INTERRACIAL ROMANTIC COUPLING AND THE COLOR LINE:
COLOR-BLIND IDEOLOGY AMONG
BLACK-WHITE COUPLES

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INTERRACIAL ROMANTIC COUPLING AND THE COLOR LINE:
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ABSTRACT

The goal of this dissertation is to explore the operation of color-blind ideology among interracial couples. Research confirms that instead of the blatant racism of the past, covert race issues persist because people tend to use color-blind racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Carr 1997) and that interracial relationships are becoming more prevalent and even accepted in the U.S. (Domokos-Cheng 1995; U.S. Census Bureau (see e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Lewis 1999; Lewis 2006). Therefore, my research considers how color-blind ideology, a typically macro and/or group-level concept, shapes heterosexual Black-white intimate relationships. The ways in which these couples build and maintain their relationships in a color-blind racist world are examined. As well, the influence of romantic interracial contact on the racial views and operation of racial ideology among these couples is explored in order to better understand the impact of color-blindism.

To do so, feminist qualitative methodology is used. This methodology was chosen because of feminism’s commitment to represent, understand and give a voice to marginalized groups (Collins 1991, 2000; DeVault 1996; Harding 1987). Feminists advocate employing a consciousness-raising method, breaking away from traditional research and dismantling the power dynamic between researcher and research participants (Collins 1991, 2000; DeVault 1996; Farganis 1986; Reinharz 1992; Sprague and Zimmerman 2004). Specifically, semi-structured interviews with Black-white
couples are conducted in an effort to emphasize subjective knowledge, to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of these couples in their own words, and to make visible their experiences as an interracial couple in a color-blind social world.

The findings confirm that color-blind ideology pervades the thoughts and interactions of both whites and Blacks involved in interracial relationships. Across the life course, color-blind ideology is prevalent in their upbringing, their interaction as a couple, and their familial and social interactions. This operation of color-blindism reinforces the mutual interplay of structure and ideology. Specifically, the relationship between the racialized social system (structure of society) and color-blind racism (the predominant ideology) is reified and works cooperatively to stimulate and reproduce inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Lewis 1999; Carr 1997; Lewis 2006; Oliver and Shapiro 1995).
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

For the majority of American adults, a primary goal of the life course development is to build and maintain lasting, intimate relationships. In terms of romantic couplehood, these types of relationships take many forms, ranging from short- or long-term dating relationships to domestic partnerships to traditional marriage. Scholarship in this area indicates that couples face a host of challenges to their relationship, including—but not limited to—financial stressors, issues of infidelity, and parenting issues when children are present in the union (Harris and Bichler 1997; Larson and Richards 1994; Reiss 1980). Nevertheless, race and ethnicity are less often examined as influential factors for intimate relationships. Given the norm of homogamy, which requires that couples share similar characteristics (e.g., race, religion and socioeconomic status; see Killian 2001, 2002, 2003), this gap in the literature may in part be due to the fact that the vast majority of relationships are same-race. However, since the 1960s, there have been notable advances in race relations (Bonilla Silva 1997, 2001, 2003; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Wilson 1978, 1987, 1996), a greater level of acceptance and approval of interracial coupling (Gregory 1993; Todd and Mckinney 1992), and a growing number of interracial relationships (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). Therefore, in this dissertation, I explore how race differences as well as contemporary color-bind ideology affect interracial
couplehood. Specifically, I investigate relationships between heterosexual Black-white couples and ask:

1. What factors shape how interracial couples partner?
2. How have changes in the status of Blacks in the U.S. affected interracial couples?
3. What attitudes do interracial couples have about race and race issues?
4. Is race a perceived stressor for interracial couples?

In the United States there have been notable advances in race relations over the last century and a half. These advances include the abolition of slavery, the revocation of Jim Crow practices, and the passage of federal laws designed to ensure equal educational and occupational opportunity. For African Americans¹, these positive changes have meant increased life opportunities (e.g., greater access to health care; Williams 1997 and greater educational prospects; Wilson 1978, 1987, 1996), higher rates of economic success (e.g., growth in the middle class; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Wilson 1978, 1987, 1996), declining overt expressions of racist attitudes (Bonilla Silva 1997, 2001, 2003), and more political representation and influence (Thomas and Hughes 1986) compared to just 50 years ago.

Along with the notable progress in race relations over the last 50 years, there has also been an increase in interracial intimate relationships. In fact, in the late 1990s

¹ I use Black instead of African American because Blacks in American are not just of African decent. The adoption of the use of African American became the politically correct and therefore most often used descriptor but not necessarily the preferred term- the 2007Gallup poll found that 76 percent of Blacks either don’t care or prefer “Blacks” (Newport 2007).
Black-white coupling quadrupled from the 1970s (Domokos-Cheng 1995). By the early 21st century, interracial and interethnic marriages made up 5 percent of all marriages with more than a quarter of a million identifying themselves as Black-white marriages (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). Furthermore, there seems to be a greater level of acceptance and approval of interracial coupling. Some research has found that 50 to 60 percent of adults would be receptive to interracial dating and 64 percent of Americans approve of interracial marriages (Gregory 1993; Todd and Mckinney 1992). However, recent scholarship indicates that this progress in race relations conceals the persistent racism and pervasive inequality that still disadvantages Blacks. In this dissertation, I apply and explore how color-blind ideology (see e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Lewis 1999), a typically macro and/or group-level concept, shapes Black-white intimate relationships. Although I primarily focus on color-blind ideology, I also explore the influence of the norm of homogamy (see e.g., Killian 2001, 2002, 2003) and the contact-hypothesis (see e.g., Allport 1958) on the potential operation of racial ideologies (color-blind ideology and anti-racism) within the intimate interracial context.

**Color-Blind Ideology**

Contemporary race tensions are not as blatant and overt as in the past (e.g., the pre-civil rights era). Instead, contemporary racism is more covert and remains relatively hidden. Racism often is unnoticed, undetected, and even ignored by the dominant group (Bonilla-Silva 2003). The invisibility of racism persists because it is concealed by the dominant racial ideology, color-blindism. Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues that color-blind

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I capitalize Black and not white purposefully. Similar to Audre Lorde (1980), I do so in order to challenge the traditional power dynamics and racial discourse to turn the power back on itself and give power to the subordinate group and to Blackness.
ideology or color-blindism is the “new racism,” one which “explains contemporary racial inequality as an outcome of nonracial dynamics” (p.2).

Color-blind ideology minimizes racial differences and purports that race and ethnic distinctions should be ignored. Moreover, color-blind ideology justifies the absence of white acknowledgment of race and color as a social fact, therefore perpetuating white dominance, white privilege and racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Carr 1997). According to Bonilla-Silva (2003), color-blind racism reproduces inequality and perpetuates white privilege because its practices are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial. Furthermore, Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues color-blind ideology is a political tool which is used by the dominant group (consciously or unconsciously) to maintain the racial order and preserve white privilege. Both Bonilla-Silva (2001, 2003) and Carr (1997) contend that color-blindism permeates both the dominant and subordinate groups. Although whites articulate color-blindism to a greater extent than Blacks, both groups subscribe to the color-blind ideology. In fact, Carr (1997) reports 77 percent of whites and 40 percent of Blacks agree that they are color-blind about race. Therefore, color-blind ideology is a pervasive belief system which rationalizes and gives power to the existing social structure— the racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003). Color-blind ideology reinforces the racialized social system, meaning it perpetuates the structure of racial positioning which determines resource access and life chances and disproportionately disadvantages Blacks.

