ACCEPTANCE OR DENIAL: INTERRACIAL COUPLES' EXPERIENCES IN PUBLIC SPACES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

How visible are interracial couples in society? According to Steinbugler (2005), they are not especially visible to passersby because they are often not recognizable as romantic partners. This could very possibly be due to the fact that interracial couples do not show as much public affection as intra-racial couples (Vaquera and Kao 2005). Most researchers agree that this is due to social barriers or constraints inhibiting their partaking in such (e.g. Vaquera and Kao 2005). Yet, relatively little is known about the experiences of inter-racial couples in public spaces, whether constrained or not. Even less is known about how such experiences affect those couples. Therefore, I will help to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the experiences of interracial couples in public spaces. Specifically, I will focus on how they perceive other people's view of them and whether this influences their lives and, especially, the behavioral adaptations they may make in response. Such adaptations can range from simple things, such as not being physically affectionate in public, to major things like deciding that they should break up due to how they have been treated in public settings.

The main goal is to gain knowledge from a subset of interracial couples – specifically Black/White pairings—regarding their various experiences in public, comparing the results across couples looking for patterns and issues. My research question is "How do biracial couples in public perceive their reception in social environments they encounter and, especially, how do they respond to these perceptions?" By asking this question I will be able to compare the experiences of the couples that are interviewed and find similarities and

differences in how they view society's perceptions of them and to discover whether this affects the couples' life choices.

This topic is significant to sociology because interracial relationships are increasing in number even as comparatively little is known about the treatment accorded them by others. Findings from the study proposed here could also provide yet another baseline measurement of the advancement, or lack of advancement, of society's racial ideals. They can also be used to educate its members on these issues and thereby advance race relations ideals. If these relationships are sufficiently studied and determinations are made as to what reactions are faced by such couples in public, we can use the information gained in diversity training or in efforts to find ways to combat racist ideas or behaviors.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Within my literature review I will provide a brief history of what is known about how Black/White interracial relationships have fared in the US in an effort to show how the nation's racism influenced, or constrained, such relationships over time. I will mainly look at everyday life of interracial couples in public spaces in terms of how those persons they encounter respond to them and the effects of these responses on the couples. Of special interest is how the internal dynamics of these relationships are affected by the couples' experiences in public and how this may affect the satisfaction of the partners. Additionally, I briefly look at how racial identities of the couples may sometimes undergo change as a result of the negative treatment the couples confront in encounters with strangers in public, along with the similarly negative treatment received from friends/family etc.

Interracial couples have had a very turbulent history in our country, from the times of slavery, when such relationships were clandestine and likely coercive, to the Jim Crow years, when such unions were mostly illegal, to the Civil Rights era when they were finally legitimized. Needless to say, the enshrined legality of the latter period to the present has not prevented the continuation of undesirable reactions to these unions (Killian 2012).

In our country's past there were explicit laws in 38 states that made unions between Blacks and Whites illegal. Such laws were eventually struck down by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional, but not until 1967 (Miller et al 2004). Even with these laws having been stricken from our books so many years ago, marital unions between Black and Whites still remain among the fewest in frequency among the various types of interracial couplings in our country,

according to Luther and Rightler-McDaniels (2013). For example, Black and White unions accounted for only 11.9 percent of all US interracial marriages in 2010. By contrast, the authors found that marriages between Whites and Hispanics (though not strictly a racial group, often analyzed as such) accounted for almost four times as many as did the Black-White unions.

More to the point, Asians, who are clearly and correctly classified as a racial grouping, and who are vastly outnumbered by Blacks, still accounted for more intermarriages with Whites (14.4 vs 11.9 percent) in 2010 than did Blacks (Wang 2012). As noted by Herman and Campbell (2012), many Whites who consider themselves (otherwise) racially open-minded, may still not date interracially –with regard specifically to Blacks-- let alone marry that way.

The residuals of our historic racial conflict no doubt underlie the negative opinions and stigma that interracial couples often face from the general public including, in some cases, from their own families. The couples' families may oppose their relationship due to the dissenters' own prejudices (Davidson 1992). For example, White families may feel the couple will suffer economically, while Black families may want their child to marry within their race to stay close to their community (Kaba 2011). These are just some the pressures that these couples must face on a daily basis due to the nature of their relationships.

Some analysts have even found that at least some portions of the public believe that White women in interracial relationships are rebelling against their families and/or have a hatred for their parents, thereby deeming the relationships as deviant (Davidson 1992). Some of these types of stereotypes are perpetuated

by the negative portrayal of interracial couples in the media (Childs 2005a). In many media outlets, interracial relationships are "portrayed to be dysfunctional and even dangerous" (Luther and Rightler-McDaniels 2013:4). Even more stigmatizing is the view that such relationships are not serious because the coupling is just another "conquest" for the allegedly hypersexual Black males in these relationships (Childs 2005a, Davis and Cross 1979).

Another negative image undermining these couplings, also reinforced by the media, is the portrayal of the White women in them as uncaring people who "steal" all of the good Black men (Childs 2005b). This furthers the related interpersonal difficulties faced by Black women, who are already plagued by a shrinking pool of eligible (marriageable) age-appropriate Black men (Aponte 1999). Nonetheless, despite the many instances of negative media portrayals of the various parties to these affairs, it is still the case, as shown by Lienemann and Stopp (2013), that the more media exposure the public has to interracial couples, the more positive the attitudes become.

Even in contemporary times there appear to be those who hold the idea that "people ought to stick with their own" and such ideas will obviously not portend well for interracial couples (Schueths 2014:2441). Oftentimes, couples will have to contend with "lite" ostracism by their own families and social networks, in spite of the superficial acceptance the disapproving ones may display. More frequently, however, they experience comments and snide looks from members of the public in everyday encounters (Dunleavy 2004, Killian 2012. Worse still, in extreme cases, couples may come to fear for their own

personal safety –at least in certain geographical areas (Killian 2012). A common reaction to these provocations by such couples is separating themselves from each other in public --as if they were not romantically involved.

Even when discriminatory actions are not made directly to a specific individual in these unions, such actions to the partner can significantly impact both. Entitled "rebound racism" by Schueths (2014), the typical example of the phenomenon is when the White partner is not the direct target of racism, but sustains harm from it indirectly, through discriminatory treatment directed at the Black partner. Discriminatory hiring and/or wage-discrimination, for example, even if directed solely at one's partner, will undermine the resource base of both parties. As noted by Schueths "If the Black partner is not compensated fairly, the resources of the entire family are diminished" (2014:2441).

This rebound racism may have an impact on one's racial identity as well. Payne (1997) elaborates on how this may come about when White partners in such couplings are treated more or less as "outsiders" (or perhaps even traitors) by other Whites. As a response, the White partner will sometimes "give up" on identifying with the White community and thereby experience an identity reevaluation (see also Forry et al 2007). A related point flows from an analysis by Childs (2005a) regarding the racial identity preferences of members of interracial relationships. She found that when asked about their racial identity, the majority of the Black partners preferred being identified as Black. However, the White partners tended to express little, if any, connection to being White.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

      This project is grounded in an interpretive philosophy of science and uses a qualitative phenomenological research design. I have chosen to use an interpretive approach (Esterberg 2005) because I want to explore the phenomenon of interracial relationships and how the participants experience and construct the reality that is their relationship. This approach is ideal as it allows for methods that lead to a rich understanding of interracial couple experiences from the perspective of people in such relationships themselves. According to Murphy and Rosenbaum, a phenomenological approach, "places the view of the actor and her meaning-making process at the center of analysis (1999:159)." I will be using this approach in order to analyze how the interviewees view the public perception and what that means to them and their relationships.

