individuals in interracial relationships (Heller & Wood, 2000). Sue (1999) argues for the use of qualitative and other innovative methodologies in researching ethnic minority populations. The present study adopts a qualitative research design with an emphasis on feminist and phenomenological approaches.

This study is primarily concerned with the description, discovery, and understanding of a phenomenon (intimacy), grounded in the lives of a certain group (women in interracial relationships), and as experienced by this group. In order to attain a rich understanding of a phenomenon, one needs to utilize various methods and approaches. This fusion of approaches creates "a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation"(Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 4). Qualitative research does not adhere to one, exclusive research approach (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Instead, it is based on multiple paradigms and perspectives. Therefore, a qualitative research design seems most suitable to the process of developing a rich and in-depth understanding of intimacy in the present study.

Furthermore, phenomenological and feminist approaches are also relevant for the present study due to the interest in presenting the individuals' lived experience along with providing a voice for a group that has been generally mute and invisible in traditional research. This study also attempts to move away from the conventional views regarding researchers and the researched. Some of these traditional views include an emphasis on the researched as a "subject," an entity separate from the researcher. In addition, conventional methods of research believe in the examination of issues and the study of subjects from a distance and through the lens of objectivity (Olesen, 1998). This study strives towards the mutual participation of both researcher and researched (Ceballo, 1999) within the context of a collaborative relationship based on equality, respect, connection, and empathy. The evolution of the study and the creation of data will be a result of the collaboration between the participants and researcher. Due to this emphasis on collaboration, this author will use the term "participant" instead of "subject" in describing the women involved in the study.

In order to seek out participants, this study utilized chain sampling as its primary method of sampling. Chain sampling or snowballing is most often utilized in order to find information-rich cases (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 1990). Sampling was initially attempted by posting flyers concerning the study in the Education building of Southwest Texas State University along with posting an all-campus email concerning the study. However, a majority of the participants volunteered for the study as a result of knowing people who knew about the study or had also volunteered for the study (i.e. snowballing).

Patton (1990) outlines three primary methods of data collection in qualitative research. These are interviewing, direct observation (e.g. fieldwork), and the study of

written documents. Semi-structured interviewing was determined to be the most appropriate method of data collection for this study due to a primary interest in "hearing" and understanding the meanings that participants ascribed to intimacy and their relationships.

Throughout history, there are numerous examples of different oral traditions as sources of knowledge. Much of history, traditions and culture have been passed down from one generation to the next through the tradition of narratives. Similarly, in social sciences, narratives can help "people understand themselves through telling and hearing stories…stories provide direct access to the richness of an encounter, including the situations, perceptions, and feelings that guided that person" (Stuhlmilller, 2001, p. 65). Interviewing has been described as a powerful means of understanding people (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Furthermore, a phenomenon is better conceptualized when individuals are asked to describe it in their own words and according to their own methods of narration (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Thus, interviewing seemed to be the most desirable method of collecting data in this particular study. Many ethnic scholars have criticized traditional research as "deliberately" omitting the voices of various marginalized groups (Lincoln & Denzin, 1998). Through the interviews this researcher attempted to bring forth the voices and insights of a marginalized group of women in non-traditional romantic relationships.

Research Design

As a result of the collaborative aspect of the research design along with the inherent flexibility of qualitative methods, this research design was emergent and constantly evolving. The hypotheses in the present study were created as a result of the data

gathered as opposed to being clearly constructed before the collection of data (as in quantitative research). Moreover, the research design did not restrict the researcher in one direction of investigation, nor did the design attempt to manipulate either the environment or participant in order to collect the most "reliable" data. Due to the flexibility in the research design, questions for the interviews evolved and were modified throughout the process of data collection.

<div align="center">Researcher as Instrument</div>

In most qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument (Patton, 1990). Thus, the validity of the "instrument" depends on the skill and insights of the researcher. Qualitative research has often been criticized for this role of the researcher. However, Gilbert (2001) comments on this issue of the researcher as instrument:

> Researchers are taught to question their ability, even their right, to use
> themselves fully as the principal, perhaps the only, research instrument. Yet,
> to know about the phenomenon about which they write and to be fully honest
> about how they came to their interpretation, one can argue that it is dishonest
> not to draw on their own emotional experience and incorporate those emotions
> into the final telling of their "research tale" (p. 11).

Therefore, closeness between the researcher and participants can be a positive factor that enhances the process of interpretation and understanding rather than being a problem.

It was important for the researcher to approach the interviews with a reflexive stance and be able to turn the participants' experiences inward (Wincup, 2001). However, efforts were also taken to monitor how the researcher's feelings and

perceptions could interfere with the interpretations of the participants' stories. Journaling was used immediately after interviews to record personal impressions about interviews (Gilbert, 2001). Additional journaling was also utilized during the later stages of data analysis. Discussion with colleagues and friends and consultation with thesis committee members were also used to facilitate the researcher's personal process (Connolly, 1998).

To further maintain the power balance between researcher and participant, the interviews were not merely one-sided 'interrogations.' Instead, the researcher was very open to questions posed by the participants about her personal experiences in her interracial relationship. Moreover, the researcher modeled a "true dialogue" (Rienharz, 1992) through relevant self-disclosure. During some interviews, self-disclosure became a turning point where the participants and researcher experienced a sense of closeness and community because of a shared understanding about their nontraditional relationships.

After each interview, the researcher also listened to the tape and noted significant themes or issues that had emerged as a result of the interview. Thus, the process of data analysis was initiated even before the interviews were transcribed and formal analysis commenced. A detailed description of the participants, method of data collection, and analysis follows.

<center>Data Collection</center>

Participants

A total number of 11 women participated in the study. Participants were involved in an intimate, monogamous, and heterosexual interracial relationship for more than one year. Selection of participants was based on the criteria of being a woman in a heterosexual, interracial relationship that was at least one year in length. There were no

restrictions in age, race, ethnicity, education level, socioeconomic level, marital status,

children/no children, and other related factors.

Ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 52 with an average age of 32.09 years

(median age, 30 years). The length of the relationships ranged from 1.5 years to 21 years

with an average of 7.2 years (median, 4.5 years). Out of the eleven women interviewed,

six women were married and four were dating. One woman had been married and

separated from her husband and was, at the time of the interview, back together with her

husband again but had not yet been remarried. Four of the eleven women had children.

Eight women were currently living in the same house as their partner while the other

three resided in separate homes and were also involved in varying degrees of long-

distance relationships.

Seven women were graduate students and one participant was an undergraduate

student at Southwest Texas State University. In addition occupations of the women

ranged from management, government, telecommunications, mental health, to computer

related fields.

The participants in the present study belonged to three racial groups. Six of the

participants were Latinas, four participants were White, and one participant was African-

American. Out of the six Latina participants, three were partnered with White males, two

were partnered with African-American males, and one was partnered with an Asian

Indian male. Out of the four White participants, two were partnered with African-

American males while the other two had a Latino and a Native-American partner

respectively. Finally, there was one African-American participant who was partnered

with a White male. Table 1 summarizes important demographic information regarding

the interracial couples in the study.

Table 1

Couple Demographic Information

Couple #	Psuedonym	Race	Age	Years Together	Children	Marital Status
1	Mary Chris	Latina African-American	23 22	3	–	Unmarried
2	Dana Peter	Caucasian African-American	23 27	3	–	Married
3	Carrie John	African-American Caucasian	27 30	4.5	1	Married
4	Lynn Frank	Latina Caucasian	30 37	6	–	Married
5	Geena Sam	Latina Caucasian	36 37	10	2	Married
6	Tracy Miguel	Caucasian Latino	24 28	3.5	–	Unmarried
7	Sarah Michael	Latina Caucasian	35 42	17	–	Married
8	Gloria Adam	Latina African-American	52 54	21	2	Married
9	Roxanne Javed	Latina Asian-Indian	22 24	1.5	–	Unmarried
10	Melanie Jack	Caucasian American-Indian	45 49	2	–	Unmarried
11	Ashley Nicholas	Caucasian African-American	36 36	8	3	Unmarried

All participants were notified of the voluntary nature of the study from the very beginning. Out of the 11 participants, one participant was asked to volunteer for the pilot study that was conducted during the initial phases of the research. A total number of 17 women contacted the researcher because of an interest in participating in the study. All women were initially contacted through the phone and were once again provided a description of the study. Two women withdrew from the study after this initial conversation as a result of scheduling difficulties. Interviews were scheduled with three women who did not show up and failed to contact the researcher to reschedule. Finally, one woman could not be included in the study as she had been in her relationship for only six months.

While participants comprised only of the women in the interracial couples, a brief description of their partners may be helpful for the reader. The ages of the partners of the participants ranged from 22 to 54 years with an average age of 35.09 years (median, 36 years). Occupations of the partners ranged from education, management, law-enforcement, business, history, medical, and computer related fields. Three women had partners who were enrolled in graduate programs.

Equipment used

Interviews were the sole data of the study. In addition, the interviews provided an accurate representation of the ways that the respondents constructed meanings in their lives (Reissman, 1993). In order to preserve the exact words, emotions, and other subtleties of language of the participants, all interviews were tape-recorded. Consent for recording was received from all participants (see Appendix A). Interviews were recorded on a standard audio tape player. All tapes were erased after they were transcribed.

Setting

    The settings of the interviews varied and were largely dependent on the participants' convenience. Four women preferred to meet at their workplace and interviews were conducted either in their offices or a quiet conference room. Three women preferred to meet in a room reserved by the researcher in the Education building. Three women invited the researcher into their homes for the interviews. Finally, one participant preferred to meet at the researcher's home for the interview. This researcher does not believe that there were any significant problems or issues that emerged as a result of the various settings of the interviews. It seems that the participants and researcher were comfortable and connected to the interview, regardless of the setting. However, participants who were at their homes also had an opportunity to share photographs of their significant others during the interview.