Although there has been an increase in interracial marriages and the approval of these unions has also improved, still almost a third of Americans disapprove of interracial marriages, with Black-white marriages being the least likely to be accepted (Gregory
1993, Solsberry 1995). In fact, homogamous intraracial marriages continue to be the preferred normative unions (Childs 2005; Killian 2001, 2002, 2003). The norm (discourse) of homogamy maintains that people are attracted to and choose mates based on shared backgrounds and similar characteristic like race, education, socioeconomic status, age, religion and other demographic variables. It holds that with the preference for homogamous unions, heterogamous couples would not only be less likely to come together, but also potentially would have less relationship success (Killian 2001, 2002, 2003). Research suggests that this persistent preference for homogamy (disapproval of interracial relationships) coupled with contemporary race issues (color-blindism) may affect the quality, satisfaction and experiences of interracial couples.

Exploring Color-Blind Ideology and Interracial Relationships

Current research on contemporary color-blind racism is prevalent and there is much agreement in the literature that color-blind racism prevails (Bonilla Silva 1997, 2001, 2003; Carr 1997; Childs 2005; O’Brien and Korgen 2007). However, there is a shortage of research on interracial relationships - specifically, an insufficient amount of research focuses on relationship functioning, experiences of discrimination and racism, coping with discrimination and racism, and coping with the racial and ethnic differences of interracial couples. Nevertheless, there is some research that informs these issues and consequently my study.

First, from a social psychological perspective, Killian (2001, 2002, 2003) examined how interracial couples struggle with the challenges of being in heterogamous partnerships in a society where the norm privileges homogamous unions. This research
evaluated how couples react to racism and discrimination, in what ways they negotiate race and ethnic differences, and what strategies they employ to cope with negative public reactions in the face of the dominant culture. Killian (2001, 2002, 2003) found that interracial couples do in fact experience external prejudice and opposition to their unions, but that white partners tend to notice or acknowledge those instances much less than black partners. Strategies that these couples employ to cope with racism are reacting back, managing their self presentation, neutralizing their public interactions, only going to places they feel welcome and comfortable, and simply not discussing their experiences of racism and discrimination.

Second, O’Brien and Korgen (2007) found that the contact hypothesis - close contact with different racial and ethnic backgrounds will lead to less prejudice and improve race relations (Allport 1958) - does not answer or explain away color-blindism. More specifically, they argue that with the prevalence of color-blind racism interracial contact has a limited impact on the racial consciousness of whites. In fact, they contend that color-blind ideology limits the explanatory power of contact theory on race relations progress. They found that close interracial contact, even intimate interracial contact, can be concurrent with racist ideologies like color-blindism and not impact racial consciousness in the same manner that interracial contact had in the past. O’Brien and Korgen (2007) argue that although interracial contact still influences racial consciousness in our color-blind society, it needs to coincide with or be followed by exposure to an anti-racist ideology that counters the tenets of color-blind ideology⁴.

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⁴ A list of the tenants of color-blind ideology and anti-racist ideology are in the Appendix A.
In this comprehensive study of interracial contact, O’Brien and Korgen (2007) discovered that 9 out of 30 white anti-racists credit an interracial intimate relationship with motivating their antiracism. As well, for many of the other anti-racists, interracial contact - especially intimate interracial contact - was a part of the process of sensitization to anti-racism even if it was not the catalyst for becoming anti-racist. Moreover, Childs (2005) found that whites in Black-white interracial intimate relationships are typically either color-blind racists or racially conscious anti-racists. Those who are color-blind tend to de-emphasize and minimize race, claiming they did not notice their partner’s race in partner selection, while the race conscious group emphasize race and acknowledge, confront and challenge societal opposition. From O’Brien’s and Korgen’s (2007) findings that intimate interracial contact creates the empathy needed for anti-racism and the few relationships that complied with the contact hypothesis were intimate interracial contact, coupled with Childs’ (2005) evidence that color-blind ideology is prevalent in these relationships, it follows that future research would investigate the contact hypothesis in romantic interracial unions and its impact on the racial views of whites in order to elucidate the operation of color-blind ideology and/or racially conscious thinking within these unions.

Research confirms that race issues still exist, but are more covert than the blatant racism of the past because people tend to embody a color-blind racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Carr 1997). Research also confirms that interracial relationships are becoming more prevalent and even accepted in the U.S. (Domokos-Cheng 1995; U.S. Census Bureau 2006). Therefore, my interests beg the question: if race is still a problem, the dominant prevailing racial ideology is color-blindism, and there is an increase in the
number of interracial intimate unions, how are color-blind ideology and contemporary racism manifest in couples who are in intimate interracial relationships? Research has also shown that in the past interracial contact improves race relations (Allport 1958, Forbes 1997), and there is current support for the contact hypothesis in regard to intimate-romantic interracial contact (O’Brien and Korgen 2007). Therefore, I explore how interracial couples navigate our color-blind world and examine the impact of romantic interracial contact on the racial views and operation of racial ideology among whites and Blacks.

My research expands the work of Bonilla-Silva, Carr, Childs, Killan, and O’Brien and Korgen. The primary focus of this dissertation is to examine the current experiences of interracial couples, and specifically how race influences and operates in those experiences. More directly, this research sought to uncover how these couples began their relationships and whether race was a factor in their coupling. Recall, research indicates that color-blind ideology is the prevailing racial ideology and that whites (and even Black partners) in Black-white unions articulate a racial ideology, typically either a color-blind ideology or an anti-racists ideology (Childs 2005; Killian 2001, 2002, 2003; O’Brien and Korgen 2007). This research sought to understand if the couples embody a racial ideology and whether the individuals in these couples embody similar or different ideologies. Research does not indicate that interracial coupling is indicative of social consciousness about race issues for all participants. This study identifies how these couples handle race and in what ways they discuss race issues as a couple. I contend that a deeper understanding of the social and familial interaction among these couples, the operation of color-blind ideology or anti-racist ideology in their social and family
relationships, and the role of racial ideology in the couples’ relationships is revealed in this study. I aim to expose the construction of a racial identity within these couples in reaction to their own racial ideology as well as their interaction with others in consideration of the intersectionality of race, class and gender.