<u>Interviews</u>

      The data was derived from one-on-one interviews that set out to discover the experiences of Black/White interracial couples in public settings. Through the interviews I was able to further explore their views on racism in America and how that might also influences the way these couples perceive other people's typical reactions to them in a public setting. The interviews took place in a public place that was convenient to the participants. They lasted between an hour and two hours and were audio recorded using a digital recorder with the consent of the participants. The digital files were transcribed by the researcher and a third party and after the transcription was completed, the original files were erased.

Table 1 shows the sample demographics. The sample consisted of six adults (age 18+) comprising three Black/White couples who had been –and still were-- united in a 'long-term' interracial relationship, defined here as being coupled for at least a full year. All of these couples were married or engaged at the time of the interview and all three consisted of a Black male and a White female. The age range for the sample was 30 to 54. Though the interviewees were couples, they were nevertheless interviewed individually in order to minimize any potential bias that could occur if a respondent were to be influenced by their partner's comments. The sample was obtained by personal networks of the researcher and colleagues in the sociology department. They were pre-screened prior to the interviews to ensure that they fit all of the criteria required by this study. The prescreening questions can be found in the Appendix.

Table 1: Sample Demographics

Name*	Age	Race	Gender	Status	Education	Occupation
Alan	44	Black	Male	Engaged	Some college	Trucker
Sue	41	White	Female	Engaged	High school	Warehouse
Karen	30	White	Female	Married	BA Degree	Admin
Aaron	39	Black	Male	Married	PhD & JD	Attorney
John	54	Black	Male	Married	BA Degree	Pastor
Marlene	47	White	Female	Married	High School	Retired

*The interviewee names are pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

Quality Improvement Techniques

In order to increase the quality of my findings, they were reviewed using peer review, audit trail and thick rich descriptions (Merriam 2002). My paper has undergone a peer review by Dr. Robert Aponte, Ph.D. I have an audit trail in the

form of interview transcriptions and documentation supporting the basis of my literature review and final conclusions. The thick, rich descriptions came from the interviews themselves, which were digitally recorded, and were extracted by a deliberate set of open-ended questions constructed to get the most productive responses from the interviewees.

<u>Research Instrument</u>

A structured interview guide (see Appendix) was used to explore the experiences that the couples had faced while immersed in a public setting. The questions were worded and ordered in a manner designed to obtain the richest possible data on their experiences. The beginning of the interview, however, explored the initial and continual reactions of family and friends to their relationship, in order for me to understand how those circumstances might also influence their experiences. I used several probes to further explore the responses, either verbal or merely visible, body-language based ones, displayed by those members of the public encountered by the couple while they engaged in everyday activities when out in public together.

In order to gain even more in-depth knowledge, questions were asked regarding how the couple reacted to the responses/reactions they received, both positive and negative. For example, did the couple carry on as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred --or did they in some way alter their behavior in order to alleviate the situation—when they perceived hostile or disapproving responses to their presence? In addition to this, they were quick to discuss the issue of racism in America, providing their perceptions on whether the situation had

improved over the years or not. Also discussed was how society might begin to combat racism and how the media has helped or hindered the problem. I encouraged all of the interviewees to relay any stories or anecdotes of their experiences in order to better understand their experiences. Through these stories I was able to see many experiences through the eyes of both partners, individually, however consistent --or otherwise-- the responses turned out to be.

The data of the interviews was captured by word-for-word transcription performed by the researcher and a third party in order to have a verbatim print out of the interview as to not lose any data from the original recording. This also allowed for reference and extracting direct quotes to corroborate the main themes that were established by the analyses of the interviews. A limitation of the transcriptions from the digital recordings is that when the interviews were analyzed there were no visible facial expressions or voice intonations which may have been helpful in interpreting the discussions.

The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Content analysis uses coding of the interviews as a means to determine themes within the interviews. Coding was used because it is a "process of breaking own, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data" (Kvale 2007). By coding the interviews I was able to determine common themes and concepts that are associated with interracial couples' experiences and perceptions in public spaces in order to better understand and articulate what they go through in their everyday life.

Data Analysis

By using content analysis I was able to code all of my interviews in order to determine major themes to later develop concepts that will be discussed later in this paper. The first two interviews were coded line by line to ensure that all themes were captured and these themes were used as a guide for the remaining four interviews. The themes found in the first two were built upon by the others as well as a basis for more themes and concepts to be found in future interviews.

Human Subjects

In order to protect the confidentiality of my participants I changed their names to pseudonyms. Although each interview was recorded, the participants' names were not recorded at any point in time. Indiana University's Institutional Review Board approved the study as Exempt (Study #1112007533), which did not require signed informed consent forms from the participants. Before each interview began, each person was presented with the study information sheet and given time to read it before proceeding with the interview. The interviews were audio recorded with the verbal approval of each participant received voluntarily. Any identifying materials of the participants was destroyed or deleted at the completion of the study.

Reflexivity Issues

I am very close to this topic due to my own immersion in an interracial relationship and the experiences that come from it. For example, I have experienced racism due to my relationship and, in some cases, I altered my

actions or my partner has altered his, due to the reactions we have received. In contrast to what one might expect, we have altered our behavior to be overly affectionate in such instances, however; I suspect our experiences may not represent the typical response. Rather I predict that most couples will alter, or have altered, their behavior to be less affectionate due to the reactions they perceived from onlookers. They likely change other life decisions based on such experiences. I would prefer the world to be unconcerned with the color of skin, thereby giving us freedom to date/marry whomever we want regardless of race. But I know from the literature, societal responses, and sociology in general that many in society do not see race and freedom of choice in the same light that I do. By being in an interracial relationship myself, I will have a better understanding of the experiences that the interviewees are describing as I may have had similar ones. However, that being said, such a vantage point can also be a disadvantage. By being so close to this topic, carrying through the project can be very emotional to me and may also cause me to overlook small details that I would see if not so close to the topic.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In the following, I will explain the findings by subdividing them within the most common themes I identified in the interviews. The themes are public reactions, supportive families, stereotypes & media and racism. Within the themes of public reaction and racism, there are additional subsections that were identified. Afterwards, in the conclusion/discussion section, the findings will be summarized and their implications explored.

In order to identify the major themes, the transcribed interviews were coded and all themes noted were then re-analyzed to find the most prevalent ones. These are described below with quotes from the interviews used for support.

<u>Public Reactions</u>

What public reactions have our participants received from society? How did these couples react to them? I found in my interviews that the reactions were both positive and negative; however the negative reactions clearly seemed to make the strongest impressions. An interesting twist to the typical reaction, however, is annoying bewilderment when the complexities of the relationship -- including children—are on display, but with ambiguous lineage. One such scene is described by Alan when he and his girlfriend were in public with their children --who are from different relationships,

> It's always again like I said, people want to stare; they don't know who's who, and who's with who. They see this Black person and White person and then we have Black kids and White kids.