<div align="center">Procedure</div>

    As mentioned earlier, 17 women contacted the researcher in order to participate in the study. Initial contacts were established over the phone. During this initial contact, the researcher briefly provided a description of the study along with explaining the role of the participants. Janesick (1994) notes that trust and rapport building should be initiated from the very beginning. Therefore, the researcher began this from this initial phone call by being authentic in describing and answering questions regarding the study. Rapport building was also facilitated by explaining to the women the rationale and interest behind the study. In many cases, this launched a lengthy conversation between researcher and participant about interracial relationships and other related issues. Since these

conversations were spontaneous and thus, not taped, the researcher made brief notes about the conversations for future reference if necessary.

During this initial conversation, the women were also informed about the voluntary nature of the study and told that they could withdraw from the study at any time. In addition participants were informed about confidentiality and that all interviews would be audio-taped. At the end, all women were asked whether they were still interested in participating. Those women meeting the criteria along with being interested in the study were invited to participate in the research. Interview times and places were determined at the participants' convenience.

As participants were contacted and invited for the study, the researcher was simultaneously reviewing the current literature on the issue of intimacy in interracial relationships. These questions and topics were modified and expanded throughout the course of the data collection. At the time of the interviews, the researcher explained the study to the participants and participants were given a chance to read the informed consent (see Appendix A), ask questions, and sign their consent forms.

Interviews

In the present study, the researcher and participants were involved in a semi-structured interviewing format to enhance the discovery and description of intimacy (Reinharz, 1992). This interview format placed the emphasis on the participants' stories instead of the asking of a preset pattern of questions. This type of format also allowed the participants to introduce issues that they felt were meaningful to them (Wincup, 2001). This, in turn, helped the researcher gain insight into the participants' meaning making processes. The researcher had a list of questions and general areas of interest.

However these questions were asked in the natural flow of the conversation and with limited intrusion to the participants' stories. During some interviews, "probes" or follow up questions were asked of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Additional questions inspired by the individual stories were also asked when necessary.

Efforts were made to continue building rapport, establishing a safe and comfortable environment, and establishing an atmosphere where participants felt knowledgeable, empowered and validated (Reinharz, 1992). Each interview began with a conversation explaining the details of the interview. Participants were then asked to sign the consent form. At this point, participants were reminded that they had the power to determine how much or how little they wanted to talk about the issues relevant to the study. Instead of initiating the interview with a set of questions, the researcher simply asked the participants to "tell the story of their relationship" in their own ways.

Interviews were also not preset for a particular length of time. The length of the interviews were determined by the time it took the participants to tell their stories and address the issues that they thought would be relevant to the study. The researcher also took time in the end to ask any demographic related questions that had not been answered during the course of the interviews. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to two hours in length, with a majority of interviews being more than one hour and 15 minutes long.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted a month before the interviews began with one of the 11 participants. The first participant to express interest in the study was chosen for the pilot. The participant was also informed that she would be part of a pilot interview, which would not be included in the formal data analysis. This interview was not

transcribed in full. It was also not included in the formal data analysis of the study. The

pilot study was useful for the researcher to familiarize herself with the process of

qualitative interviewing. Questions were asked and refined as a result of the pilot study.

Sections of the interview were transcribed and additional notes were taken. These

sections further helped the researcher to begin learning the process of data collection,

interpretation, and analysis. Finally, the pilot study resulted in the creation of a tentative

list of themes and codes.

Data Analysis

Patton (1990) remarks that following the interview, the researcher must work

towards analyzing and synthesizing the data, which she will ultimately present to an

audience of some form. Data analysis is an ongoing process where the researcher

attempts to "bring order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data"

(Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150). Data analysis commenced from the point when the

researcher narrowed her field of interest and decided on the guiding question or topic of

inquiry. This guiding question asked how women in interracial relationships experienced

intimacy.

Further analysis occurred after the researcher created tentative themes and codes,

which were refined during the pilot interview. After the pilot interview, data analysis

was conducted following each interview in order to document themes and codes that

were significant in that interview (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Personal impressions were

also recorded in order to help the researcher monitor internal process and to aid with

interpretation during formal data analysis. Furthermore, the analyses following the

interviews were extremely important in refining the emergent research design of the study.

The preservation of the actual words of the participants was crucial for the purpose of the present study. One of the primary aims of this study, from the beginning, was to present the voices of the participants. Through the presentation of the actual words, this researcher hoped to successfully convey the meanings, thoughts, perceptions, and the degree of emotions experienced by the participants in the interview. Therefore, the interviews were transcribed in full, names were replaced with pseudonyms, and other identifying information was omitted from the text.

The transcripts of the interviews also included other subtleties of language such as pauses, repetition of words, etc. The inclusion of elements such as pauses were often helpful in conveying the underlying emotions or thought processes of the participants. For example, pauses in some participants' speeches were often indicative of intense emotions being experienced about the topic being discussed. Additional transcription notations were added in order to aid the reader in understanding and experiencing the words of the participants. Table 2 includes a list of the various notations utilized in the transcriptions. Notations used for the transcripts were adapted from Kogan and Gale's (1997) transcription format.

Table 2

Transcription Notations

Notation	Description
Pauses in text	(.) Short pause (..) Intermediate pause (…) Long pause
CAPITAL	Words spoken louder and/or with added emphasis
(( ))	Indicates clarifying information or non-verbals, e.g. ((laughter)), ((exhale))
. . .	Indicates ellipses in passages

A more intense data analysis continued after the interviews were transcribed. After

transcription, the researcher listened to the each interview to ensure that the transcription

was accurate. This practice proved helpful for the researcher to increase understanding of

the data by enabling the researcher to both 'listen' and 'see' the data (Connolly, 1998).

This led to the process of analyzing the text, identifying themes, and coding these themes

into categories. During the creation of themes, a strong emphasis was placed on

identifying ways that participants' created the meaning of intimacy in their interracial

relationships.

The text was analyzed using a theory building program called QSR N5. The N5 is

the latest version of the software package called NUD*IST or non-numerical

unstructured data indexing, searching, and theorizing (Creswell, 1998; Richards, 2000). This software assisted the researcher was able to more effectively manage and analyze the data. The N5 facilitates the process of coding the text, the retrieving of both the codes and the text, and ultimately the exploration or analysis of the coding (Richards, 2000a). The tools of analysis in N5 include the coders, text search, and node search.

Coding is an essential element of the data analysis. Coding is the process of reducing data according to concepts or categories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Coding creates a system of reference for the researcher between the data and a particular theme or category. Richards (2000b) provides a helpful analogy by stating that coding serves a similar purpose to the page number entries in the index of a book. Just like these page numbers can immediately provide the reader with information about the location of a certain topic, so can coding help the researcher place the text of an interview under a certain topic. For example all text related to the theme of race may be coded under this theme.

The researcher places all the coding in containers called nodes. Free nodes were constructed initially when themes emerged from the text without a tangible pattern. Once patterns could be discerned between nodes, the researcher constructed Tree nodes. Tree nodes provided a hierarchical system of organizing and crossing themes and categories that emerged from the analysis.

The N5 also helps in refining the analysis through text and node search. Text searches find particular words or expressions throughout the text units in the project. A node is then created to hold all the text that contained that word. Similarly, a node search helps the researcher search all the nodes in order to test relationships between nodes or

refine a theory or hypothesis about the data. These two functions were utilized to some degree towards the final stages of the data analysis. Other helpful tools in N5 included memos, and description sections where the researcher was able to write down definitions, thoughts, and tentative theories about the data. The memos proved helpful in remembering internal processes and rationale of the researcher in analyzing the data. Finally, the N5 proved useful by providing a visual representation of the themes and categories created from the data.

In summary, a qualitative methodology was utilized for the purpose of understanding the concept of intimacy, as described and understood by women in interracial relationships. Emphasis was given to the actual words of the participants and all efforts were made to preserve these words accurately in keeping with feminist research traditions. Direct quotes from the interviews are used as examples of the final themes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of the present study was to explore the meanings of intimacy as

perceived by women in interracial relationships. This study utilized phenomenological

and feminist research methods to understand the concept of intimacy and the meanings

ascribed to this concept by the participants. Perceptions about intimacy were explored

through semi-structured interviews. The data was organized and analyzed with the help

of the software program called QSR N5 (Qualitative Solutions and Research International

Pty Ltd., 2000).

All interviews, with the exception of the pilot interview, were transcribed in full.

These transcripts were then coded using the N5 software. Text from the transcripts was

coded at the appropriate categories (or nodes). Initially, free nodes were constructed to

represent all themes emerging from the text. These themes were then examined for

relationship and compared with other themes and ideas. Tree nodes or hierarchical

themes were constructed where useful. The data were continuously analyzed within and

across categories of themes. An initial list of themes was constructed before the

commencement of the interviewing process. These themes were then refined as newer

themes emerged from the interviews. After all the interviews were conducted, data were

analyzed and themes were refined till they best represented the experiences of the

participants.

The analysis of the data revealed a number of significant themes crucial to the experiences of intimacy for women in interracial relationships. After detailed analysis and exploration, it was determined that many of the aspects described by participants appeared to be universal across all romantic relationships in general. A brief discussion of these universal aspects of intimacy might prove beneficial before initiating a discussion of the factors that are unique and significant to interracial relationships.

<div align="center">Universal Themes of Intimacy in Romantic Relationships</div>

The concept of mutuality is one such global theme that has emerged in previous research. The participants in this study also touched on the concept of mutuality in their relationships. Participants echoed the sentiments of other non-interracial couples by describing the importance of sharing values such as respect and trust, being open and honest with their partners, and sharing love. In addition to mutuality other universal themes included commitment, a feeling of connection between partners, physical and sexual intimacy, the significance of thoughtful gestures (e.g. giving flowers, gifts to each other, writing notes etc.), empowerment, and the importance of open and honest communication between partners.