Overall, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand the lived experiences and stories of interracial couples as they navigate our color-blind racist world and to provide a better understanding of the experience of interracial couples by exploring these couples’ personal experiences. My goals are to reveal whether color-blind ideology or anti-racist ideology operates in romantic interracial relationships, and to explore the influence and impact of the norm of homogamy and the contact hypothesis on the racial views of those involved in interracial couples, as well as their family and social relationships. To study the experiences and perspectives of these couples, I collected data through semi-structured interviews with Black-white couples. I conducted this research with the understanding that each participant has his or her own story and experience as a partner in an interracial relationship. I interviewed 10 Black-white interracial couples and one white partner of a Black-white couple. I achieved the sample through personal and professional contacts, referrals and snowball sampling. I interviewed the couples as a couple together because I am “interested in their experiences, accounts, narratives and ways they construct their lives and create their ‘selves’ and their identities as ‘interracial couples.’” (Childs 2005, p. 13)

The overall intention of this research is to offer new insight into the interplay of structure (intimate interracial contact) and ideology (color-blindism/anti-racism) on the perpetuation of racial privilege and the permanence racial inequality. Specifically, this
study examines the development and maintenance of interracial intimate relationships among heterosexual Black-white couples and explores how color-blind ideology (see e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Lewis 1999), a typically macro and/or group-level concept, shapes Black-white intimate relationships. Moreover, this research provides an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of these couples and adds to the growing body of research on the functioning, coping, and interaction of interracial couples.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the research on race relations and intimate relationships is reviewed. Specifically, I trace the history of race relations and intimate coupling. In doing so, I focus on the differences between the experiences of Blacks and whites. The period covered is from slavery to the present. The main goals of this chapter are a) to understand the historical progression of race relations and how this development affected intimate coupling, and b) to emphasize how race operates in intimate relationships by conceptualizing how racial ideology shapes and perpetuates racism. I achieve these goals in five steps. First, I define race and review how the social construction of racial categories maintains inequality. Second, I characterize color-blind ideology and its role in the perpetuation of racial inequality. Third, literature on heterosexual coupling and intimate relationships is reviewed. Here, I distinguish between the experiences of Blacks and whites in order to understand racial difference in relationship outcomes. Fourth, literature on interracial intimate coupling is reviewed with specific attention to how racial ideologies may operate in those unions. Finally, color-blind racial ideology is proposed as a potential factor for the structuring of interracial intimate relationships.
Race and the Perpetuation of Racial Inequality

The notion of race only began to formalize with the emergence of modernity and the expansion of a world political economy (Miles 1989; Pedersen 1994; Winant 2000). The interconnection between European expansion, industrialization, and capitalism made racial characterizations a practical and even convenient creation on the part of the dominant group. In fact, such notions were developed to rationalize European world exploration (Miles 1989; Pedersen 1994). Race categorizations facilitated the emergence of a racial hierarchy, which benefits the dominant group and disadvantages subordinate groups. These racial formations benefit the oppressor because they define who is privileged and who is not. Therefore, racial grouping helped assure the dominant racial groups’ interest in maintaining superiority over other racial groups (Blumer 1958; Hirschman 1983, 2004). These categorizations were and continue to be “conveniently” constructed to maintain the advantage of the dominant group. In fact, Doane (2003) contends that racial classification “categorizes social relationships between groups having unequal levels of power” (p.9). In addition, racial categories determine social structural organization which in turn predicts one’s social location and life outcomes (Bobo and Tuan 2006; Bonilla-Silva 1997). According to Williams (1997), race is “a central determinant of social identity and obligations, as well as, of access to societal rewards and resources” (p.326).

In the U.S., European settlers created their majority status by distinguishing themselves from other groups. Prior to chattel slavery, Africans in the New World were indentured servants, not property and were free to own land, enter contracts, and hold indentured servants of their own (Bennett 1966; Jordan 1968; Stampp 1956). Moreover,
like other indentured servants when their term of service was completed, they were free to go. However, when the demand for labor grew beyond the capacity of indentured work, whites realized that a system of perpetual servitude based on race would best serve their economic interests (Bennett 1966; Everett 1991). Thus, the dominant group constructed a category of “other” which classified humans into inferior and superior groups and facilitated unequal divisions of wealth, power and prestige across different groups (Better 2002; Hirschman 1983, 2004; Sue 2003). Specifically, this division placed Blacks into a subordinate position and whites into the dominant position. These racial distinctions prevented nonwhites from property ownership, political rights and facilitated the establishment of exploitive practices like slavery (Omi and Winant 1986). Racial classification assurred that whites had power and served as a tool for assigning privilege, controlling access to resources, and justifying the freedom, rights, and opportunities of some rather than all (Omi and Winant 1986).

In the time of slavery, the dominant group rationalized their superiority and advantage by maintaining a racial characterization of Africans as brutish, immoral, uncivilized heathens, and as a subhuman species (Jahoda 1999; Jordan 1968; Omi and Winant 1994; Schaeffer 2006; Thompson 1977). Therefore, the expansion of European capitalism in the U.S. led to the ideology of racism that whites used to justify the exploitation of nonwhites, much of which hinged on how race was defined (Frazier 1957; Cox 1948). In the following paragraphs, I outline the history of race definitions beginning with the biological and socio-biological frameworks and end with a detailed explanation of the social construction of race, which is the predominant framework used
currently by social scientists. In addition, I detail how the social construction of race perpetuates inequality.

_Biological and Socio-Biological Frameworks._ Traditionally, races were biological categories and were assumed to be distinct, genetic, and based on organically objective groupings (Doob 1999; Graves 2004; Schaeffer 2006). Early scholars thought of race as a biological certainty, as though there were genetically different human groups distinguishable by distinctive physical characteristics (Better 2002; Hirschman 1983, 2004; Omi and Winant 1986; Winant 2000). In fact, Krogman (1945) defined race as “a sub-group of people possessing a definite combination of physical characteristic, of genetic origin, the combination of which to varying degrees distinguishes the sub-group from other sub-groups of mankind” (p. 49). Commonly recognized physical traits used to distinguish one race from another are skin pigmentation and tone, nasal shape and lip form, and the color distribution and texture of body hair (Simpson and Yinger 1985). These initial biological definitions emerged in the interests of the ruling class in order to delineate inferiority and superiority. Interestingly, those individuals who were to be perpetually enslaved had darker skin, wider noses, and fuller lips compared to their white masters. By designating racial membership, the dominant group was able to establish and justify claims of their superiority as well as maintain power and control.

A variant of the biological framework is the socio-biological perspective on race. This perspective recognizes that social and cultural factors have some influence on behavior and group differences, but purports that the influence of socio-cultural factors are dwarfed by the biological and genetic endowment of the individual (Mazur 2005; Nielsen 1994; Wilson 1975). That is, the socio-biological framework privileges genetic
factors over cultural factors. The end result is that, even considering the socio-cultural factors such as a history of slavery, this framework would render Blacks “less fit” in Darwinian terms because they have failed to achieve educational and occupational success (Wilson 1975).

Although biologically based definitions of race have held prominence in the past, there are some clear problems with defining race in biological terms. First, there are more genetic similarities across people than there are differences. In fact, humans have 99.9% shared gene variance and blood type does not distinguish racial or ethnic groups (Bonham, Warshauer-Baker & Collins 2005). Second, there are more differences within racial groups than between them (Atkinson, Morten & Sue 1998; Schaeffer 2006; Sue et al 1998). For example, skin color, which has been used since the time of slavery as a racial determinate, varies more within traditionally regarded racial groups (Blacks) than between racial groups (Blacks and Whites) (Williams 1996). In fact, there is great variation and overlap between races with regard to skin color, meaning there are light-skinned Blacks and dark-skinned whites (Graves 2004; Schaeffer 2006). Therefore, most biologists have abandoned the notion of race as a biologically valid distinction (Jones 1997).