Sue, Alan's partner, describes a far more typical, but negative, experience when dining out with Alan.

> Me and my boyfriend were at a restaurant eating and we had a totally White couple sitting next to us, they told the waiter I will not sit by that … (the N word) … and her, so they had to be moved and that just did it. It angered me it upset me.

Though upsetting, the incident didn't cause her to explode because,

> you know I wasn't embarrassed because they're not me you know if I wanna eat with whoever you know I was like that's on them so after that one I just kinda got used to it.

Speaking more generally, Alan notes to the unpredictability of how the public will respond and how it isn't always bad. He stated, "People will stare and some stares are positive and some are negative." On the negative side, though, Alan reveals that it isn't always necessary for any words to be spoken for members of the public to "signal," or mildly gesture, their disapproval.

> Certain people stare … at us, some people shake they head like they just don't know what they doin (here meaning that the couple doesn't belong together).

He also described a positive experience,

> Some people are very nice, some people are nice and ask us if have kids you know of course we tell them our kids are grown we don't have any kids together but ah some people can be very nice. This older White lady came up to me and asked if I had ah any biracial kids because she think that biracial kids are the cutest kids she ever seen I told her I didn't have none and she was older an older White lady grandmother and I told her I didn't you know I didn't have any.

In her interview, Carol described some of the reactions she has received when out in public with her husband Aaron. Her experiences in public were more often instances where disapproval was subtle and/or ambiguous, than was the

case with the other participants' encounters. She did make an important point regarding people who seem to want to react negatively, but at the same time seem to hold back because they are in public; whereas they would probably castigate the couple from the safety of on-line anonymity if they could. She says of her experience,

> We haven't gotten too many. I think people are better about recognizing that that is an unacceptable social behavior, to a certain extent. I think people are much more comfortable doing that sort of thing online, anonymity, that they feel more comfortable saying that. And that, I think is always sort of at the back of my mind that there are so many people out there that feel that way but, know, it's not acceptable to actually say that. But when I am out in public, I'm thinking, oh, there might be somebody who feels that way and isn't going to say anything to me, but they might look at me funny, and then I think are they looking at me funny because I have spinach in my teeth or are they looking at me funny because they're like, oh, it's an interracial couple. It makes you think … sometimes I think it makes you think the worst of people.

Carol's reaction is to become more suspicious of people and their motives, unlike most of the other sample participants, who tended to express a lack of caring about (or having gotten used to) the reactions or what the public thought of them. Indeed, she notes that virtually any overtly negative reaction would make her very upset. Speaking of a town between Indianapolis and Bloomington that was historically well known for its racist environment, she stated,

> When we drive down to Bloomington or something, to visit or something, it's like we don't want to stop in Martinsville because I just don't want to deal with having somebody say something because I really just don't know what I would do. I would probably explode.

In contrast, or perhaps because they avoid such environments, Carol's husband suggested that the related problems of public harassment were minimal, He

15

stated "Well I would say that we have been fortunate, Carol and I have been very fortunate, thankfully, that we haven't experienced what I would call an overt racial hostility."

Marlene and her husband John seem to have received the worst reactions of all couples that were interviewed. The majority of the extremely negative reactions they received occurred at their church, which I find very ironic as this is supposed to be a place where no one is judged. John is a church pastor in a predominately Black church and Marlene, who is retired, is very active in the church with John. They have endured repeated instances of parishioners purposely avoiding taking a seat at the same pew as Marlene at church. She has also been deliberately ostracized by fellow parishioners and, perhaps most outlandishly of all, John has been told by some that he shouldn't be married to her. He said of the people in his church,

> The biggest challenge I've had to deal with is with church folk. I don't want to call them Christians, I said church folk, because these are the people that really don't have a relationship with Christ, they emulate what they saw their parents and grandparents do but they really don't live it. We go to church and they, in the Black church, will totally try and ignore my wife simply because she's White.

Marlene also provided similarly negative tales of her interactions with the other parishioners,

> I mean I have people making comments all the time at church. The pastor would even say I'm still working on my prejudicism. Nobody in the whole 8 years that we went to that church would sit on my whole pew. I don't care how crowded it would be, they would not sit with me. And if people would come, they would say oh you don't want to go sit with her.

The treatment also spilled over into Sunday school class. Marlene relays,

> And during Sunday school class, we'd talk about feet washing, talk about it in the bible, and I would say, I was a cosmetologist, I had my cosmetology license, so I would say I felt like it was an honor to give my 96 year old grandmother and my mom pedicures, and they'd say oh we don't wash people's feet, White people wash ours. Are you kidding me? So they would throw off comments all the time.

She was also excluded from activities outside of the Sunday Service and Sunday

School.

> I never got invited to join any auxiliary or do anything in eight years. They would walk in the room. I was the Sunday school secretary. They would walk in the Sunday school room, and be inviting everybody in there but me, I guess because I was White I blended in with the wall, that's what I would say, because I never got invited in the whole eight years.

Other than the very negative reactions encompassing their church and its

parishioners, John's and Marlene's experiences in public were pretty

indistinguishable from those reported on by the other couples. It was mainly just

people staring and whispering comments amongst themselves, but not saying

anything directly to the couple. An example of these is provided by John when

relating a story about eating out in his hometown,

> The looks and wonder what is she doing with him. They look like … especially the older people. I had stopped going to Cracker Barrel because people would sit there and they'd look, the older couple, they'd sit there and they'd look, and then they'd whisper.

> Marlene and John do travel a quite a bit to churches in other area of the

country and they did note that folks in some areas are more accepting than those

of other areas. Marlene relayed the following story about their experiences in

different areas as compared with those here in Indianapolis,

> We go to this conference in Detroit, and there's 5,000 people there. And it's all, an all-Black church. And I had told my home church one

New Year's when we was giving the testimony, I can go there or I can go to Georgia, and I get treated better there than I do at my home church. I can walk into the Village Pantry and get treated better than I do in my home church. But, yeah, it is different, different places. But, yeah, Indianapolis is terrible. Georgia's fine. Detroit's fine.

Unfortunately I did not receive any additional information from the other interviews regarding different states or areas the couples had visited and any reactions they had received.

A sub-theme of this finding can be defined as the sample participants' not caring about the public's reactions to their presence as an interracial couple. This theme arose often and conveyed instances when subjects alluded to the numerous times when they received comments, funny looks, staring and pointing, and so forth, but remained unmoved, stating that these reactions did not bother them and they would just continue on with their day as if nothing had happened. As Sue said in her interview,

Not getting mad about people's personal opinions and their looks and their little comments you know now it's just like I brush it off like you know they don't live my life they don't live within my walls so they can go on.

Sue's boyfriend, Alan stated,

Me personally, I really don't care what people look at me and what they say and what they think. That's been the biggest thing that people will stare at you kinda stare at me like I got a tail or some kind of animal because I'm dating someone outside of my race but it really doesn't bother me personally but I can see for some people where it could be a major struggle. If I was younger maybe there would have been a struggle but I'm at the age now where I really don't care what people say or what they think.