The participants in the study expressed that while they belonged to different racial and cultural backgrounds from their partners, there existed many similarities between partners. Some participants remarked that like many non-interracial couples, they were also initially attracted to their partners because of the similarities that existed between them. In addition, these similarities continue to be a vital part of some of the relationships. Thus, the importance of similarities in values, interests, and goals seems common across both interracial and intraracial relationships.

While participants spoke at length about many aspects unique to their situation as an interracial couple, most women believed that they also experienced various stressors common across all relationships. The participants felt that like all couples, they too experienced the normal day to day challenges associated with being in a relationship. The topic of relational stress seemed to emerge out of the belief that intimacy was affected both by stress between partners and the strategies that the couple employed in dealing with the stress.

All participants provided a number of examples of relational stress. For a number of women there seemed to be one particular period of stress that was significant to the intimacy in their relationship. Relational stress was often caused by external circumstances such as loss of a job and financial problems. Some of the women involved in long-distance relationships with their partners described how the distance led to strain between the couple. However, it seemed that it was easier for the couples to resolve their relational stress when it was precipitated by external factors. Many participants believed that it was more challenging to overcome relational strain that was caused by factors within their relationships (e.g. lack of communication, or lack of trust). Like other non-interracial couples, three participants also reported periods of separation and "break ups" from their partners.

Along with the significance of relational stress, participants described the ways in which in they resolved this stress. Once again, interracial couples seemed to employ a number of universal coping strategies to resolve their relational stress. These strategies included communication, seeking couples' counseling, determination to work at the relationship, and other methods of conflict resolution.

In summary, women in interracial relationships described a number of universal processes or themes contributing to their experiences of intimacy in their interracial relationships. Some of these themes were related to mutuality, commitment, communication, conflict resolution, the importance of similarities, and the significance of physical and sexual intimacy. In addition to these universal processes, a number of themes emerged that seemed to specifically describe intimacy in interracial relationships. An analysis of the data suggested that these themes were significant because they addressed the issue of intimacy within a context of race and culture. These themes often depicted the dynamics of race and culture and their impact on the intimacy in the interracial relationships. Table 3 presents the themes that are unique and specific to interracial couples in their process of establishing and negotiating intimacy.

Table 3

Themes of Intimacy for Interracial Relationships

1. Negotiating cultural differences
   1.1. Roles of women
   1.2. Mutual appreciation of culture
   1.3. Blending cultural traditions and definitions of love

2. Surmounting family opposition
   2.1. Personal empowerment
   2.2. Relational empowerment

3. Overcoming societal prejudice
   3.1. Gaining perspective
   3.2. Confronting prejudice

4. Use of external resources
   4.1. Family
   4.2. Friends

Significant Themes of Intimacy for Interracial Relationships

The final themes outlined in Table 3 are all related to the concept of intimacy within a context of race and culture. Themes of negotiating cultural differences, surmounting family opposition, overcoming societal prejudice, and the use of external resources emerged as the four principal themes that were essential in the experience of intimacy for women in interracial relationships. Relationship intimacy was impacted positively by the mutual exploration and negotiation of the cultural differences between partners. Intimacy for the participants in this study was also largely affected by two sources of external stress. In their process of negotiating intimacy, interracial couples had to deal with opposition from family members and acts of racism and prejudice from various sources in society. Finally, the use of external resources for support was a significant theme in intimacy for women in interracial relationships.

While there are a number of essential themes of intimacy in the interracial relationships in this study, the remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to a lengthy description and discussion of only the themes that emerged as unique to interracial relationships. In addition, a chorus of voices of the participants will also emerge in this chapter. Passages from the interviews and the words utilized by the participants were included whenever possible to accurately illustrate a particular theme. Thus, the actual words and phrases used by the women in this study provide the essence of the themes that are outlined in the above.

Negotiating Cultural Differences

A major aspect of intimacy for the interracial couples seemed to be their willingness to identify, appreciate, and incorporate the cultural differences present in

their relationship. This theme of cultural differences appeared to be significant at various junctures of their relationships. A few participants talked about the initial difficulty in deciding to make a stronger commitment to the relationship. For these individuals and their partners, the hesitation in commitment was a direct result of an awareness of their racial and cultural differences. In particular, many women touched on the issue of having to deal with the contrasting messages of society, its definitions of what relationships should be, and who to be in relationship with, versus the messages that they were receiving from their hearts. By choosing to be in an interracial relationship many women felt that they had to break away from, what one participant termed to be "the conventional rules of falling in love."

Tracy and Miguel have been dating for three-and-a-half years. Tracy is 24-years old and Caucasian while Miguel is 28-years old and Latino. Tracy described her process of crossing "those boundaries" of race and culture when she realized that she wanted to be in a serious relationship with her boyfriend. Tracy recalled how surprised and "somewhat confused" she was when she contemplated dating Miguel.

> TRACY: He's (..) a Hispanic male and (...) I'd never (.) uhm even (..) contemplated dating someone that wasn't, you know, middle class, White, you know the whole little box that you know, I'd been raised to date and be interested in.

Furthermore, some individuals struggled to commit themselves to the relationship out of fear and apprehension about their families' reaction to their relationship. Carrie is in her late 20s and is African-American. Her partner, John is 30 years old and Caucasian. Carrie and John had an "on and off relationship" for six months. Carrie described feeling

frustrated with this relationship and feeling sure that their relationship would not become stronger or more permanent. It was only later that she understood her Anglo partner's hesitation in making a commitment.

> CARRIE: [John] knew that he liked me, he knew that I had all the qualities that he wanted in a female, "BUT Oh God she's Black!" ((Laughter)) And I think he was thinking about how (.) his (.) FAMILY would -- would handle the situation.

Thus, race of the partner seemed to be a significant issue to consider for some individuals like John because of their doubts about how their families would react to their partner.

Once couples had made a stronger commitment to the relationship, they were ready to explore and work on their cultural differences. Roxanne and Javed, both in their early 20s have been dating for more than a year. Roxanne is Latina and Javed is Asian Indian. Roxanne expressed her initial apprehension about Javed's culture, especially his Islamic religion. She described the many "extreme differences" between their respective cultures. For example, Roxanne explains that she belongs to a "very Catholic family" while Javed is Muslim. She described how the rules and practices in the two religions were very different and the difficulty that she experienced in often understanding all the complex rules that Javed has to follow as a Muslim. She expressed feeling "overwhelmed by small things like he is not allowed to have pork while we cook with that all the time." However, she explained that she was willing to learn more about his culture due to her commitment to be in a relationship with Javed and accepting the "whole package" instead of choosing the "little things" that she was comfortable with.

Similarly Tracy also touched on the topic of cultural differences in her relationship with Miguel. She remarked that the cultural differences seemed to emerge in many different aspects of their relationships. She remarked how she gained a little awareness about the differences in their cultures through a simple conversation about their ideal baby names.

> TRACY: You're just talking baby names -- you know I'm thinking you know, just a regular Jennifer or Mary ((Laughter)) or something like that and he's thinking Alizondro, Guadalupe, you know. You know, Rosa, Rosamia. . . . So that's one of the awakenings when we're driving in the car talking about baby names and I just think, "Whew!" We need to get a Mexican baby name book and an American baby name book and we need to really try to match something up. But -- uhm -- that's the thing is that (.) I never would have thought that I could even consider Rosamia as a name, you know, three years ago. But that is a name that's considered beautiful in -- you know for girls in his -- the Hispanic culture. And now I'm thinking well I do want our -- I like when our cultures can -- can intermingle -- and especially with [Miguel's last name]. You know I want them to have a name that reflects where they come from. From both sides.

Some couples had to confront a wide spectrum of issues within their cultural differences. This was the case for Lynn and Frank. Lynn is 30 years old and is originally from Brazil. She is married to Frank who is in his late 30's and is Caucasian. The process of dealing with cultural differences for Lynn and Frank was more complex because not only did they belong to two different cultural and racial backgrounds, but

they were also from two different countries. Thus, they had to work through a number of unique and distinct cultural differences. An important aspect of intimacy seemed to emerge out of Lynn and Frank's process of negotiating their cultural differences. This aspect was reliance. Lynn discussed the importance of reliance within the context of culture. One issue that was significant in their relationship was language. While Frank was brought up speaking English, Lynn's first language is Portuguese. She was raised on this language and only spoke this language till she came to the United States, when she started learning English. Due to this, she described needing her husband in improving her language skills in English. Although her English has increasingly improved over the years, Lynn still feels that she needs help with certain words and phrases. As a full-time student, she described having to work twice as hard because of her limitations in the English language.

> LYNN: Now not as much but before I used to have a lot of things that I couldn't figure out, you know, on my own. I would need his help. And he helped me a lot. . . . And he proofreads all of my papers. . . . And that's something amazing that I don't even know, you know, anybody else that would do that. He proofreads everything and -- uhh - he -- uhh (.) like I would call him in the middle of the day if I don't know how to say something and he would tell me. I don't think many people do. And he DOES.

Frank's demonstration of reliance is an important part of his commitment to Lynn and his relationship. Thus, this reliance helps both partners to solidify their relationship and enhance their intimacy.

An analysis of the data seems to reveal that in order to deal with the cultural differences, both partners had to first gain an awareness of their differences, especially in areas that might have an impact on the relationship. Once partners became aware of important aspects of their partner's culture, it seemed significant for them to express their appreciation of their partner's culture. Finally, some couples decided to find ways of incorporating their different cultures and blending together their differences in order to create unique definitions and traditions for their relationship.

<u>Roles of Women</u>

Due to the fact that the interviews were conducted with women by a woman, one common theme that emerged during a majority of interviews was the perceived roles of women in different cultures. In many of the relationships, partners gradually became aware of the differences in the perceptions of women in different cultures.