*Social Construction Framework.* By the middle of the 20th century contemporary social scientists began to reject the biologism of the past and recognize that race as a biological entity has no scientific validity, but instead stems from social relations (Better 2002; Graves 2004; Winant 2000). In fact, it is now widely accepted among social scientists that there is no mutually exclusive or biologically distinct race; instead race is a socially constructed concept. Race is a socially, culturally, and politically determined
label which is only given meaning because of the meaning the dominant group assigns to it (Better 2002; Hirschman 2004; Winant 2000). Clearly, the construction of race was a useful political tool to create and maintain “otherness,” as well as perpetuate dominant group privilege. In the US, race is structured by the way in which the dominant group assigns, interprets and translates its meaning. It follows that race is important because of the social meaning the dominant group attaches to it. When their racial categorizations are accepted as legitimate (as was done during European expansion with the creation of racial categories), a racial hierarchy can emerge which privileges the dominant group (Graves 2004; Schaeffer 2006).

Racial groups and racial identities as social creations (Doane 2003) reflect a continual reformation process in which “racial groups are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed” (Omi and Winant 1994, p.55). Although physical markers may go unchanged, the meanings ascribed to them may vary depending on the social context. Therefore, race is embedded in the specific social, historical, and cultural context (Omi and Winant 1994). Omi and Winant (1986, p. 348) offer a definition of race rooted in the social construction framework:

Race is indeed a pre-eminently sociohistorical concept. Racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded. Racial meanings have varied tremendously over time and between societies.

For example, consider the “one-drop” rule. The one-drop rule was established in the 1800s during slavery and was used through the 1900s to categorize race groups. The one-drop rule states that those individuals with “one drop of non-white blood- one African ancestor” are by definition, Black (Davis 1991; Doob 1999; Schaffer 2006). The
white majority established the one-drop rule as a way to protect the resources of the white wealthy class; this rule was distinct to the United States, as there are not classifications like this in other countries. In the time of slavery, white men sexually exploited Black women and this exploitation often resulted in offspring (Bennett 1966; Everett 1991; Stampp 1956). Under traditional law, mothers and their children would have inheritance rights. However, whites did not want to give up resources or share their power so in order to maintain their privileged social position they created the one-drop rule. Thus, the dominant group created structural difference and attributed inferiority to racial categorizations in order to maintain their superiority. By categorizing any racially mixed person as Black and assigning them the status of the subordinate group, whites are able to maintain control and minimize opportunities.

Furthermore, during the enslavement of Africans, whites established slave codes in order to have complete control over slaves’ lives. In fact, all aspects of a slave’s life were determined by the implementation of rigid social, psychological and physical controls (Everett 1991; Stampp 1956). The general purpose of these codes and laws were to distinguish slaves as property, not people, and to ensure that the ownership of that property was protected (Doob 1999; Schaffer 2006). Slave-owners needed to generate and sustain strict discipline for slaves to ensure that slaves accepted their place as inferior servants. Slave-masters also intentionally instilled a feeling of vulnerability and absolute dependence within the slaves (Everett 1991; Stampp 1956). These controls perpetuated the consistent imbalance of social and economic resource allocation. For instance, slaves were not allowed to buy, sell or inherit anything. Following the slave codes, no one, not even whites, were permitted to give books to slaves, not even the bible. Even more
disturbing, the law prohibited both the formal and informal education of slaves (Davis 1991; Doob 1999; Schaffer 2006). Clearly, the denial of basic privileges like assets and wealth accumulation and the right to literacy and education for Blacks guaranteed whites their preservation of power and facilitated their disproportionate resource accumulation.

During slavery, these codes were enacted to dehumanize and grossly disadvantage Black people. Race was constructed to exemplify the superiority of whites and inferiority of Blacks. These race distinctions were beneficial for and deemed socially acceptable by whites and were constructed by the dominant group in order to protect their interests (Everett 1991; Stampp 1956). The preservation of whites’ power and resource accumulation and the inferior label attached to Blacks that began during slavery, continue to operate and have cumulative effects on modern day constructions of race, life outcomes for Blacks, and the conditioned use and acceptance of racial stereotypes as “social facts” to distinguish people (Helms & Cook 1999; Jones 1997; Oliver and Shapiro 1995).

Oliver and Shapiro (1995) argue that the cumulative effects of past discrimination, prejudice and disadvantage have led to current racial inequality. Furthermore, they contend that contemporary racial inequality is not separate from the historical process of racial sedimentation which began with slavery. That is, Blacks form the sediment of the American class stratification system and are cemented at the bottom of the economic order. Historically, Blacks have experienced low wages, poor schooling, and personal and institutional discrimination, which perpetuate intergenerational economic and social inequality (Oliver and Shapiro 1995). This historical process results in a cumulative disadvantage, especially with regard to wealth accumulation, for Blacks.
More specifically, current life outcomes for Blacks are clearly influenced by the past denial of property ownership and inheritance, as well as literacy and education. Concerning denied ownership and inheritance, Blacks were disadvantaged in terms of passing wealth on intergenerationally, which continues to be a problem in the Black community (Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Wilson 1978, 1987, 1996). In addition, recent research shows that Blacks still experience income inequality compared to their white counterparts (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2007). There is also a link between the denial of literacy and education and the continued low educational and occupational attainment of Blacks. In fact, the percentage of whites earning a college degree was nearly double the percentage of Blacks earning a college degree in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). The system of cumulative disadvantage is a result of a blocked opportunity structure that is constructed in such a way that opportunities and privilege are provided based on racial categorizations, which are predictive of one’s social structural location and life outcomes (Bobo and Tuan 2006; Bonilla-Silva 1997). Clearly, there is a cumulative disadvantage operating for Blacks that began during slavery with the lawful operation of slave codes and the early conceptions of race. These factors continue to operate through to the present (Oliver and Shapiro 1995).

Although Blacks are no longer considered a subhuman species and the one-drop rule and slave codes are no longer lawfully maintained, the construction of race is still operating within our racialized social system and pervasive inequality still disadvantages Blacks. The construction of race continues to be a useful political tool for the dominant group to create and maintain otherness, as well as perpetuate dominant group privilege. Race is important and understood because of the social meaning the dominant group
attaches to it. The meaning and construction of race is embedded in the specific social, historical, and cultural context (Omi and Winant 1994). Contemporarily, race still demarcates dominant and subordinate status and stratifies racial groups based on perceived superiority and inferiority. The present social construction of race maintains a disadvantaged position for Blacks and indicates the stability of racial inequality. Today, Blacks in comparison to whites are still critically deprived on social indicators like income, employment, education, poverty, health, and housing (Corcoran 1995; DeNavas-Walt et al. 2007; Feagin and McKinney 2003; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Krivo et al. 1998; Wilson 1978, 1987, 1996).