As one would expect, along with not caring about the responses of their public "audiences" when out and about, the sample's participants were often just

as explicit in expressing their commitment to not altering their behavior in any

way as a response to whatever provocations they encountered. John described

his behavior when he received unfavorable reactions from others in public.

> And when I'm out, I don't let people stare at me cause me to change how I'm going to behave. I am proudly me 24/7. I really am. What you see is what you get. I'm not trying to impress nobody. I'm not trying to get in the clique with anybody. I'm just me.

John's wife, Marlene, responded similarly when asked if she altered her

behavior. However, she did note that she has witnessed people who do change

aspects of behavior, sometimes to great lengths, in ways that seem designed to

make them "fit in" with the prevailing social environment. Marlene said,

> I see a lot of people try to act different, like a lot, like we used to have a store…. I can only judge by people that we've seen, but like people would come into the store and they would be interracial couples. And it was always funny to me because you would see them together, and the woman would be acting so ghetto like she thought she was Black or something, and then the next week you would see her without her boyfriend, or husband, or whoever he was, and then she would think she was White. And I'm like, wow, are you … I mean her whole voice would change, the way she would talk would change, and I'm like, wait a minute, I'm confused, are you the same person that was here last week. And then if her husband would come in from the car, it was like you just flipped the switch. And so I had to ask John, I'm like I don't understand this. And he's like oh yeah, yeah that's the way they are. But he had to tell me though, and he would point it out, he's like, no, now let's watch this Black guy because I guess Black guys do the same thing too, they act White. If they get around I guess higher executives or something, and they're in a White environment, they try to act White too. So, but I had never seen that, so I was like, wow, it's true.

Supportive Family

This concept can be defined as the recurring theme of how the

respondents' families were supportive of the couples –or not. Overwhelmingly,

they were supportive, though sometimes it took "getting used to" for younger step-children. Alan stated "the kids are fine about it but there's always someone that says, you know, I feel sorry for the kids." He suggested that many in society see interracial families and mostly worry about the kids. But, in his case, the kids are fine and not worried about their racial makeup.

John and Marlene have children from previous relationships and no children together. When Marlene was asked if her children showed a negative reaction to her interracial relationship, she stated "My two girls, they've always, all of their friends, we've always, my kids weren't raised that way. Yeah, we've always got along good with everybody, treated everybody equally, so yeah, no."

When asked about her husband's family she stated "he's had some … his ex-wives, but not as … I mean his youngest son probably has some issues but just because of his ex-wife, but yeah as far as we knew the kids didn't have no issues. Yeah." Again, in this relationship the children had no issue with their parent being in an interracial relationship.

Interracial families are just a family like any other as per Alan's comment, "Maybe they're trying to figure out who we are they don't know that we are one big happy family just cause we're White and Black but basically we are just one big happy family just because our skin is a different color and we still bleed red on the inside." Alan and his girlfriend Sue also both have children from previous relationships and none together.

Alan's girlfriend voiced a similar sentiment when she discussed how her children felt about Alan, "they love him and you know I always taught my kids you

know they're no different. This race is not different from our race and this race is

no different and nobody is 100% of anything so I always raised my kids like that

so it wasn't any issue with either one of them." When asked about Sue's children

and their reaction when their relationship began, Alan stated,

> Sue's kids um when I first met Sue, her oldest daughter had never
> seen a Black person in person I mean never had talked to a Black
> person or never physically hugged a Black person I was the very
> first one. but when I first met her she was kind of kinda scared, she
> didn't know how to how to take me to know what my reaction would
> be but she loves me both her girls love me.

> After time passed Sue's children became more comfortable with

Alan. He talked to me about how they feel about the relationship of their

mom and him. Alan said, "They don't have no problem with me being

Black and their mom's White. Once they knew I was a good stepfather to

them and they love me and I love them."

> When Alan was asked about his children in regards to their reaction to the

relationship he stated,

> My kids, think they love it. They don't have any problem with it. My
> kids' stepfather is White and their mother is Black so that's
> something they were raised ever since they were a baby and
> always see.

Unlike Sue's children, Alan's had been around other races growing up. He

described this to me,

> No type of racial barrier there's Black in their family and Whites in
> their family my kids that's all they know and their stepfather is White
> is they don't have any problem with it, my grandkids don't have any
> problem with it.

I have found that there are many stereotypes the couples experienced in public and different ways in which they perceived them. I will discuss general stereotypes that were discussed, as well as many of the stereotypes that were perceived by the couples either when they were out individually or together as a couple. At the end of this section, media influence with regard to stereotypes will be discussed.

Aaron discusses just a general stereotype of interracial relationships in general. He says,

> in many people's eyes, especially, you know, if I choose to date a White person, and I know there are White folks out there who would rather the White person I'm dating choose anyone else except a Black person. Because when they see Black, they see struggle.

His wife Carol discusses something that she experienced while out alone. She says,

> I went down to Cassie's graduation party or something, and I don't know how it came up, or if she met Aaron or something, but her mom said, I guess found out that my husband was Black and she goes, 'Oh, she looks like she would have a Black husband'.

As Carol was not expecting this comment, she relayed "it was kind of like …What does that mean? Like, really, I mean I don't understand what does that mean, how does one look like that, like do tell, do tell."

In Carol's interview she discussed stereotypes that she experiences when in public with her husband. Carol said "We do worry sometimes about fitting into stereotypes, like I've gained a lot of weight and so then I get concerned, well, are

we becoming that stereotype of larger White woman and a Black man?" She

proceeds to discuss stereotypes further by saying,

> Because there are those sort of stereotypes and you did think well
> there are, clearly there are factors that make it that there are a
> much larger number of White women with Black men than there are
> Black women with White men. We have interracial friends that are
> both. We have friends that are male White, male Black. But you do
> wonder, okay clearly there are things that influence that, that create
> that within society that create those stereotypes, and to a certain
> extent you're like well I don't want to conform to that stereotype
> because then people are going to put me in that stereotype and
> they're going to assume that of me, and I really don't want people
> assuming things of me.

Carol later describes another situation in which she felt stereotyped and how it

made her feel at the time,

> I think you get more self-conscious and you sort of wonder if people
> are thinking things. In terms of actual reactions, little subtle things
> like we were at the grocery store getting groceries, and the cashier
> will look at me to pay. And it's sort of one of those things where the
> feminist in me goes hooray, yeah, women, women are paying. And
> then there's the cynical part in me that goes is she looking at me
> because I'm the White woman and she's thinking oh she's
> somehow paying the bills.

> From her experience above she has mixed emotions, one which is very

positive and then one negative based on what she perceive the person may be

thinking due to stereotypes. The final thoughts that Carol had on stereotypes

pretty much sums up how they affect her. She says,

> Like whatever stereotype you're thinking, we don't conform to it so
> fuck off… Because you feel defensive about people putting you in a
> box, you want to be not in that box, you want to be able to say you
> can't put me in that box for whatever reason. I don't think anybody
> likes being stereotyped.