There seemed to be an interesting trend around the issue of the perceived roles of women in different cultures. The Latina participants in the study seemed to appreciate and accept the roles of women in their Anglo partner's culture. For example, Lynn vividly described the contrast in the definitions of women in Brazil and in the United States. She commented that in Brazil, the women are defined purely on the basis of their "bodies and looks." In general, Brazilian women "don't have the same rights" as men. They are defined as "objects of a man's desire, just for sex." In contrast, Lynn perceived the roles of women as more equal to men in the United States. Hence, her choice of a Caucasian partner contributed in helping her feel "appreciated" for her qualities versus purely being judged on the basis of her physical appearance as a woman in Brazil.

On the other hand, Tracy, who is Caucasian, described how women were defined in her culture and family. She described her role models as women who "were more equal to their husbands...in household duties (.) in earning a living." She described experiencing some difficulty in understanding and accepting the roles of women in her Latino partner's culture.

> TRACY: His family (..) and I -- I think his CULTURE (.) I see the women
>
> expressing their love for their husbands through service and through being in
>
> the kitchen and keeping the house spotless and uhm (.) not letting the man lift
>
> a finger. And just being in his (.) mother's house wears me out because she's
>
> just everywhere. She's making sure you have enough water, a napkin, many
>
> times she doesn't even sit down at the table because she's so busy in the
>
> kitchen still getting stuff ready and never sits down and enjoys anything.

Thus, there seemed to be awareness around the roles of women in different cultures. Most women did not report any conflict in the relationship around this issue. Most women described this role awareness as important to talk about in relation to their partners' expectations of their roles in the relationship.

<u>Mutual Appreciation of Culture</u>

One important aspect of commitment for the women was to appreciate and embrace their partners' culture and traditions. The women also reported the importance of when their partners showed appreciation and a curiosity about their cultures. It was essential for Lynn to expose her husband to her Brazilian culture. She expressed a deep satisfaction when she was able to go to Brazil with her husband. She described how "incredible" it was to show him "my country and my people. The house where I grew up

in." Lynn stated that by becoming more familiar with her culture, her husband now

appreciates her culture and, in turn a part of her that is very important.

> LYNN: And he, he likes -- uh -- like I -- UH -- he likes my Brazilian side. . . .
>
> And he says, "I like your accent. And that's something different that I -- you
>
> know -- that for -- for your identity that I want you to preserve." He always
>
> says, "Don't try to lose your Brazil -- you know, your Brazilian side." . . . He
>
> really likes that -- uhh -- I'm from a different culture. He really appreciates
>
> that. Because it's something that is different and something that he can learn
>
> about.

It seemed very significant for Lynn that her husband supported her cultural identity

instead of expecting her to embrace his Anglo-American identity. Lynn's words also

convey the importance of individuals expressing appreciation for aspects of their

partner's culture.

Roxanne also described her process of learning more about Javed's culture. She

described reading and researching Indian and Muslim traditions. She admitted that

although many of Javed's traditions seemed "very scary and weird" at first, she has now

slowly become familiar with them and can now often appreciate the meanings behind

many practices in Javed's culture.

Blending Cultural Traditions and Definitions of Love

In discussing cultural differences between partners, participants also spoke about

the different ways that their cultures defined love. Many of the women in this study

spoke about the "rules" or "acceptable" ways of acting as a couple. Most couples

belonged to cultures that had shared similar beliefs about love. For example, Mary found

a number of similarities in the perceptions of love between her culture and her partner's culture.

Mary and Chris have been dating for three years and are both in their early 20s. Mary is Latina and Chris is African-American. Mary commented on how both these cultures really "emphasized" love. She continued to state that love, in both cultures is "like almost an art" which she believes that both partners "brought that together" in their relationship.

Lynn spoke of many differences in the ways people expressed love in her culture versus her husband's culture. Lynn commented, that "[in the U.S.], people say more than they actually do. [In Brazil] we do more than we actually say." While Lynn belongs to a culture where love was expressed more through actions, her husband, Frank belongs to a culture that uses more words to express love. Lynn described her initial surprise at how often people in the U.S. said "I love you" to people. However, this is an important practice for Lynn that she is glad her husband brought into their relationship. In their relationship, they blend the definitions of love through explaining and understanding the other's culture.

> LYNN: I, uhh, try to tell my husband like how (..) you know, how I was, how, how I was brought up and how things were. And -- and so he has a perspective. And -- and then we kind of set like a half-way thing. Like half-way is his culture and half-way is my culture. And then (.) we just compromise. Like I -- you know - not too much of his culture and not too much of mine.

An interesting aspect that emerged within the context of this theme was related to public affection. In comparing cultural definitions of love, a majority of the participants felt that they belonged to cultures that emphasized more physical touch and affection. Most women talked about how comfortable they were to display affection in public. However, they felt that their partners belonged to cultures that did not approve of public affection. This was a common finding across all participants, regardless of their cultures. This finding is interesting because it leads to the question whether public affection had more to do with cultural differences or gender differences.

A number of participants talked about certain traditions or practices that the couple had created during their relationship. These traditions seemed unique to the couple and vital for the relationship. Although the importance of rituals has been discussed in other research with non-interracial couples, there were distinct qualities about some of the rituals described by the participants in this study. Some of these rituals were created as a result of the cultural differences between the partners. These traditions or rituals were significant because they were linked to the culture of either one or both partners. For example, Lynn described one special tradition in her relationship, which revolves around her Brazilian culture.

> LYNN: We try to find Brazilian things to do whenever possible. Like he -- he
> knows there's not much around and then he checks the paper to see if there
> was any Brazilian event going on. And then -- uhm -- like we went to Dallas
> for the state fair because they had a Brazilian thing also. Like a little tent. We
> go out and find - uh places to do some -- uhm -- uhh -- Brazilian dance. And
> he has learned how to make Brazilian -- uh -- breakfast. So we make that

together. And uh -- that -- that's -- that's really very special and very -- uh -- unique that we have.

Other couples also formed traditions and rituals related to culture. Melanie is Caucasian and in her early-40s while Jack is American-Indian and in his late-40s. An important ritual for Melanie and Jack was tied to the American-Indian culture. Melanie described that one special tradition for them involved taking frequent and long road trips and "traveling all over for powwows and other American-Indian events." Thus, the significance of rituals for some of the interracial couples in this study was in sharing and honoring one partner's culture together as a couple.

In summary, one of the prominent themes of intimacy in interracial relationships revolved around the couples' ability and willingness to deal with their various cultural differences. Through the process of gaining awareness and appreciation of their differences, these interracial couples seemed to solidify their commitment, strengthen their connection, and ultimately enhance the intimacy in their relationships.

Across all interviews, participants shared stories and accounts of times when the couple was faced with stress and adversity related to their status as an interracial couple. Most women felt that the experience of overcoming these challenges together, as a couple, seemed to be pivotal in their relationships. The participants explained how the process of undergoing stress from outside of the relationship often contributed to the enhancement of intimacy within the relationship. All women agreed that it was important for them as couples to create coping strategies in order to confront these external stresses. Through jointly creating ways of dealing with external stress, couples experienced an

increase in cohesion, a determination to overcome the stress, and a further growth in relationship intimacy.

During this discussion of challenges faced by the couples, many issues related to race, prejudice, and discrimination seemed to emerge. All participants in this study talked at length about prejudice faced by interracial couples in general. In addition, a majority of participants described painful personal experiences of racism and prejudice. Another paramount theme that emerged out of this discussion revolved around the families of the couples. There were numerous accounts of overt and subtle opposition to the interracial relationship. The challenges that were faced as a result of family opposition seemed to be very different in nature than challenges that were confronted due to societal prejudice. Due to these differences, the couples employed different coping strategies to overcome these stresses.

Surmounting Family Opposition

Out of the eleven participants in this study, seven women reported confronting varying degrees of family opposition towards their interracial relationship. For some women the opposition was only from one of the partners' family while others reported receiving negative reactions from both families. These women seemed to be the most emotionally affected when the opposition was from immediate family members like parents and siblings. Negative reactions from distant family members did not seem to influence the couple to a great degree. However, a common trend for some couples seemed to be that of initial family opposition to a progression of tolerance and even support for some relationships.

In general, it seemed that there was a larger degree of opposition from the women's families than the families of the males in these relationships. In addition, strong opposition from mothers seemed to be more prevalent than opposition from fathers. This was the case with Gloria. Gloria and her husband, Adam, have been married for 21 years and are both in their 50s. Gloria is Latina while Adam is African-American. Gloria explained that her mother was against her relationship with her husband for many years. It was only after Gloria's children were born that her mother became more accepting of her relationship and "came to a point now where she can just tolerate [Adam] and, you know, acknowledge him." Gloria recalled one incident before her marriage where her mother, who had never met Adam at that point, decided to write him a letter and express her feelings about their relationship to him. Gloria recalled some of the things that her mother included in the letter to Adam.

> GLORIA: Telling him, you know, (.) that he -- he needed to stay away. I was not for him. (.) Oh, she did! ((Laughter)) She just really went into it, you know, like -- you know, pretty much to say how bad he was for her daughter! ((Laughter)) And uhm (.) and you know that -- that he wasn't good enough. And so -- you know, that - that really hurt him. (.) And uhh -- and so HE held that resentment in (..) for a long time. (.) And in a way (..) that was very hurtful to me (.) very, very painful.

Sarah and Michael were also confronted with strong family opposition from Sarah's family. Sarah and her husband, Michael have been married for 18 years. Sarah is 35-years old and is Latina and Michael is in his early 40's and Caucasian. According to Sarah, her family alienated Michael for many years after they were married. She

described ways in which her family made excuses about not getting close to her husband. For example, Sarah described how her mother, who is "partially hard of hearing," would use that condition as "a tremendous excuse of not interacting with him and yet (.) she would interact with everybody else including the others -- you know, the daughter-in-laws and kids."