**Color-Blind Ideology and the Perpetuation of Racial Inequality**

Stability in racial inequality results in the continual lack of access to opportunities for Blacks, which decrease life chances. This condition is a blocked opportunity structure, which denies access to resources such as education, employment, income, residential security, homeownership, and political representation. As the dominant group, whites create, maintain and benefit from this structural configuration because it feeds the system of oppression that prevents Blacks from attaining resources, thereby allowing whites to maintain greater access to resources. Therefore, the blocked opportunity structure perpetuates the subordinate and disadvantaged position of Blacks, rendering material success for most Blacks nearly impossible. Moreover, whites often blame Blacks for their disadvantaged position (e.g., culture of poverty argument; Corcoran 1995) and deny the structural forces (e.g., welfare and work program reform; Corcoran 1995; Wilson 1996) that perpetuate the disproportionate opportunity hierarchy (Brown et al.
This pattern of perpetration and denial maintains the disadvantage of Blacks and ensures that power, opportunity, and privilege are cornered by the white majority and continue to be inaccessible to Blacks, consequently perpetuating continued negative outcomes for Blacks (Doane 2003; Feagin and McKinney 2003; Wilson 1996). Persistent inequality is endemic for Blacks and is maintained because of covert structural racism and a prevailing color-blind ideology, an ideology which has replaced historical racism and helps to perpetuate white dominance (Bonilla-Silva 1996, 2000, 2003; Carr 1997).

This literature review traces through three historic periods in time: 1) Slavery (1619-1865), 2) Pre-Civil Rights Era (1866-1970), and 3) Post-Civil Rights Era (1971 to the present). Therefore, before I detail color-blind ideology I am compelled to outline the organization of historical racism. Figure 1 is meant as a heuristic model which I simply use as a framework to guide and shape my exploration of the relationship between the operation of structure and ideology and the perpetuation of racial inequality. Specifically, Figure 1 outlines the relationships among structure, ideology and racial domination across these three periods. The rectangular box or the backdrop for structure and ideology is codified as the capitalist motive – the major goal of which is to generate and keep resources in the hands of the dominant group. Recall, historically and currently in the US, the hierarchical structure disproportionately allocates social rewards to members of different racial groups, and the racialized social order is distinguished by differences in life chances. Many classic (e.g., Marx 1859, 1867, 1932, 1972; Weber 1927, 1947, 1958, 1968) and contemporary scholars (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2001, 2003; Omi & Winant 1986; Wilson 1978, 1987, 1996) refer to this pattern of disproportionate allocation as the
capitalist motive. An important component to the history of racism is that this capitalist motive remains the same across time – with the same outcome, white racial domination. Also important is that the relationship between structure and ideology remains interconnected (as depicted by the concentric ovals in which structure and ideology are securely embedded) although there is continual evolution in both structure and ideology across time. Notice the double-sided arrow inside the structure and ideology part of the diagram. I draw this to illustrate the mutual interplay and reflexive relationship between structure and ideology and to show that structure and ideology are intimately bound together. Furthermore, the relationship of structure and ideology is representative of the dominant group construction, as well as the direct experiences of both the dominant and subordinate groups. It is the framework of the dominant race that tends to be the master framework for all groups. That is, the ruling material force of society is also the ruling intellectual force of society (Marx 1845-1856). I explain the evolution of structure and ideology for each time period below. The dotted line that runs along the left side of Figure 1 illustrates a transformation from overt to covert expressions of white domination across the three time periods. Succinctly, structure and ideology change from overtly to covertly operating in order to continue the subordination of Blacks and foster the capitalist motive.
During slavery, the structural location of Blacks and the ideology that maintains their structural location are the most crucial determinants of racial domination. In fact, Blacks were the workhorses of the agricultural economy. They worked on white owned plantations growing and maintaining their herds and crops. White plantation owners profited from the production of Black slave labor, while Blacks were denied the very resources they produced for whites (Everett 1991; Stampp 1956). During this period, under white law Blacks as a group occupy a position of property (structure), which is consistent with them being viewed and treated as non-human entities by the white majority (ideology). In this early period, the subordination of Blacks is quite overt. Blacks were captured and enslaved for the sole purpose of creating and securing the
agricultural economy of the newly expanded United States of America (i.e., the capitalist motive).

In the pre-civil rights era, Blacks continued to be victimized by the racial domination of whites, but some gains were made. For instance, the early twentieth century was witness to the rise of Black entrepreneurship (e.g., Madame CJ Walker--Giddings 1984) and black intellectual thought (e.g., E. Franklin Frazier 1932). Nevertheless, these gains were not applicable to most Blacks. Even though some Blacks were able to get a job and earn a wage; they were denied admissions to the very public universities for which their tax dollars paid. Historically, the opportunity structure operated in ways that facilitated resource denial and racial inequality and preserved white racial domination. The newly gained “freedom” for Blacks revealed slight progression in both structure and ideology, although these two components of social life clearly still arise from the capitalist motive. The new economy based on industrialization meant the dominant group needed Black labor in the urban and industrial sectors instead of on the plantations (structure); however the dominant group still viewed Blacks as not having complete humanity (ideology). In the pre-civil rights era, the embedded nature of structure and ideology was preserved. Although there had been a shift in structure and ideology, they were still highly driven by and dependent on each other in order to maintain racial domination. However, in the pre-civil rights era the racial domination of Blacks was not as overt and blatant as it was during slavery.

During the post-civil rights era, the dominant group claims that structural constraints are invisible. That is, the new rights and opportunities afforded to minorities (structural shift) make it possible for the dominant group to now ignore structural
positioning as a cause of resource deprivation and to adopt a color-blind ideology (ideological shift) that presupposes that Blacks are at fault for their own disadvantage (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2001, 2003). For example, if whites were called upon to address structure, they would argue that laws have changed to improve and equalize life chances for Blacks instead of recognizing the structural constraints persisting in the social system (Feagin 2006; Feagin and Sikes 1994). Furthermore, whites would claim that they no longer hold prejudicial ideas about Blacks, which previously might have precluded mobility. In the post-civil rights era, structure and ideology are still intimately bound together even though structure is invisible to whites. In fact, it is the mutual interplay and reflexive nature of structure and ideology that is most pronounced in the third time period. Structural position leads to the adoption of certain ideological beliefs and those beliefs reify one’s structural positioning. The structural privilege of whites allows them to adopt a color-blind ideology. In turn, this ideology shores up the structural location of whites and guarantees that resources remain under their control and ensures their racial domination. Again, there was a shift in both structure and ideology from the pre-civil rights era to the post-civil rights era. The overt nature of racial domination has also decreased such that the anti-Black sentiment is much more covert now than in previous historical periods. This pattern follows the aforementioned capitalist motive because although Blacks have more freedom and opportunities in the post-civil rights era, the amassing of resources is still the main goal and outcome of the majority group.

Today racial inequality is still pervasive. The U.S. is the wealthiest and most prosperous nation in the world, yet it is plagued with gross income disparities, poverty, hunger, and healthcare inequality. These disparities disproportionately disadvantage
Blacks. In the post-civil rights era it is expected (at least as claimed by the white
majority) that minorities’ opportunities would be comparable to that of whites, but it is
evident that Blacks are still greatly disadvantaged in regard to life chances. Bonilla-Silva
(1997) reminds us that in spite of all the legislative strides for minorities and the
abundance of resources available in this country, the unchanging element is that the life
chances of Blacks are significantly lower than those of whites. He argues that although
not all dominant members (whites) receive the same level of rewards and not all
subordinates (Blacks) are at the bottom of the social order; minorities are still in a
subordinate and disadvantaged position relative to whites. Recall, it is the racialized
social order that structures the social relations of privilege and depravity in access and
opportunity (Bonilla-Silva 1997). The daunting reality is that although adequate
resources are available in this country, Blacks are still systematically denied access and
disadvantaged on all social indicators more than their white counterparts and it is the
operation of color-blind racism which perpetuates racial inequality.