While Carol discussed stereotypes that seem negative her husband, Aaron discussed how being in an interracial relationship was perceived as more of a positive stereotype within the African American community. He says,

> I think the presumption, right, is that, somehow, you know, from the perspective of the person of color, there's been a longstanding narrative that somehow, you know, that somehow there's a change in status, social status, if you were actually date outside of your race…Like there've been a series of studies done that have talked about the propensity for, you know, for specifically - African American males who date White females. Having higher incomes, college degrees, being like, you know, quote unquote more Eurocentric in their like kind of a whole view of the world. Um, and even some folks go so far as to say becoming Republican.

He goes on to further discuss the stereotypes regarding status from the White side and alludes to the same negative stereotypes for the White person in the relationship that his wife discussed in her interview and was sure to voice his disapproval of it. He says,

> There's a lot more, and I would argue, back to the status point, I don't agree with the status point because I think that actually was the narrative that exists in a lot of White households…But I think a lot of [White] households really think sub-consciously or consciously about status and where it will go, if their son or daughter decides to date outside the race. Will it move up? Or will it move down? And I think often times, that's a consideration that changes upon the race or ethnicity of the individual. There's plenty of folks who have a much different view of White men dating Asian females, specifically Chinese, Japanese.

Aaron brings up the point that these stereotypes are more pronounced in Black/White couplings as opposed to couplings of a White person and someone of a race other than Black. He brought up this issue with me in a suggestion that if I were dating a man of a different race than Black, it would be perceived differently than my current relationship (with a Black man). He says,

24

That often times if you quote back to both families, right, they see "Well, both are interracial relationships." But they see them totally differently. And it's really interesting, like, I oftentimes want to know for maybe a person like yourself who is dating an African American male, if your family would have responded to (my partner's name). If they would have responded to (my partner's name) if (my partner's name) were Filipino, the same way.

Another stereotype that Aaron pointed out was regarding the sexuality within the relationship and the perceptions that the public has regarding the sexual relationship within the interracial relationship and how they are discussed within groups. He states,

I mean, if-if you never really know if someone actually asks, like if a group of you know, if I'm gonna consider like, specifically Black men and White women, each of us have carried with us this kind of really interesting almost sexual stereotypes and prototypes.

He then discusses the typical stereotypes for Black men and White women separately.

Like a narrative text. But White women, who have always been objectified, it's kind of like, this very interesting traditional beauty, to see the beauty, right? To see the beauty in them. And then Black men have also been objectified as these kind of like hyper-sexualized, you know, almost savage beast that like, 19 foot tall. You know what I'm saying. And I'm like, so, do conversations happen when we? When I'm sitting around in a group of African-American men, they ask me specifically, "So do um, how is it?" The presumption is I think, on many people's parts, that those are the conversations that take place. In my experience, those conversations don't happen. I don't presume that White women sit around [talk about getting laid] and go like "He's so wild."

Several participants repeatedly raised the issue that many of the stereotypes that are experienced or perceived come from the media. Therefore, the next area I will discuss is media portrayal and stereotypes.

The participants seemed to believe, in agreement with myself, that what we see daily influence our ideas of how a certain race or ethnical group is best perceived, whether experienced directly or viewed on a screen. They held that media is more and more influential in this time of technology. It is no longer only what we see on TV or movies that can influence our opinions and ideals, now there is social media outlets that can spread false information that can influence these things in a matter of seconds. It is much more difficult today to not see a wide range of posted opinions, pictures, and cartoons that may be negative to one group of people or another.

Most people in our country have at least one, if not many social media accounts that they monitor on a daily basis, typically several times a day. These accounts allow them to access information and opinions from all over the world instantaneously, instead of being limited to the narrow forms of information available 10 to 20 years ago. Even stories about major events often took until the end of the day on the TV news to be widely known. Some items weren't widely known about until months later, when they were publicized in a documentary or Hollywood movie. As such, the media likely influenced the public somewhat less than is the case today.

Many of the participants in my study mentioned media in their interviews and how they think it affects the perceptions of racial outsiders and how that can indirectly mold perceptions of either party in the relationship or the relationship as a whole. When John's wife, Marlene, talked about the media, she said,

> Like I said, my parents did not know any Black people ever. My
> parents only … it wasn't my mom; it was my dad, only had seen all

26

of the negative stuff on TV. Every time you turn on the TV, what do you see? Crime, a Black person; murders, Black person; people robbing people, it's usually a Black person. And it's White people too but they don't show it.

Sadly, such media coverage was the only basis for her family to form their opinions of Black people and, as a consequence, they tended to color their views of her husband with these same stereotypes. Her family could hardly have started out with a positive opinion of her husband because all they had seen was negative images of Black males on television. This was never countered by the opportunity to meet any Black people or make any Black friends.

Indeed, most of the comments on the media in the interviews strongly stressed how the media can negatively influence opinions of certain groups, such as Blacks. However, Carol also related that media could also be used to provide a positive image of interracial couples. Consistent with literature reviewed earlier in this paper, Carol held that the more positive images of interracial couples that are seen, the more positive the public reactions will be toward such couplings. She said, "A lot of it I think is about visibility. Aaron and I always get excited when we see other interracial couples in public, or on television, in commercials. It's always like, yay, interracial." She even provided an example of how this could work using a popular television show as the basis for her points.

It's sort of like making it a normalcy thing. Kind of like with in terms of the television stuff for the gay community, things like Will and Grace being on television, that a lot of people sort of grew up, not … that that was part of the culture and it was accepted as sort of a normal thing, it was not something necessarily to be remarked upon. It was something very like, oh, hey, yeah, this is cool, this is normal relationship, the girl and her gay best friend. And that sort of putting it on television as this is something normal, something to not be remarked upon. And I think obviously the television show, a lot

of the jokes were centered around that relationship and about that, and I think that eventually the goal would be to get to the point where you have gay characters but that's not the central focus of the relationship. It's not oh he's gay. That's not the central focus of who he is. In the same way, I think showing interracial couples in popular media, and making them something that is accepted, that is normal, and then eventually making it so that it's something that it's not remarked upon.

Racism

Racism is very important when looking at interracial couplings as this is the basis for negative opinions or perceptions that the couple may receive in public. I asked questions about racism, more generally, toward the end of my interview and how the participants thought racism was progressing in this country. They and I agreed that racism underlies the lack of acceptance that they experience and the less racist society becomes, the better the perceptions interracial couples will encounter.

John marveled at how, even after all these years, many people are still not accepting of interracial couples, specifically Black male/White female couples, using as an example something he'd viewed on television. He said,

> There was a commercial on recently about cheerios and they had this little interracial girl that went into her mom, and you could tell that she was mixed, and she went to the mom does this have … she said why do we eat cheerios, she said it helps lower heart disease, and she went to her dad and poured all of these cheerios on him, and when he got up they showed this Black guy. But then they had another commercial come on later that showed the same couple but it showed well we're getting ready to have a baby, but they didn't show that commercial very often. It was like because of the outrage, that one was pulled. America still isn't where they need to be when it comes to interracial dating. They aren't. They are more accepting of a White man dating a Black woman than they are a Black man dating a White woman.