There were some individuals in the study who had been in a previous relationship that was interracial. None of these individuals reported facing family opposition. However, the majority of the women and their partners in this study had not been involved in previous interracial relationships and seemed to experience more family opposition than those who had been in interracial relationships before.

A common theme for some participants was their families' refusal to acknowledge the relationship. Some women spoke of how their families, especially their parents, would try to find them "suitable" dates despite being aware that their child was in a committed relationship. Sarah remembered such times, "when my mom, still (.) five and six years into my marriage, (.) was trying to introduce me to other gentlemen. And you know telling me I ought to meet (.) so and so (.) or telling me how so and so, (.) he's a really sweet gentleman and he's single."

Tracy also talked about her family's reaction to her relationship with a Latino man. She described her family having "certain stereotypes about Hispanic males." Although her parents were not direct in their opposition, they often conveyed their sentiments through their actions. Tracy described one incident when she was having dinner with her father and his wife at a restaurant.

TRACY: The whole time he's sitting there trying to hook me up with the

waiter. And HE ACTUALLY GAVE my number to the waiter. And I was

just -- I could -- I was just shocked. I couldn't believe that he was doing this.

You know, it was all kind of in jest but it was kind of - you know -- there was

some kind of strange truthfulness in it that, oh my gosh! And I just (..) I know

that would not have happened if I was dating someone else. WELL, someone

White! You know -- he would not have disrespected our relationship like that.

These and other similar experiences were described by the participants in the study.

Due to the sheer volume of examples of family opposition provided by the participants, it

was evident that this was a significant stress factor for the interracial couples. When

asked how the couples dealt with these situations, many women described a process of

gaining power and strength within the relationship as a result of dealing with the stress

caused by their families. In addition to creating a stronger relationship, some women

spoke about gaining personal power by deciding to stay with their partners despite their

families' reactions. An additional coping strategy that seemed to emerge from an

analysis of the data was the couples' minimizing of their racial differences in their

relationship. Although this was never articulated by the participants in the study, it

seemed to be implicit in many of their messages of "race doesn't matter to us, it's only to

people outside." In other words, because people outside the relationship seemed to be

putting a great deal of emphasis on the racial differences between the partners, the

partners seemed to cope by minimizing these differences and focusing on other aspects of

their relationship.

Personal Empowerment

Sarah and Michael have been married for 18 years. Yet at the time of their marriage, Sarah was only 18. She described herself as being protected by her family as the only girl and also being the "baby" of the family and "daddy's little girl." When her parents, belonging to a Hispanic heritage, learned about her relationship with a Caucasian man, they strongly opposed this relationship. Sarah recalled the ways they conveyed their "disapproval." Sarah described her parents' actions at this time as "very painful" and recalled feeling "traumatized" and "powerless" as a result of this opposition from her family. She also described being forced to "choose" between her parents and Michael.

> SARAH: Pushing me away (.) to a place of (.) EMOTIONALLY pushing me
> away to a place of deciding what it was going to take for me to choose him or
> them. (.) Uhm -- they began inflicting a lot of rules in my life and trying to
> enforce them. You know, they just made me powerless in many ways. It was
> a lot of things out of control for me. And (...) it got to the point where I
> literally got very, very traumatized.

Sarah continued on to describe her process of dealing with this "trauma of losing my family." Sarah explained that she had to "elope" with her husband to get married. Sarah then talked about "gaining control over my own life" after her marriage. She also explained how it took "three or four years (.) before (.) I would get to a place where I could begin working on a relationship with my parents."

Mary also expressed some of these same sentiments in discussing the opposition that she has experienced from her parents. Mary described her parents' disapproval of her relationship with an African-American man and their belief that she should only be in

relationship with someone who also belonged to Hispanic heritage like them. She

commented feeling "good" about her relationship.

> MARY: I'm with the person I want to be with. And when [my parents] pass
>
> along, I'll still be there. I don't wanna, you know, do it because they said that
>
> it was wrong. But, you know, I don't wanna miss out on something because (.)
>
> they said so and it wasn't right. So ((exhale)) my decision is not to go against
>
> them but to do something for myself and know that I MADE the RIGHT
>
> decision. (...) No matter what.

Thus, some participants experienced a sense of empowerment by gaining back their

power from their families and deciding to continue their relationship despite the risk of

losing their families. These women coped with the opposition by not allowing their

families to force them to choose. Instead, these women made the decision to be with

their partner because they truly wanted to be in relationship with their partner regardless

of his race and culture.

Relational Empowerment

When asked about the impact of the family pressure on the couple, all women

asserted that their relationship had evolved to a stronger and deeper level. The

participants expressed that even when one partner's family was causing pressure, it was

an experience that both partners had to endure. Therefore, they experienced cohesion

during the challenges they confronted from the outside. Sarah described the cohesion

that she experienced with Michael during their first years of marriage.

> SARAH: I think [the family opposition] really (.) pushed us together (.) in a
>
> lot of ways. . . . So I think (.) ultimately it blossomed into a beautiful

relationship. The first year that is traditionally very traumatic and very hard

for most marriages -- uhm -- but for us it was a time for -- uh -- strength. (.)

Building our relationship.

Mary also described her relationship becoming "stronger" as a result of the pressure

from her Hispanic family regarding her choice to date an African-American man.

Roxanne spoke at length about the opposition that both herself and Javed experienced

from their respective families. She explained that their relationship strengthened in time

as a result of the intercultural stressors from both families. She recalled initially in her

relationship feeling "torn in the middle between somebody I loved, and my family."

However, Roxanne believed that her relationship with Javed had strengthened over time

despite their families' opposition. She remarked,

> ROXANNE: But, I guess it made us stronger, because they wanted to pull us
>
> apart you know. And (.) WE didn't let them. (...) And so I think now -- maybe
>
> before sometimes I think it was -- kind of like I'm going to prove to my
>
> parents that I'm not doing anything wrong, you know? But now, it's like yes --
>
> you know -- I do love him and I will, you know, just to leave him because my
>
> parents say so and his parents say so. It's so much more now. WE are just so
>
> much stronger together.

Thus, for some couples, there seemed to be an initial period of feeling "torn" between

family and their partner. However, with time, couples seemed to cope with the

opposition through an increased cohesion within the relationship. While opposition from

families was described as painful and emotionally difficult to experience, societal

opposition and prejudice also seemed to affect some participants at a very emotional level.

Overcoming Societal Prejudice

Many women disputed the prevalent stereotype that they were with their partners because they "wanted something exotic," or that they were "rebels." The women in the study stated that they no longer saw their partner as a person from a different race, rather it was often society that reminded them of this fact. Tracy commented on this very point. She remarked,

> TRACY: When you get to know somebody (.) that gets kind of separated from
>
> all that. Because I forget that there's anything different between us when
>
> we're out on a Sunday just kind of (.) bee boppin' along. It's -- it's when (..)
>
> somebody brings it to my attention. 'Cause its more of a big deal for people
>
> on the outside. You know, they only see our differences.

Other participants like Sarah also touched on this topic. She remarked about the fact that she did not intentionally seek out a partner from a different race and that, "I didn't look to him because he was White. I just happened to really focus in on the characters that I, that were displayed to me. . . . I appreciated him for the person that he was (.) not the color."

Although some women described instances when they experienced prejudice from people in society, most women felt that people in general were more accepting of interracial and other non-traditional relationships. Most participants felt that the Central Texas area in which they resided was very diverse and liberal, and therefore people around them seemed more open and accepting to their relationship.

When participants talked about negative reactions from the larger society, they usually described situations where they received stares or comments as a couple or as a family. Some participants talked about stereotypes and how often they themselves or their partners were judged on the basis of these stereotypes. For example, Tracy touched on this topic in relation to her boyfriend, Miguel. She described feeling "frustrated" when she noted surprise in people when they found out that her Latino partner was in graduate school.

> TRACY: You know -- uhh -- it's sad more you know -- that when I say I'm
>
> dating Miguel Nunez and they hear that last name and they're thinking -- you
>
> know -- some Hispanic guy -- you know -- (.) probably has some dead-end job
>
> -- you know -- that kind of a stereotype. And so when I say something about,
>
> yeah he's working on his doctorate -- that -- you know -- the eyebrows go up
>
> and go, "Oh! Oh, well that's great!" (.) You know, and why does it have to be
>
> like that? . . . that people can't get over those -- uh -- stereotypes.

Gaining Perspective

In their discussion of societal prejudice and discrimination, some women described the impact of the discrimination on one partner. In most cases, the partner that belonged to the dominant race was confronted with prejudice for the first time in their lives. By witnessing the discrimination on either their partner or their relationship, these individuals were strongly and emotionally impacted. Melanie who is Caucasian described one such incident where she directly experienced prejudice because of her relationship. She recalled going to a restaurant in a small southern town with her American- Indian partner, Jack.

MELANIE: I noticed that everybody's being really quiet and sort of looking at us. . . . And so we -- uh -- we leave the restaurant, and I -- I said something to JACK -- if -- like, "What was with those people?" And he goes, "Well, MELANIE, you know this -- uh -- you don't know this but this is a Klan town." (.) And he said, "Uh - you just don't have any awareness of what it's like to be a minority, and to be (.) a biracial couple like that in some of these small southern towns."

Carrie also described an incident when her husband, John experienced prejudice directed toward both his wife and his relationship. Carrie described this event as "something that made him very angry and also very aware. (.) Aware of the fact that he IS different because he is with me." Carrie recalled the incident, which also took place in a restaurant. She explained that they were sitting behind two White couples.

CARRIE: I knew that [the two White couples] were laughing a lot, but I didn't necessarily associate it with us. I went to the restroom and came back. And -- and I remember sitting down and he said, "Are you ready to go?" (.) And I was like, well obviously something happened by the time I went to the restroom, so let's just go. We got outside and we're sitting in the car and I was like, "Do you mind telling me what happened?" (.) And he said, "Well, when you went to the restroom -- uhm -- these -- one of the girls -- the White girls turned to him and said, 'Couldn't you find a White girl?'" . . . AND (.) he (.) you know -- he said later that -- you know this was the first time he had kinda realized that people may look at us differently from other couples.