*The Structure of Color-Blind Ideology.* Bonilla-Silva (2003) asserts that color-
blind ideology or color-blindism is the “new racism,” one which “explains contemporary
racial inequality as an outcome of nonracial dynamics” (p.2). Color-blind ideology
credits the Civil Rights movement with transforming white racial attitudes, eliminating
lawful segregation, and eradicating blatant discrimination. Moreover, color-blind
ideology purports that the Civil Rights movement generated the decline in acceptability
of overt expressions of racism as well as, the alleged increase in white acceptance of
Carr 1997; Doane 2003). In fact, most white Americans and even some Black Americans
believe that racism has vanished (Feagin and Vera 1995) and that if vestiges of racial
discrimination still persist it’s because Blacks have failed to take advantage of the
opportunities created with the Civil Rights movement, not because the U.S. is still a racist
Silva (2001, 2003) contends that the new racism is difficult to detect because color-blind
ideology camouflages racial practices. In fact, color-blind racism reproduces inequality
and perpetuates white privilege because its practices are subtle and embedded in the
operation of institutions.

It is important I distinguish that other noted scholars (e.g., Bobo, Kluegel, and
Smith 1997; Kinder and Sears 1981) introduced “new forms of racism” (e.g., laissez-faire
racism and symbolic racism) arising in the post-civil rights era which informed Bonilla-
Silva’s construction of color-blind racism. In the 1970s, research reported that attitudes
toward traditional overt expressions of anti-Black prejudice were becoming much less
common, yet there was also widespread resistance to busing (Kelly 1974), affirmative
action (Lipset and Schneider 1978), and even black candidates for political office (Sears
1988). Symbolic racism and laissez-faire racism offer explanations for the qualitative
change in racial attitudes but not the prevailing opposition to color-conscious public
policies. Symbolic racism affirms that early learned and embedded American values like
individualism, self-reliance, a strong work ethic, obedience and discipline were
increasingly becoming linked to negative attitudes toward Blacks (Kinder and Sears 1981,
1985). Contemporarily, for whites, these racial attitudes manifest in a strong resentment
aimed at Blacks whom they perceive as welfare dependent and recipients of
“preferential” treatment. Proponents of the symbolic racism model argued that
opposition to policies that would potentially help to ameliorate racial discrimination and inequality rested in psychological predispositions created in early childhood socialization not in individual material need or racial conflict over social resources (Kinder and Sears 1981, 1985; McConahay and Hough 1976; McConahay 1982).

The laissez-faire racism model emerged out of the weakened foundations of the Jim Crow social order to justify and defend white privilege and results from the complex interplay of economic, political and race mechanisms. Laissez-faire racism did not reduce racial attitudes to socialized predispositions but rather had an orientation toward more rational, political and ideological explanations (Bobo 1983). In fact, this framework recognizes that the legacy of discrimination as well as changes in institutionalized structural conditions and mechanisms of social life reproduce anti-Black attitudes and Black disadvantage (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997). However, in an effort to legitimate white privilege, laissez-faire racist attitudes still blame Blacks for their economic and political failures and attribute their barriers to success to cultural inferiority (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997).

Bonilla-Silva’s (2001, 2003) explanation of contemporary racism is also a more multifaceted framework. His conceptualization of color-blind ideology acknowledges and accounts for the interplay of structure and ideology in the operation of racialized social systems. In fact, he “sees the views of actors as corresponding to their systematic location” (p.8) not simply as “individual psychological dispositions” (p.7). The structure of society and the predominant ideology have a reflexive relationship so that structural positioning (racialized social system) matters, but also ideology (color-blind racism) takes on a structure of its own. Specifically, the social construction of race determines
racial categories; those categorizations occupy social realities and structure where individuals are positioned within the racialized social system. Social-structural positioning then dictates resources access and life chances while the prevailing color-blind ideology generated by the dominant group (those who also construct race and the racialized social system) reinforces the racialized system. This reinforcement of the racialized structure preserves the dominant groups’ cumulative advantage and perpetuates the subordinate groups’ cumulative disadvantage (Oliver and Shapiro 1995). Therefore, structure and ideology work in tandem to stimulate and perpetuate inequality.

Whites exercise color-blind ideology to rationalize the disadvantaged minority status as a product of the market, natural phenomena, and Blacks’ cultural limitations. Color-blind ideology also relies on linking contemporary race issue and the social standing of minorities to naturalization, cultural effects and the minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Therefore, color-blind racism is manifest in statements like “Sure neighborhood segregation is a bad thing, but it really is natural because people just want to live with people like them, that’s the way it is”; “The problem for Blacks is that they just have too many babies”; “I’m all for equal opportunity; I believe in people being judged on individual merit, that’s why I am opposed to Affirmative Action”; “I’m not racist; some of my best friends are Black.” These narratives are indicative of the collective ideological practices that reinforce the contemporary racial order.

Color-blindism renders cultural and racial difference irrelevant and blames people of color for their underprivileged position by attributing their failures to individual issues. Within the color-blind discourse inequality is not explained as a structural problem that is maintained by persistent racism, rather it is explained away as a result of individual or
group level deficiencies (Doane 2003). In fact, Bonilla-Silva (2003) reports that whites do not perceive racism or discrimination as a central factor determining life chances for minorities and instead, typically blame Blacks’ for their disadvantaged economic and social standing. Whites argue that Blacks’ standing in society is a result of their lack of effort, weak family organization, cultural inferiority and inappropriate values (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Quillan 2006; Wilson 1987, 1996). Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2003) argues that this new ideology is a way to individualize racism (e.g. it’s those bigots not me) and perpetuate the denial of racism as a structural component of the social system. Therefore, the persistence of racial stratification within the racialized social system and the reproduction of inequality by social institutions are overlooked and ignored (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Carr 1997).

Bonilla-Silva (2003) contends that color-blind ideology assert a race-neutral social context and justifies whites’ refusal to acknowledge race and color as a social fact. The prevalence of color-blind claims and the belief in a color-blind environment are contradictory with the persistence of gross racial inequalities (Lewis 2003) and in turn reinforce white privilege (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Carr 1997). In fact, color-blind ideology has produced a new set of racial understanding for whites that is based on the invisibility of white identity and white privilege. Within the new discourse, race no longer matters. Instead, race issues are dealt with by not “seeing” race-color and claims to the “sameness” of everyone (Doane 2003). Therefore, color-blind ideology is supported by statements made by whites like, “I don’t see color, just people” (Bonilla-Silva 2003).
The notion of a post-racial society where race is no longer viewed as a significant obstacle to social and economic participation renders the discussion of explicit racism unacceptable (Lewis 2003). From a color-blind standpoint, introducing race into the debate results in accusations by whites that Blacks are complaining, seeking special treatment, “playing the race card,” or even being racist (Blauner 1992; Doane 1996; Hartigan 1997). From Bonilla-Silva’s (2001, 2003) perspective, most whites believe that if Blacks would just move beyond the past, all people could live together without a race problem.