John also noted how he believed that racism was being perpetuated by

the news media in this comment,

> It has absolutely gotten worse because as long as the news media
> can keep it as a Black and White issue, they can keep us divided.
> The last thing that our government and the news media want to do
> is bring us together because once we unite … run this country like it
> was run the way this country was intended to be run. But as long as
> we can keep police officers killing young Black men and women,
> and I mean to the point to where we're getting murdered all the
> time, and everything's being swept under the carpet, and the news
> media is glorifying it, then this country is always going to be in the
> state of chaos.

He discussed how race is involved in their life to some extent, but that it is not an

everyday thing. John says,

> I mean race is something we talk about but it's not like our central
> everyday issue. I mean we are a normal couple and we deal with
> normal couple things like anybody of any race would, like, hey, did
> you pay the water bill, and, hey, can we go visit my family this
> weekend, and, hey, would you pick up your damn socks. It's the
> sort of normalcy issues that we're already at, and I think other
> people need to get to.

> Many of the participants had ideas on combatting racism. In Sue's

interview, she thought that education and more positive interactions may help.

She said,

> Some people have changed some people have not. Do I think more
> education to be put out there to people that are racist? I do I think
> that they need to do some kind of study like in a room or something
> have everybody be blindfolded let them interact then take them
> right off and say this is the person that you have been interacting
> with. I think education plays in a lot of it…I just don't I think honestly
> I think everybody may, it may not be for everybody but I honestly
> think that every person should get to know a person for who they
> are not for the color of their skin because you don't know what
> you're missing out on from each individual person.

Alan also discussed education as a possible way to combat racism. He said,

Diversity programs I think, actually should help some people as far as don't know how to deal with different races try to take that program some people some Whites can't talk to Blacks and some Blacks can't talk to Whites. Without being tactful without you know causing some type of conflict saying the wrong thing or hurting somebody's feeling so certain people like that might need to take some type of courses like that but it will help it will help society some kind of way if more people did learn be it courses or being taught at home by their parents this is the way you should live or any kind of way that that it will help them change everybody that needs changed because society is changing the world is changing.

Marlene's thoughts on combatting racism were,

I think we all just have to start realizing that everybody bleeds the same. I mean that's what I try to tell everybody. And when I start hearing it, I'm like what color do you bleed. And I had to ask my pastor. I'm like do you really think that there's a Chinese heaven, and a Black heaven, and a White heaven. I mean how are you going to tell me you're working on your prejudicism? I'm like seriously, you need to go home and work on your adulterism.

Two subthemes of racism were starting at home and ok for friends but not lovers. The first can be defined as the teaching of non-racist ideas in homes amongst ourselves and family members. The subjects in my study thought that to combat racist thoughts and actions, the educative lessons should start at home with parents teaching their children not to judge someone or a group of people based on the color of their skin or on stereotypes. Aaron, for example, stated,

We have more spaces to engage it, but we still aren't engaging it in the space that counts, think of it that way. The space that counts is that kitchen table...We're not engaging it as much there. So, I don't know… We have more spaces to engage it, but we still aren't engaging it in the space that counts, think of it that way. The space that counts is that kitchen table.

Marlene's comments, in contrast, allude to the flip side of the issue --how racism can start at home if children see negative reactions by their parents.

> I tell everybody, these kids now-a-days don't know racism. They are not born with racism. If they wouldn't hear their parents talking about it, and everybody bringing it up, everybody would get along. But the problem is we're teaching them, we're showing them, we're breeding it in them, so they're learning it.

Although she and the others believed that the education kids received at school would help, they still thought strongly that the anti-racism seed must be planted at home, if we (as a society) undermine the racism that is still very much a part of their everyday lives. Alan says,

> I think ah it all starts at home instead of with the public. It all starts at home with the parents where the parents raise their kids not to see Black and White. If it starts at home it starts with the mother and father and I think it will bleed out to society and the streets more where they would be more acceptable of the Black and White relationship but it all starts at home. If we can get mom and dad to change their home and to put in their kids what's right and what's wrong that would be the only way that society would change if the racism that's here in America then it would be a lot better and not as bad as it was in the 50s and 60s and the past but we came a long way but we still got a long way to go.

By way of example, Sue explained how she taught her children such lessons and how it really made a difference. As a result, her children are very accepting of her relationship today because they were taught to never discriminate or feel differently about someone based on color. She says,

> They love him and you know I always taught my kids you know they're no different. This race is not different from our race and this race is no different and nobody is 100% of anything so I always raised my kids like that so it wasn't any issue with either one of them.

The second subtheme of, ok for friends but not lovers, is the idea that it can be fine and dandy for people of two different races to be friends, but that it is socially unacceptable and/or frowned upon to be lovers in an interracial

relationship. Several of the participants stressed the fact that many in society are OK with Black/White interracial friendships, but when it becomes an interracial romantic relationship, the acceptance is no longer there.

Aaron relayed a story in which he asked a White woman in his high school to go to prom with him and she accepted, however when he went to pick her up she came out and told him that she was unable to go as her dad was watching the interaction and conversation from a window by the door. Aaron relays,

> My junior year, I told you about my racial experiences dating. When prom came around, right, I actually had asked the one, White woman to go dance. And she had agreed. She agreed to. Like, she got her dress. Everything was great, and I showed up, -- and this is very interesting because, I thought, you know, I didn't come from a lot of money at all, you know, so, and had took whatever, a bunch of money I could to go out and buy a like a suit or a tux. You know, I was ready to go. Borrowed daddy's car. Um, show up to pick her up. And wouldn't you know, I stood outside her house for about 35 minutes, for her explaining to me how she could not go.

Aaron had admitted they have been out casually a couple times and how that was not objected to by her parents. However, as the prom was a much more formal, public event, and they would be going as a couple, the liaison was no longer acceptable to her dad, and she was told that she could not attend the dance with him. This was so even though all of the plans had been made in advance. This example is one that represents the reactions of parents when it comes to their children dating interracially.

John also suggested that he did not think that people had a problem with interracial friendships, but moving beyond that could change things. He stated,

> White folks quick to say oh I just love you, I just love you man, until you start dating somebody that they know and then they say I can't stand that nigger. And that's just the term they'll use.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this paper was to look at the how interracial couples perceived their experiences in public in order to determine if such excursions brought forth negative reactions and, if so, whether they altered their behavior in response to such occurrences. Although they reported many such experiences, they always went on to discuss much more than their experiences, including examining the sources of the negative reactions and providing their opinions on these sources. These included media portrayals, stereotypes, and plain old racism. Interestingly, they often stated that they really didn't care what others thought of their interracial relationships, though they did engage in some behavioral changes to accommodate the responses.

A more general conclusion from all of this is that however reduced from times past, racism continues to haunt society and that interracial couples are likely to be among the most sensitive persons to many aspects of how racism continues to play out in society. This, no doubt, owes much to their unique position in the racial hierarchy –standing in direct violation of what traditionally was the most sacred taboo of all racist prohibitions: intimate intermingling across the color line. Most telling, in this regard, is the quote by one of the Black male respondents, who quipped:

> White folks quick to say oh I just love you, I just love you man, until you start dating somebody that they know and then they say I can't stand that nigger. And that's just the term they'll use.

However exaggerated the remark might be, it was hardly the only example of the general idea (non-intimacy, OK; intimacy, no way!).