Although a painful and upsetting experience for Melanie and John, they, along with other participants, felt that by gaining this perspective, the cohesion between partners was strengthened. Furthermore, the partners belonging to the dominant racial group seemed to be able to identify and work together with their partners in coping with any discrimination that was directed at them.

Confronting Prejudice

It was important for some couples to confront some acts of discrimination targeted towards them. These couples often took an "active approach" in dealing with the discrimination. For participants, these confrontations mostly took the form of correcting people's stereotypes related to their relationships. In addition, these confrontations described were always with someone with whom the couple was acquainted. However, Carrie recalled an incident when she decided to take a complete stranger by surprise and actually address the prejudicial remark that he made towards Carrie and her husband. In this case, confronting a stranger actually had a positive outcome for Carrie and John.

> CARRIE: We passed by two couples -- two Black couples. And the guy said, "Will you look at salt and pepper." (.) And I turned to him, I said, "Where?" (.) ((Laughs.)) BECAUSE I WANTED HIM TO KNOW that I heard him. And I wasn't gonna be -- you know -- just ignore that. . . . And he looked at me and he just died laughing -- because he knew exactly what I was doing. And he went, "I didn't mean any disrespect to you." And I said, "Thank you." You know -- and then it was -- it was interesting because -- uhm -- (.) you know, he apologized to me and he apologized to JOHN.

The participants who described times when they had confronted prejudice described feeling "good" about their decision to confront instead of ignore. They acknowledged that confronting prejudice might not always be effective or successful. However, for many it was important for them regardless of the outcome. Roxanne described her decision to confront as "at least once, saying something instead of just listening to other people's comments."

Use of External Resources

Many women touched on support from external sources as an important aspect of the couples' coping methods. Many women felt that experiencing support from friends and family often kept the couple from feeling isolated or alienated from the outside community. Many women touched that one important source of support were their friends who were also involved in interracial relationships. Thus, there was a significant sense of community that these women experienced around other interracial couples.

Support from family members was also very crucial for the participants. Some women reported receiving support from one partner's family while the other partner's family was opposed to the relationship. In these situations, the support that the partners received was even more significant. These women reported feeling "assured" that at least one of their families was "welcoming" toward the relationship. Melanie touched on the importance of support from the American-Indian community in her life.

> MELANIE: So, there's people among the Navajo, and Commanche, and Taos
>
> Pueblo, and now the Cherokee, that have adopted me into their families. Or --
>
> you're just a part of the extended family. There's that kinship bonding...But

everybody just -- we all forget that I'm not Indian ((Laughter)), and that feels

so good. Knowing that they are there for me and that I am family to them.

<u>Family</u>

Dana remembered the importance of receiving acceptance and support from her

great-grandmother. Dana explained that when her great-grandmother heard the news that

Dana was dating an African-American man, she responded by stopping their tradition of

writing letters to each other regularly. Dana recalled not hearing from her great-

grandmother for about a month. However, her great-grandmother finally wrote to Dana

and offered her blessings and support to both Dana and Peter.

> DANA: [My great-grandmother] wrote me and said "WELL, I've prayed
>
> about it and I've talked to our pastor about it and (.) there's nothing in the
>
> Bible that says you all can't do this. SO (..) we wish you the best AND (..) she
>
> wrote to Peter saying "you know it may be hard to get into our family but it's
>
> harder to get out." So I was like "Phew," you know, and after that she
>
> welcomed him with -- uh -- open arms.

In discussing family support, Carrie described both their families as being supportive

of the relationship. She recalled her first meeting with her mother-in-law and being

unsure about her reaction to their relationship. Carrie described this meeting as a time

"when she kind of tested me." Carrie explained that she understood later that her mother-

in-law had concerns about the way they would handle pressure from other people who

would look at their relationship as, "simply as a White guy with a Black woman."

However, when her mother-in-law realized that Carrie was capable of handling any

external pressure, she was supportive of their relationship. Carrie described experiencing

support from her mother-in-law in the fact that she is not "embarrassed" to show her family to other people.

> CARRIE: She has a picture of us at work. And pictures of her grandson -- which, (.) you know - and she's older. (..) A White female. Her bosses are older White males. (.) Uh -- conservative. And it's that feeling of, "Well, (.) "this is my daughter-in-law. (.) I -- I care about her enough to put a picture up. And I don't really care what you say." (.) So she's not embarrassed (.) you know -- to have me (.) as her daughter-in-law. And that means a lot.

Support from family was especially significant for Sarah and Michael. Sarah remembered Michael's parents "being there" for them when Sarah's family was pressuring her to end her relationship. She was grateful that Michael's parents did not oppose their son marrying someone who was Latina and bringing her in their Anglo-American family. She described that support as being very important for her during the time that they eloped together.

> SARAH: [Michael's parents were] very supportive. (..) Very supportive. In fact his mom and dad offered to be taking the place of [my] mom and dad in the interim to support us, to help us. It gets back to our elopement -- uhm -- they bought me the dress, organized the justice of the peace at that particular time. . . . [Michael's parents were] there as a safety net. And they still continue to be very, very supportive.

Friends

Most women reported having a circle of friends that were "liberal," "open-minded," and "diverse." Thus, most women felt that their friends supported their relationships.

Mary described her circle of friends in college when she started dating Chris. For Mary, this support from friends was especially helpful in "balancing" all the pressures she experienced with her family.

> MARY: [Our friends] they knew both of us individually and when we started dating they were just so supportive. . . . I also thought they knew us individually -- they knew him very well, they knew me very well and they just thought it was a perfect match you know and (.) we went out with all our FRIENDS -- you know -- Anglo couples, Hispanic couples, Black couples. And everyone was okay with it. I mean they thought it was great.

Sarah also experienced support from her friends from high school at the time when her family was opposed to her relationship. She remembered that she had some friends from high school who provided support to her during the time of her elopement.

Most women felt it was important for them to have a circle of friends that accepted and supported their relationship. For many couples, their friends often provided the support that they were missing from their families. In some cases, participants reported having friends that helped them and supported them in situations where they faced discrimination. Thus, it seemed that having a network of supportive friends was a significant way of coping with stress in addition to feeling supported in being in an interracial relationship. By receiving support from friends and family, couples felt affirmed in their relationship and thus motivated to stay and continue to enhance their relationship and intimacy.

In summary, there were a number of important themes that contributed to intimacy in the interracial relationships in this study. Participants described a number of factors

that are universal processes in romantic relationships. These factors included commitment, connection, mutuality, empowerment, honesty, trust, respect, conflict resolution, and physical intimacy. In addition to these global factors, participants in also discussed important themes related to intimacy that were unique to interracial relationships.

There were four primary themes that were essential for the participants in their experience of relational intimacy within the context of race and culture. Cultural differences between partners were significant because, as a result of dealing with these differences, couples experienced growth in their relationship and intimacy. Although couples were confronted with painful and often traumatic stressors from external sources such as family, participants believed that dealing through these challenges enhanced the intimacy between partners. Finally, support from family and friends during difficult times facilitated a growth in relational intimacy for interracial couples. A summary and discussion of results is presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of intimacy for women in interracial relationships. This study was grounded in a combined feminist and phenomenological approach to research. A total number of 11 women, who had been involved in an interracial relationship for one year or more, were asked to discuss their perceptions and experiences of intimacy in their relationships. The interviews were semi-structured and collaborative in nature, providing participants a more flexible path to exploration and discussion of factors that contribute to intimacy in their relationships.

This chapter presents a summary of the results along with a discussion of these results. This chapter will also provide a brief discussion of the limitations of this study along with suggestions and directions for future research.

Summary of the Results

A number of themes seemed to emerge in the exploration of intimacy in relationships. However, the four primary themes of negotiating cultural differences, surmounting family opposition, confronting societal prejudice, and the use of external resources seemed most crucial to the experience of intimacy for women in interracial relationships. All participants discussed significant aspects relevant to intimacy that were common across all relationships in general. However, participants also described other elements that were unique to interracial couples.

Universal Themes of Intimacy in Romantic Relationships

Participants touched on a number of global processes contributing to the intimacy in their relationships. These processes are global because they seem to exist in all types of romantic relationships as indicated by the literature on intimacy and romantic relationships. The emergence of these universal themes is an extremely significant finding because it strengthens the theory that interracial romantic relationships are indeed similar to non-interracial relationships in many aspects. Furthermore, this finding disputes many of the myths about abnormality in interracial relationships by providing evidence that states that interracial couples are not that different from intraracial couples. One of the general aspects that emerged from this study is the concept of mutuality. Mutuality was conceptualized by most participants as the sharing of values, beliefs, and practices in the relationship. An important aspect of this mutuality was the reciprocity of love between partners experienced through thoughtful gestures, physical affection, and sexual intimacy. Mutuality in respect, trust, and openness were also important aspects that sustained the couples' intimacy. Other universal elements included the importance of commitment, empowerment in the relationship, conflict resolution, and open communication.

Connection was an important theme for all participants. Although couples belonged to different racial and cultural backgrounds, they felt that similarities between them contributed largely to the connection in their relationships. Thus, similarities and complementary beliefs were important reasons for connection for participants. A majority of participants discussed the ways they initially formed connections with their partners. This initial connection created the foundation for their relationship and

continued to play a vital part in the couples' relationships. Participants also talked at

length about the role of relational stress on intimacy in the relationship. The successful

resolution of relational stress seemed instrumental in improving intimacy in the

relationship.

<u>Significant Themes of Intimacy for Interracial Relationships</u>

All participants touched on the dynamics of race and culture on their relational

intimacy. They acknowledged that while they experienced intimacy in many ways

similar to non-interracial couples, the intimacy in their relationship was significantly

affected due to the added dynamics of race and culture.