It is presumable that whites really do believe that they “do not see color” because whites generally are not conscious of their racial privileged nor do they understand how they benefit from the subordinate status of Blacks (McIntosh 1988). Instead, they believe that they truly judge people on individual merit and personality traits so that for many whites their prejudices, discriminatory behaviors and even their racist ideologies are unconscious (Quillan 2006). This “blindness,” in turn, helps to maintain the structure that benefits the dominant group -- because little change can occur when the problem is denied and not addressed (McIntosh 1988). Color-blind ideology is a frightening political device which the dominant group employs (consciously or unconsciously) to maintain the racial order and preserve white privilege (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Color-blind racism reinforces the racialized social system so that the structure of racial positioning which determines life chances is maintained. The central outcome is the preservation of white dominance. Thus, racial inequality persists.

Bonilla-Silva (1997) argues that racism is a part of the larger social structure and constitutes a racialized social system. Today, the racialized social system places actors
into racial categories which structures society on economic, political, social, and ideological levels. In all racialized social systems, racial categorizations become the standard for social organization and subsequently determine life chances for all racial groups (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Succinctly, the social structure is constructed in such a way that race determines location in the system. Color-blind ideology is therefore needed to justify the disadvantaged location of minorities. Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2003) points out that the explicit racialized social relations that operate in the social system produce hierarchical patterns which assign people to subordinate (Black) or superordinate-dominant (whites) positions and distinguish social rewards and life chances. Therefore, as subordinates, Blacks have less access to resources and receive less social rewards. Conversely, whites, as the dominant group benefit from resource access and reward allocation (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Omi & Winant 1986; Wilson 1978, 1987, 1996).

These disparities are an issue of covert, systematic and structural racism, which is embedded in the normal operations of institutions that perpetuate institutional exclusion and deprivation of Blacks. The covert nature of the blocked opportunity structures, along with the prevalence of color-blind ideology makes it difficult to detect and impossible to directly identify. This fact is why many do not see systematic racism as a contemporary problem (Makalani 2003, Mills 2003). The embodiment of color-blind racism, the continual denial of a race problem, and the refusal to acknowledge the existence of discrimination facilitates persistent racial disparities and chronic inequality. These persistent inequalities also shape intimate coupling, the primary focus of this dissertation.
Intimate Coupling and Race Differences

In the U.S. a primary goal for most adults is to foster and maintain lasting, intimate relationships. In fact, as individuals move toward adulthood they have a tendency to seek out intimate relationships and explore couplehood. In terms of romantic couplehood, these types of relationships take many forms, ranging from short- or long-term dating relationships to cohabitating partnerships to conventional marriage. Often, individuals seek the intimacy of romantic relationships in order to meet basic human needs for identity construction, self-esteem and emotional support (Brehm 1985, Zinn and Eitzen 1990). As a part of life course development, adults seek companionship, love, commitment, emotional connections, and social support that intimate relationships offer (Gove 1973; Knox et al 1999; Launmann et al 1994; Umberson 1987, 1992; Waite 1995; Zinn and Eitzen 1990). Couplehood is also sought and entered into for practical reasons like financial resource gain, economic security, reproduction and childrearing. Regardless of the form, adults spend a great deal of their lives navigating through and working on the development of fulfilling intimate relationships.

Research illustrates that satisfying intimate relationships, especially marriages, offer numerous benefits. In fact, a fulfilling relationship is one of the best predictors of life satisfaction even over financial security, job satisfaction and physical health (Glenn and Weaver 1988). Even with the relatively recent shifts in family structure (e.g., retreat from marriage, higher divorce rate, increased nonmarital births and increased cohabitation; Bumpass & Lu 2000; Cherlin 1992; Litcher et al 1992; Manning & Smock 1995; Mcloyd et al 2000; Schoen & Canudas-Romo 2005) there are still many positive consequences of marriage. Married people tend to have better health (Kiecolt-Glaser
and Newton 2001), longer lives (House, Landis and Umberson 1988), more frequent and better sex (Greenly 1994; Launmann et al 1994; Waite 1995), higher earnings and more wealth (Waite 1995), social support to cope with stress, and a sense of obligation and life meaning (Gove 1973; Umberson 1987, 1992). Therefore, it is not surprising that marriage is still a desired social practice. The U.S. has the highest rate of marriage among advanced societies and an estimated 90% of Americans will eventually marry (U.S.Census Bureau 2001).

Although there is a propensity toward marriage in the US, this practice is not quantitatively or qualitatively the same across all groups. Historically, Blacks and whites have had different experiences in regard to romantic coupling and marriage. In the following paragraphs, I distinguish between the experiences of Blacks and whites in order to understand racial differences in relationship practices and outcomes. In making that distinction, I discuss the history of marital and familial instability among Blacks. My conceptualization of marital and familial instability reflects the work of Wilson (1978, 1987, 1996) and Bonilla-Silva (1997) by emphasizing that social structure, which is created and maintained by the dominant ideology, shapes opportunities and life chances. Specifically, structural conditions make access to the institution of marriage and family different for Blacks and whites. As defined by whites, marriage and family is a monogamous lifelong commitment entered into in order to reproduce and operate as an economic unit (Demos 1970; Greven 1970; Havreven 1976; Laslett 1971). However, as I will discuss in the following sections, due to white domination, the structural situation for Blacks made it especially hard for them to meet the white definition of marriage and
family. Furthermore, I explain the connection between persistent racial discrimination and inequality and the production of the Black family structure.

**Coupling During Slavery and the Pre-Civil Rights Era.** The history of Black marital and family instability dates back as far as slavery. In that era, Blacks occupied a position of property within the social structure and were perceived and treated as a sub-human group by the white majority (Doob 1999; Everett 1991; Stampp 1956). Lawfully, the dominant group established slave codes which denied Blacks literacy, education, property ownership, inheritance, as well as familial and marriage relationships (Bennett 1966; Everett 1991; Stampp 1956). The pervasive racism of the time sabotaged relationships between Blacks, minimized the emotional bonds of slaves, and marked Blacks as inferior for familial roles. In fact, according to slave laws Blacks were not allowed to operate as a family unit or enter into contractual marriage (Jordon 1971; Stampp 1956). Therefore, the conventional notion of marriage and family was unattainable for Blacks and consequently laid the foundation for Black family instability.

Another disruption to the structure of the Black family in the time of slavery was the construction of Black masculinity. Whites’ characterized all Blacks as depraved, amoral and uncivilized, and deemed them a less than human species (Jahoda 1999; Jordan 1968; Omi and Winant 1994; Schaeffer 2006; Thompson 1977). The categorization of Black men during slavery was even more severe. Whites rendered Black men as violent and hyper masculine, lacking tenderness and sensitivity, and the embodiment of fervent sexual desire (Jordon 1971; Stampp 1956). Whites considered Black men incapable of commitment and unqualified to maintain familial obligations. As well, they were denied the basic human right of building a family. Although slave
masters were often sensitive to the bond between a slave mother and her child, they had no reservations about selling the father away from the family (Owens 1997). Therefore, Black men were prohibited from assuming proper “father” roles and had little control over the fate of their children. The construction of Black masculinity during slavery had a crippling effect on slave fathers’ parental responsibility. Because Black men lacked the authority to be a father and were denied the right to protect their family some were left feeling little or no paternal or familial obligation (DuBois 1899; 1990).