One unanticipated finding, which may or may not be an anomaly, is

the large number of African American people who also seemed extremely perturbed at encountering an interracial coupling, according to one of the couples. Generally, and consistent with the main thrust of the interviews, one expects Whites, especially strangers in public, to be the ones who are most likely to exhibit their disdain for interracial coupling. Even more surprising, the disgruntled were not typical loud-mouth street corner types, or others who you might expect to have misgivings, such as single Black women who might resent the relative absence of Black males in dating pools due to the latter dating Whites. Rather, the grouping consisted of Black, long-time parishioners of a church, who objected to their pastor's marriage to a White woman. Even more astonishing, their coldness to the Pastor's bride went as far as never sitting in the same pew as the wife – right out in the open -- and the mal-treatment never tapered off!

Consistent with the noted behavior, when beginning this paper, I believed that there would be many instances in day-to-day life when couples that would alter their behavior in public in order to avoid any negative reactions or comments, such as standing apart to appear as friends only. That was not the case. More often than not, when negative (or suspiciously negative) reactions occurred, the couples mostly carried on with their actions as if the comments or reactions had not occurred. Even when they were able to easily deal with such provocations, however, they would still make mental notes of the incidents and sometimes avoided those places thereafter.

Often such accommodations would fade from memory and the behavioral shifts (avoiding Martinsville when traveling to Bloomington from Indianapolis) would eventually seem normal. On the positive side, the negative reactions couples experienced did not cause them to alter their basic behavior (such as standing apart) when out with their partner in public. Moreover, my respondents did not take the negative reactions to mean that they themselves were doing something wrong; instead they recognized that the problem was with the person/people who reacted negatively. And, of course, there were many more times when public excursions brought forth mostly neutral or even positive reactions.

One participant did mention that she and her husband often observed other interracial couples who would alter their behavior when in public, under certain circumstances. Thus, sometimes a White partner of an interracial couple might "act Black" to fit in and, correspondingly, sometimes a Black partner might "act White." Such events did not, however, seem to occur frequently.

One thing that stood out strongly to me was the deeply held concerns of the participants about common stereotypes and, especially, how the media seemed to facilitate their spread. They seemed well aware of how the media has become so much more influential in contemporary times than was the case not so many years ago. The participants discussed the negative images that are portrayed in the news media about Blacks and how this shapes the reactions they receive in public. Positive images were certainly not totally absent, but either they were shown comparatively infrequently or, more likely, they simply

35

lacked the impact of the negative images, particularly those associating Blacks with crime.

One White interviewee mentioned that she felt conscious about gaining weight due to a stereotype that Black men are with "bigger" woman and she felt that people looked at her that way in public when she was out with her husband. Needless to say, the stigma associated with being a large woman in general, often quite cutting in itself, is significantly heightened when it is tied to the racial stereotype. In fact, she was actually told that she "looked like someone" who would have a Black husband. That was almost certainly a reference to weight. But whether or not stereotypes of that variety are also frequently conveyed in the media cannot be answered here. Still, the respondent believed it to be so.

Nevertheless, both my sample group and I share the view that when media outlets portray negative images of Blacks, as they seem to do often, they further the racism in our country. For example, when the police officer who killed Michael Brown was not charged, it was instantly available to the world via news and social media outlets. The vile comments on the social media outlets most likely helped fuel the fire and kept the hate for Whites alive in the heart of many members of the Black community --and vice versa among Whites. There were many accounts of the events of the shooting and the riots on these sites. However, many of them were not accurate, were grossly exaggerated, or were just completely fabricated. Yet, they almost certainly caused the divide between Blacks and Whites to widen.

A final recurring theme in the interviews concerned ways we could combat racism in society, more generally, in addition to reducing or eliminating the negative impact of the stereotypic images that abound in both news and social media. Several people stressed the fact that dialogue needs to begin at home. They strongly argued that we need to discuss race and race issues in our homes with our families, including even young children, to better understand fallacies of racism and to diminish the dislike and hatred it spawns. It is unlikely that children are born with pre-conceived ideas about race or ethnicity, so we must teach our children tolerance and understanding instead of dislike and hatred. The participants also discussed the great need for people of our country to come together, as a single people, and realize that we are all the same inside. We all "bleed the same color," and the only real difference is in the color of our skins.

The purpose of my study was to better understand Black/White interracial couples' experiences in society. I sought to understand how they perceived such experiences and how they reacted to the perceived reactions, when they seemed negative. All the couples received at least some negative attention while in public or received indirect negative messages stemming from their relationship. The reactions they received ranged wildly, from barely subtle looks to total ostracism –the latter in a house of worship, no less!

However, there were numerous signs of acceptance and hope for the future, even if these were not uppermost in the respondents' minds throughout our discussions. For example, the negative reactions they perceived in public settings fell far short, in strictly numeric terms, of the positive and neutral

reactions they also encountered. In addition, nearly all significant family members were reported to be supportive, even children from another marriage. In the latter case, it sometimes took time for the child/children to draw closer to the new (out-of-race) parent, but some of that would almost certainly take place even if the child and parent(s) were of the same racial group. Considering that interracial coupling was the most intense of the nation's racist taboos, it is hard to deny that some progress has been achieved. But, as also reported here, there remains much to be accomplished.

The limitations to my research were primarily the standard ones that can be expected from a small-sampled, qualitative study. The most critical limitation is the sample size was very small. Thus, the major and overall limitation is that one cannot generalize from the findings to others in the category, though the findings were suggestive of the range of problems interracial couples can come to expect from others, both in public and in private (friends, relatives, etc.). The narrowness of the inclusion criteria might be seen as an additional limitation, but including interracial couples of other groups (e.g., Asian/White, Asian/Black) would have required a substantial expansion to the sample size; a virtual impossibility. The fact that I, the researcher, am in an interracial relationship of the kind reported here, may have introduced some bias, but the established precautions noted earlier clearly went a long way toward minimizing any such problem. Further research in this area, one that is clearly a growing social pattern, will easily override any remaining bias from these findings.

APPENDIX: SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Pre-Screening Interview Protocol
The interview process will begin when a potential participant contacts me about the study by telephone. After making a brief introduction, I will conduct a telephone screening interview to establish that the potential interviewee meets the study's eligibility requirements. If eligible, I will schedule the interview.

1. Introduction: How did you learn about the study? Okay, you saw the flyer [or learned of it from someone in my class]. Well, as indicated in the flyer, I am looking for members of long term interracial relationships who have had negative experiences in public settings because of your relationship. Specifically the research is focusing on relationships in which the man is Black and the women is White. If you fit this description, I would like to talk to you about your experiences with your relationship. Your participation would involve meeting with me for a one-on-one private interview where I would ask you about your experiences regarding your relationship, especially in public. I will be audio recording interviews for my own information. I will be the one listening to the recordings, as well as transcribing them and when I am finished with the transcription, I will erase the recordings. Nothing that could identify you will be included in what I type. Everything you share with me will be kept very strictly private and I will not use your name in my report. I will provide $20 cash compensation for your time. Does this sound like something that you might be interested in participating in?

2. Prescreening Questions: Okay. I need to ask you a series of questions to determine whether you are eligible to participate in this study. Do you have any questions for me before we proceed? All right.