Many participants described the couples' process of understanding, appreciating,

and eventually integrating their cultural differences to create a unique definition of their

relationship. Cultural differences were negotiated through a growing awareness of

differences, appreciation of the other's culture, and finally a desire to incorporate

traditions and definitions of the two cultures. One significant aspect of the awareness

was the differences in the roles of women between the two cultures in the relationship.

Culture also seemed to be related to the concept of reliance for a few participants.

Finally, rituals that reflected the culture of the partners were significant to the experience

of intimacy. These rituals were significant because they helped partners blend their

different cultures together to create new and unique traditions as a couple. These rituals

were also important because they provided the couple with time for each other and

opportunities to enhance the connection in the relationship.

Coping with family opposition, although painful and stressful, was perceived by

many participants as significant in enhancing the intimacy between the partners in the

interracial relationship. Participants felt that partners had to come together and become more cohesive in order to confront the family opposition.

Participants experienced a sense of cohesion and a growth of intimacy as a result of experiencing negative reactions from society as an interracial couple. Intimacy was enhanced for many couples when partners from the racially privileged group experienced prejudice or discrimination for the first time as a part of the interracial couple. Through these experiences, these individuals gained more perspective and became willing to confront prejudice whenever possible.

All participants expressed the significance of support that they received from family and friends. This external support helped couples feel positive about their relationships and enhance their intimacy.

Conclusions

There are a number of aspects that contribute to the experience of intimacy for women in interracial relationships. As mentioned earlier, some of these can be seen as universal across all types of romantic relationships. On the other hand, a number of aspects unique to interracial couples seemed to emerge as a result of this study.

The themes of connection and commitment have been shown to be significant factors of intimacy across a variety of relationships (Connolly, 1998; Moss & Schwebel, 1993; Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Similarly, the concept of mutuality is another universal aspect of intimate relationships (Jordan, 1991). Moreover, a review of the literature on intimacy also presents other components such as communication, empowerment, closeness, physical and sexual intimacy, mutuality in interests, goals, beliefs, and values as significant factors in romantic relationships (Hatfield & Rapson,

1987; Marston et al., 1998; Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Rosenbluth & Steil, 1995; Waring, 1988).

The participants in this study discussed at length the strategies utilized by the couple in order to resolve relational stress. There was agreement that by successful resolution of conflict, both partners had experienced an increase in intimacy. This finding is consistent with previous research on intimacy, where other couples also discussed the impact of conflict resolution on intimacy (Harper et al., 2000; Schwebel et al., 1999).

To date, it appears that little to no research has examined the concept of intimacy within the context of interracial relationships. This study resulted in the emergence of a number of themes that seemed to distinctly describe important themes of intimacy for interracial couples. Many of these themes were unique to interracial relationships. These themes included the couples' commitment to deal with the cultural differences that existed between partners. Negotiating and appreciating these differences were an important part of the commitment experienced by the participants. Most participants strongly agreed that the level of intimacy in the relationship was transformed as a result of dealing with their differences. This aspect of intimacy was unique for women in interracial relationship due to the inherent racial and cultural differences existing between partners.

Some interesting insights emerged as a result of the discussion on cultural differences. The participants described different ways of dealing with cultural differences in the relationship. Dealing with cultural differences for some couples meant gaining awareness and learning about certain aspects of the each other's culture. For

example, an important insight reported by participants was their awareness of the roles of women in their partner's culture.

Another way that participants often described their experience of dealing with cultural differences was to express appreciation towards aspects of their partners' culture that seemed attractive and valuable to them. Moreover, many participants also reported feeling very happy when their partners expressed appreciation of certain aspects of their culture. Finally, for some participants, appreciation often led to the desire to incorporate aspects of the other's culture into the lives of the couple. For example, learning the partner's language or seeking out and attending events related to the partner's culture were important acts of incorporation in the interracial relationships. Thus, integrating and embracing aspects of each other's culture, thereby transforming them into a part of the relationship, was a powerful way of dealing with cultural differences.

An additional finding emerged as a result of the discussion on cultural differences. When participants were asked to describe the differences in the definitions of love between the two cultures in the relationship, a majority of the participants felt that they belonged to cultures that encouraged public displays of affection. On the other hand, both White and non-White women reported that their partners belonged to cultures that discouraged people from expressing affection in public. This finding was interesting because it seemed to be more related to gender differences than cultural differences. Previous resources suggest a gender difference in the definitions of and the ideals of romantic relationships (Forgas & Dobosz, 1980; Hatfield & Rapson, 1987). Women are socialized to express more love while men are socialized to be independent. Therefore, it seems acceptable for women to express their intimacy in public while men may hesitate

to express their intimacy in public (Hatfield & Rapson, 1987). These patterns of socialization are across many cultures and may aid in better understanding the perceptions of the participants in this study. In other words, it may be that all participants, regardless of their race, may have been socialized in cultures that perceive women as more nurturing and intimate and men as more autonomous and independent.

There seems to be mixed research on the issue of public touch between couples. Some researchers believe that while no differences in public displays of affection exist between males and females, males initiate public touch more often during the initial stages of a relationship while women initiate a higher degree of public touch during the later stages of a relationship (Emmers & Dindia, 1995). This may be one explanation for the four participants in the study who have been involved with their partner for more than five years. Therefore, there might indeed be a difference between public displays of affection between the participants in this study and their partners. However, gender definitions may play a larger part in this difference than cultural definitions of love.

There is a limited amount of research to date that has discussed rituals as an important factor of intimacy. Connolly (1998) conducted a study with long-term lesbian couples and found that rituals were an important and creative resource for couples, contributing to the strength, resiliency, and longevity of these relationships. Similarly, rituals seemed to be a vital part of the couples' lives in the present study. After noting the importance of rituals in two different types of relationship, one might speculate that rituals might be a more important aspect for non-traditional romantic relationships as they help these couples find creative means to strengthen their relationships and establish their own traditions and definitions of their relationship.

The theme of reliance was another theme that was unique to the present study. This researcher was unable to find research that has included reliance as a theme contributing to intimacy in romantic relationships. This researcher believes that reliance can be an important theme in interracial relationships. It is especially significant in situations where the couple is living in an area that is predominantly part of one partner's culture. In this situation, the partner who is culturally different can experience isolation and invisibility because of their difference in culture. Reliance from the partner that belongs to the dominant culture of the area can help the culturally different partner feel more acculturated and less isolated.

The experience of relying on one's partner can be especially essential and powerful for individuals in interracial relationships who are also from another country. These individuals not only have to deal with their status of being culturally different but also have to deal with their status of being a foreigner to the country. Thus, reliance from their partner may be essential in many aspects including language and laws and rules of the country among other things. While the theme of reliance is significant for interracial relationships and emerged within the context of the interracial relationships in this study, it may not necessarily be unique to these relationships only. It may be important to examine this aspect in other types of romantic relationships.

There were other important aspects related to intimacy that seemed significant for women in interracial relationships. Support from family and friends were extremely crucial for the interracial couples in this study. Previous research also notes the importance of external support, especially for non-traditional couples (Connolly, 1998; Lewis & Yancey, 1995). Support was especially significant for the participants at times

when they were faced with numerous sources of opposition. During this time, support from family and friends often helped participants feel affirmed in their decision to be in an interracial relationship. Thus, external support from family and friends plays an important role in empowering the couples and their decision to be with one another. In relation to external support, many participants discussed the importance of meeting other interracial couples and multiracial families. This researcher believes that interracial couples experience support through other interracial couples because they gain a sense of community and acceptance from other interracial couples, which are important aspects that are often missing from the lives of non-traditional couples. Through connection with other interracial couples, individuals can not only experience the positive factors in their relationship but can also witness the strengths that exist in other interracial relationships. This can be extremely significant and powerful for some couples who have received a vast amount of negative messages about interracial relationships from other people in their lives.

Two other significant issues were family opposition and societal prejudice. There seemed to be a higher rate of opposition from the families of the women in the interracial relationships. Past research has also uncovered this trend where more women receive a larger degree of opposition from their families (see Frankenberg, 1993; Hill & Thomas, 2000; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). A majority of participants in this study who reported confronting family opposition were Latina. However, this may be due to the fact that six out of the eleven participants in the study were Latina. Therefore, this finding may have more to do with the sample of this particular study than race and culture.

Although the factors of family opposition and societal prejudice have been discussed in previous research, they have not been examined within the context of intimacy in interracial relationships. Moreover, previous research has simply pointed out these two factors as leading to stress without discussing the ways in which the couple has coped with the stress. One exception to this is Foeman and Nance's (1999) model for interracial relationship development. The stages of this model, outlined in chapter two, seem to be very closely related to the themes of coping with external stressors in the present study.

There are a number of parallels between the interracial relationship development model and the findings of the present study. A number of themes in the study seem to describe specific stages in the model outlined by Foeman and Nance. For example, in discussing the theme of external opposition, many participants described the process of increased cohesion between partners as a result of the external strain on their relationship. This process seems to correspond with Foeman and Nance's second stage where they note that the couples are often "forced" to become more cohesive due to the external stress, which leads to a deeper sense of commitment and cohesion between the partners.

Another similarity is related to the issue of defining the interracial relationship. According to Foeman and Nance, the couple reaches a place where they begin to create unique definitions of their relationship. This phenomena was experienced by a number of participants in the study who described blending their different cultures and definitions of love, thus creating a unique definition of their own relationship.