Screening Interview Questions	Participant must answer the following for eligibility
1. Are you in a long term interracial relationship?	1. Yes
2. What is your sex and race?	2. If male must be Black and if female must be White
3. Have you ever had any kind of negative experience in public that you felt was due to your interracial relationship?	3. Yes

3. Schedule Interview: Wonderful! You are eligible for the study [if not eligible, politely let them know]. Can we schedule an interview? When would be a good time for you? We can meet in a room on campus or at a Starbucks in a location that is convenient to you. Or, if you have another place in mind, it is possible that we could do the interview there. I would also be happy coming to you as long as I can interview you in private. Also, if it is all right with you, I will give you a reminder call (or send you a reminder e-mail) the day before the interview.

<u>**Qualitative Interview Guide**</u>
Introduction: Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. I really appreciate your willingness to help me out with this interview. Have you ever been interviewed before? Well, the main reason why I would like to interview you is to learn about your experiences in an interracial relationship, especially in public places such as eating out or visiting family or friends. Findings from this study will be used to further our understanding of how society's perceptions affect the members of interracial relationships in public space and whether such individuals continue to experience racism and if so, how it affects their choices in life.

Interviewee Role: I want you to feel that this is *your* interview. I am here to listen to what you have to say. I am very interested in your experiences and feelings, so please feel free to share anything that comes to mind. My job is to listen to you so that I can better understand these experiences.

Explain Audio Recording Procedures: As I explained when we talked on the phone, I will record our conversation so that I do not have to take notes and so I can get your complete answer. This also helps me guarantee that my report will accurately reflect your experiences. I will be listening to the tapes and personally transcribing them and then the recordings will be erased. Is this okay with you?

Assure Interviewee of Confidentiality: Please feel free to speak openly with me. Maintaining your privacy is the most important thing to me and anything you say during this interview will be kept private and confidential. I will not include your name or any other unique information that could identify you in my report. If your partner is also participating in the study, I will not share anything you say with your partner either. Also, if I ask you any questions that you do not want to answer, you can just say, "pass" and we will skip those questions.

Time Frame of Interview: The interview will last about one hour to an hour and a half. If you need a break at any time, just let me know.

Obtain Informed Consent: Before we begin the interview, I would like to go over the study's information sheet, which describes the nature of the study, your role in the study, the steps taken to maintain your confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of the study. You can take this form with you (Wait for the participant to read the information). Do you have any questions about the study or the information you read? If not, do you give your permission to participate in the study by being interviewed? (If the participant agrees, then start the interview). Ok thank you for your help with the study. Do you have any more questions before we start? Thank you again for taking the time out to talk to me about your experiences. Here is a $25 gift certificate as a way of saying thank you for taking the time to participate in my study.

Gain Verbal Consent and Start Interview: Ok, then I will begin recording the interview now. Start recorder and record verbal consent prior to asking any interview questions: "We are now recording. Today is 2014. My name is Lisa. I am a graduate student at Indiana University Indianapolis. I would like to ask your permission to record this interview which I will transcribe myself and to use the recording and the transcription for study and research purposes". If verbal consent is given and audio recorded, proceed with the interview.

Questions: Let's begin with some background questions so that I can get to know more about you before we talk about your experiences. I will use the answers to these questions for an overall description of who participated in the study.

Background Questions
1. What is your gender?
2. What is your race?
3. How old are you?
4. What is your education level?
5. Can you tell me about where you grew up – was it more rural, urban, if urban, how racially diverse was your area of town?
6. Do you currently live in a rural or urban setting?
7. What is your relationship status? (probe, married, living together, living apart)
8. Do you have any kids? (probe for age, whether any are step children, adoptive children)
9. Are you employed? If yes, what kind of work do you do?

Ok, let's first talk about:

Topic	Main Question	Follow up – Probes
Beginning of interracial dating.	Tell me about when you started dating interracially.	What age did you start dating interracially? Have all of your relationships been interracial? If not, how were the non-interracial ones different, if at all? How did your family react to your interracial relationships? How about your friends?
Current relationship	Tell me about your current relationship.	How long have you been in your current relationship? How did you meet? Can you describe your experience as an interracial couple? What struggles/challenges have you faced due to race?

		How have you dealt with them?
Racism	How do you think society has changed or not changed regarding race?	Do you think society is more accepting of people of a different race then themselves? What about interracial friendships? What about interracial relationships? Do you feel like an interracial couple? Can you share some more thoughts about that?
Family Reactions	What does your family think about your relationship choices?	How does your parents and extended family feel about people of different races? How do they feel about interracial dating? What about interracial marriages? How have they reacted to your current relationship? Have you made any life choice changes due to their reactions/perceptions/opinions?
Public reactions/ perceptions	Tell me about your experiences in public as it relates to your relationship.	What reactions have you received from others due to your relationship? (such as when eating out, shopping) What do you think society's perception of your relationship is?
Responses to public reactions/ perceptions	How have you responded to public reaction/percept ions of your relationship?	Have you changed your behavior with your partner due to public reaction when you are public? If yes, how so? (you might have some probes here as well) Has this change led to changes in your private life? If yes, how so? How much does public perception matter to you? Do you think it matters to your partner? Can you elaborate on that?
Final Question	Ok, we are about done. I have one final question	Is there anything that you would like to add that I failed to ask on this topic but that you think I should know?

Thank you:
Thank you! The information you have shared with me has been very helpful. If you have any additional questions for me or just want to talk about the interview experience, please feel free to give me a call or email me.

Indiana University Study Information Sheet
The Experience of Interracial Relationships in Public Spaces

You are invited to participate in a research study about experiences with interracial relationships in public spaces such as when shopping, eating out, going to hotels, visiting family or friends, or some other public setting. You were selected as a possible subject because you are now in an interracial, long term, heterosexual relationship, are either a Black male or a White female, and have experienced at least one negative reaction when in public. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. The study is being conducted by Lisa Bell, Indiana University graduate student of Sociology. This is a non-funded study.

STUDY PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is designed to understand the experiences of couples in interracial relationships in a variety of public spaces and how such experiences affect their life decisions.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY: If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things: Participate in a recorded interview to last approximately an hour to an hour and a half in a confidential, secure, convenient place. I will ask questions regarding how you began dating interracially, your current interracial relationship, your views on racism, public reactions and perceptions you have experienced as a consequence of the relationship, and how these reactions or perceptions have affected your life choices with your partner. All interviews conducted will be audio-recorded and transcribed by me into a written transcription at which time the audio-recording will be erased.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. This is unlikely as I will not ask about any illegal activity. I will not use your name in any reports in which the study may be published. All audio-recordings of the interviews will be erased after the transcription has taken place. Please also know that if both partners in a relationships are interviewed, that what each of you say will not be shared with the other partner. Everything you say will kept private. People and organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include the study researcher and her professor, Dr. Aponte, and the Indiana University Institutional Review Board.

PAYMENT: You will receive a $25 gift card for taking part in this study.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS: For questions about the study, contact the researcher Robert Aponte at (317) 274-2536 or Lisa Bell at (317) 446-3747. For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss problems, complaints or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information, or offer input, contact the IU Human Subjects Office at (317) 278-3458 or (800) 696-2949.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF STUDY: Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Indiana University.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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