The element of time proved important for many interracial couples in the study. A large number of participants described their relationship and changes in aspects of their

intimacy across time. For example, while there were initial doubts about commitment for individuals, through time they experienced a stronger commitment to one another. The element of time was important in the context of family opposition. Many participants described feeling "torn in the middle," or "extremely stressed out" when they initially faced family opposition to their relationship. Many women spoke about contemplating whether being in a relationship with their partner was worth all the stress that they were experiencing. But with the passage of time, participants reported building stronger bonds with their partners. As one participant reported, "it made [the relationship] stronger, because [our parents] wanted to pull us apart." Therefore, the element of time proved significant for the couple to realize that their relationships were important in their lives and worth fighting for.

Moreover, the element of time is also significant with families who were opposed to the interracial relationships in the study. While families took a very active stance in opposing the relationship at first, through time many families either accepted the relationship or learned to tolerate it without inflicting a great amount of stress on the couple. As a result, the "fighting and the shouting" appeared to de-escalate with time. While some families may have evolved to a stage of tolerance with time, other families made some severe changes in their opinion over time. A few participants noted that, over time, their families realized that the interracial relationship was healthy and positive for their child and realized that many of their fears were unfounded. These families then often transformed into resources of support for the couple. Thus, the element of time seems to play a significant role in many aspects and dynamics of interracial relationships.

This researcher believes that the element of time is indeed significant for the intimacy of interracial couples. The initial doubts and hesitation that interracial couples experience are often due to the messages that they receive from sources that are external to the relationship. These sources are often based on stereotypes, myths, and beliefs about the separation of races and cultures. It is only when the individuals spend more time with their partners and begin to realize that there are strengths in their relationship that they begin to reject the myths and stereotypes. With time, interracial couples may realize that the arguments against their relationship are not valid and that their relationship holds many of the same strengths that are in intraracial relationships.

The element of time is also important in relation to society's perception of interracial relationships. Interracial relationships have increasingly become more accepted in the United States as indicated by the literature review. The laws that were created and enforced against interracial relationships are no longer in existence. Individuals now have the legal right to marry interracially. Moreover, the United States has evolved into a diverse society with people from a number of racial and cultural backgrounds. This diversity has resulted in a willingness to accept differences among people. While opposition to interracial relationships and other non-traditional relationships still exists in many parts of society, interracial relationships are steadily becoming more prominent. The rate on interracial marriages has steadily increased over the years and research indicates a higher number of people who are also dating interracially.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study uncovered significant information about interracial

relationships, many limitations exist. One of the limitations of the study is the issue of

generalizability. While the issue of generalizability is central in quantitative research, it

is not a core aspect of qualitative research. Qualitative research methodology pays more

attention to the context and operates within the belief that results have no meaning

without paying attention to the context in which the study was conducted. Thus, the

results of a qualitative study cannot be fully generalized to any other context (Heppner,

Kivilign, Jr., & Wampold, 1999).

One limitation that exists in the present study has to do with its sample of

participants. Although the participants and their partners were diverse in their racial and

cultural backgrounds, the majority of these couples belonged to a higher socioeconomic

status (middle to upper-middle class). In addition, education level of participants was

higher than average. All participants had at least bachelor's level education, and seven

women were pursuing graduate level degrees. Due to these two factors, the participants

in this study may not be representative of the larger population of interracial couples.

Bias is another issue that has often been perceived as problematic in qualitative

research. In the present study, it can be argued that there is a higher probability of

researcher bias due to the researcher's personal experience in an interracial relationship.

However, certain measures were employed to reduce researcher bias. Every effort was

made to use the participants' words during the interviews and the presentation of results.

A semi-structured interview approach was determined to be the most appropriate

approach as it allowed the participants to largely determine the direction of the

interviews. In addition, the researcher also utilized journaling throughout the process of data collection, documentation, and analysis in order to record personal reflections related to the study.

There was some inconsistency in the setting of the interviews in the present study. While there was inconsistency in the setting of the interviews, it was important for the researcher to leave the choice of a meeting place to the participants. By having the choice, participants were free to pick a place that would be most comfortable for them to meet. Thus, by sacrificing the consistency of a setting, this researcher ensured that the participants were comfortable and thus more open to the interview.

Although limitations exist, this study contributes to the body of knowledge related to interracial couples. While it may not be representative to all interracial couples, it is significant because it conveys the stories and experiences of the participants in this study, thus providing readers with personal accounts rather than outsider perspectives.

<u>Recommendations</u>

The findings of the present study offer a significant amount of insight into interracial relationships. These findings also suggest a number of directions for future research. Although the present study was qualitative, there are a number of findings that might lend themselves to future quantitative research. While the present study explored themes of intimacy in interracial relationships through semi-structured interviews, future quantitative studies can investigate important factors of intimacy in interracial relationships by using a survey method to analyze the critical factors in intimacy for interracial couples. In addition to this, the final themes of intimacy in this study may be helpful in constructing an intimacy scale for interracial couples that more accurately

represents their experiences of intimacy. Moreover, there is a need to investigate the relevance of current intimacy scales with interracial couples. Thus, future researchers can investigate the validity of some prominent scales of intimacy and relationships with non-traditional couples such as interracial couples.

Another area to explore might be with men's experiences of intimacy in interracial relationships. The findings presented in this study are from the perspective of women due to its focus on women. It would be beneficial to follow and expand this research by including the perspective of men in interracial relationships. It might also be beneficial to conduct a similar study and interracial couples as a dyad. Exploration of intimacy factors with a larger number and a more diverse group of participants might also strengthen and expand on the current findings.

The present study also provides insight into differences within cultures. There seemed to be some differences in experiences between women in high-context cultures and those women belonging to low-context cultures. Further exploration into these differences might offer additional insights into the dynamics of interracial relationships. Additionally, it might be helpful to look at the different characteristics of interracial relationships on the basis of high and low-context cultures. For example, future research may attempt to discover the differences in relationships between partners belonging to similar context cultures (i.e., where both partners belong to high-context cultures or vice versa) versus those relationships where one partner belongs to a low-context culture while the other belongs to a high-context culture.

Additional avenues of future research include exploring factors of intimacy in interracial relationships of gay men and lesbian women. In addition, it may be important

for future researchers to examine the role of acculturation in interracial relationships where partners are not only from different cultures but also from different countries. These and other directions of research can be significant in contributing to the larger body of research on interracial relationships.

The history of interracial relationships is long and complex. It is a history that is filled with laws that once banned interracial marriages along with beliefs that these relationships were somehow dysfunctional, immoral, and 'wrong in the eyes of God.' However, it is also a history of overcoming. For decades now, interracial couples have overcome enormous amounts of adversity and rejected many myths and stereotypes that described them. Like other marginalized groups in society they have fought for their rights, especially to be recognized by the law.

This history of overcoming has greatly contributed to the increasing numbers of interracial couples in our society today. While interracial couples possess some unique qualities, it is also important to stress that they experience many of the same processes experienced by intraracial couples. For years now researchers and academicians have described interracial relationships through a model emphasizing deficits. This researcher hopes to contribute to the discipline of social sciences and mental health research by providing a strengths based perspective of interracial relationships by describing all the universal processes along with the unique issues faced by the couples in their journey to create and enhance intimacy and love.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Women in Interracial Relationships: A Qualitative Exploration of

Relationship Intimacy

My name is Smita Sundaresan. I am a Master's student in the department of

Educational Administration and Psychological Services at Southwest Texas State

University, San Marcos, Texas. I am currently working on my Master's thesis project,

which involves the study of romantic interracial relationships. In particular, I am trying

to learn about women in interracial relationships and how they perceive intimacy in these

relationships. For the purpose of the present study, I am limiting my study to only

women in heterosexual interracial relationships. However, it is my hope that in the future

this project can be expanded to explore more diverse interracial relationships. Research

on interracial relationships is slowly emerging in the area of social science research.

However, there is a need for additional research on the subject. In addition, there is

limited research to date that has focused exclusively on women and intimacy in

interracial relationships. This information would be helpful in obtaining descriptive

information for therapists, educators, and researchers. If at any time you have questions

or concerns about this project, please feel free to contact me, Smita Sundaresan, at (512)-

707-1238. In addition, you can also contact my Thesis committee chairperson, Dr. S.

Kerl at (512)-245-3758. You may also contact me at the following address:

Educational administration and psychological services,

Education Building, 4th floor, 600 University Drive, San Marcos, TX-78666.

Process of the Study: I will invite you to share your story of your relationship and the intimacy that you have experienced in this relationship. We will only have one meeting. You will determine how long we meet as it is your story that remains the focus. You may share whatever is comfortable for you. The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed to assist me in writing my report.

Rights and Privileges: Tapes and transcripts will be kept confidential, and these tapes will be destroyed when no longer needed for the study. These records will remain locked when not in the possession of the researcher. Your identity will be kept anonymous in the written reports, and any identifying names or information will be deleted from the transcripts. Pseudonyms will be employed when referring to participants with members of the thesis committee or when discussing or writing about the results. Your comments will not be shared with others in any way that identifies you. The tapes and transcripts will be destroyed at the end of the study.

This project is voluntary in nature. Thus, you may choose not to answer any questions, withdraw from the project, and/or end an interview at any time.

Potential Benefits and Risks: The process of this study might increase your awareness about your relationship and in turn also increase awareness and communication within the couple, which might be of value to the relationship. Little risk in involved in participating in this study. You are in control of what is discussed in the interview. However, women who are currently experiencing a crisis in their relationship, are asked to decline participation. Your signature indicates that you are not in crisis, and

that you are currently involved in a heterosexual, romantic, interracial relationship for 1 or more years.

Participant's Consent: I have read all of the above information and consent to be interviewed by Smita Sundaresan. This consent form will be filed separately to ensure anonymity. Access is restricted to the principal researcher or authorized representative. My signature also acknowledges receipt of a copy of this consent form.

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

Researcher: I have carefully discussed the nature of the above project to the participant. To the best of my knowledge the participant signing the consent form clearly understands the nature, benefits, risks, and voluntary nature of the study. No apparent medical problem, language barrier, or educational difficulty precludes a clear understanding of her involvement in this project.

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

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