Although Whites’ denial of slave marriages and their characterization of Blacks as unemotional and devoid of family values brought fragility to the Black family structure, research indicates that many Black men and women expressed great love for each other and devotion to their families (Owens 1997). Many freed slaves attempted to find their long lost loved ones. In fact, countless slave narratives offer stories of newly freed slaves spending years trying to locate relatives (Gutman 1976; Litwack 1997). Unfortunately, locating family members was almost impossible. By the time their search began so many years had passed, changes in the physical appearance of loved ones coupled with outdated or inaccurate information meant that families reuniting was unlikely. Instead, the foundation for splintered relationships among Blacks was strengthened and modern day ramifications followed (Litwack 1997).

In the time of slavery, whites as the dominant group had very different familial and marital experiences. Clearly, as the ruling group, whites constructed the meaning of marriage and family structure and established the expectations of the marital and family unit. Whites were not merely permitted but also obligated to marry and build families. A nuclear family structure based on patrilineal inheritance was brought to America by the
earliest settlers (Laslett 1971). Although love was present in marital unions, it was not the basis for courtship, mate selection or marriage. During slavery, white marriages were structured according to economic considerations and were arranged based on social order. Marital unions across social boundaries were forbidden (Demos 1970; Laslett 1971). Instead, acceptable marriages were made as a social and economic alliance in order to secure the position and wealth of families. From the noble upper-class to the less fortunate, whites’ arranged their marriages based on property, dowry, and economic security and experienced great stability of the nuclear family, as well as a network of support from their extended family (Demos 1970; Greven 1970; Laslett 1971).

Even though whites were structurally privileged to benefit from the institution of marriage, white women were confined by gender role expectations and experienced considerable gender inequality. Under the patriarchal family structure men had ultimate power and control over the family unit. Marriage was based on property relationships, and therefore, women were considered the property of their husbands. The husband served as authority over his wife and children much like he did over his slaves. Because women were deemed inferior to men subordination to men was required. Women were expected to be obedient and subservient to their husband. Nonetheless, whites still experienced marital and family stability in the time of slavery.

Black family instability persisted during the pre-civil rights era and extended north with southern migration. After 1910, there was a mass migration of southern Blacks from the rural south to the urban north. Blacks were motivated to move north because of the persistence of white social hostility and their need for stable employment. Although slavery had ended, southern Blacks were still confronted with pervasive social
problems like racially motivated violence and exclusion, substandard schools, and political disenfranchisement (Flynn 1983; Mandle 1978; Ransom & Sutch 1977). Furthermore, the southern economy offered Blacks very little opportunity. Blacks were relegated to sharecropping or primarily low paying unskilled labor and domestic servitude. During the early 1900s, northern factories were expanding their production and consequently their labor force. Factory owners were in search of cheap labor which they found in poorly paid southern Black workers (Campbell & Johnson 1981; Fligstein 1981; Henri 1975; Woodson 1969).

When rural Blacks migrated north they entered a new social context but brought with them a history of Black family dislocation. In relation to southern migration, northern urban Blacks and especially northern Black families experienced a myriad of changes. These changes included a decrease in marriages and family size, as well as an increase in nonmarital motherhood and single parent headed households (Lichter et al 1992; Ruggles 1994; Schoen 1987; Waite 1995). These changes indicated increased fragility and volatility of the Black family. Early research argues that the growing instability could be explained by the decrease in social support of the extended family (e.g. many migrants moved north on their own with the intention of sending for loved ones after they were settled; Frazier 1932) coupled with the harsh and traumatizing experiences of urban life (e.g. most migrants were uneducated displaced farmers and sharecroppers with little urban experience; Drake and Clayton 1962; Frazier 1932, 1966), which resulted from southern migration (Jones 1985; Staples 1985).

A plethora of research in this area maintains that the weakened black family structure emerged as a legacy of slavery (DuBois 1899; Frazier 1932; Morgan et al 1993;
According to slave law, marriage was not a legally binding institution for Blacks and parents had little control over the life outcomes of their children. The injustices of slavery deprived Blacks the opportunity to foster families and retarded the sense of familial obligation, parental responsibility and marital fidelity among Blacks, particularly Black men (DuBois 1899; Frazier 1966). Frazier (1966) referred to slavery as a matriarchal institution because although Black women were also denied the opportunity to cultivate family, they primarily managed the slave household. During slavery an established expectation and tolerance for nonmarital sex, illegitimate children, and unlawful marriages emerged. The impact of the ongoing denial of marriage and family formation resonated. Therefore, although Blacks were now free people permitted by law to marry and raise families, the “deviant” familial patterns of slavery still lingered and continued to operate into post-slavery (DuBois 1899; Frazier 1966).

DuBois (1899) and Frazier (1966) argued that urban Black family instability can be attributed to southern Blacks’ experiences of slavery. As an artifact of slavery, “deviant” family patterns were elements of the southern plantation culture and of southern Black social life (Frazier 1966). When southern Blacks moved north they brought with them their culture and family patterns. Thus, their imported instability was influential on northern family patterns. DuBois (1899) pointed out that the casual moral habits of slavery characterized by nonmarital sex, fragile families and illegitimate children influenced the Black family patterns emerging in Philadelphia. Drake & Clayton (1962) also noticed that deviant southern family patterns had deleterious influence on Black family patterns in Chicago communities. Research argued that southern migrants introduced a structural culture of family disorder, fragility and
malfunction to northern Blacks (Drake & Clayton 1962; Dubois 1899; Frazier 1966). In turn, those patterns influenced northern familial outcomes and perpetuated Black marital and family instability. Essentially, Black families were characterized by low rates of marriage and increased non-marital cohabitation and childrearing.

During the pre-civil rights era, whites continued to experience and benefit from family and marital stability based on a patrilineal nuclear family structure. White marriage during slavery focused on economic concerns and maintaining social position, and love was not a crucial component of couplehood. After slavery, there was a shift from the traditional family (economically focused) to the modern family (concerned with love and personal considerations) which emerged from the growth of industrialization. Industrialization created a distinction between public and private spheres by decreasing communal subsistence farming and increasing in wage-work outside of the home (Jones 1982; Tilly and Scott 1978). This transition of family structure meant the purpose of family became focused on breeding, child-rearing and consumption (Havreven 1976). In addition, the basis for marriage began to shift from strictly economic and status considerations to unions based on personal happiness and self-development, love, attraction, and mutual respect (Degler 1980; Knox et al 1999; Murstein 1986; Mintz and Kellogg 1988; Zinn and Eitzen 1990). Although industrialization created new family functions, white women still experienced substantial gender oppression. However, whites continued to experience economic security and family stability in the pre-civil rights era (Havreven 1976; Degler 1980).

_Coupling in the Post-Civil Rights Era._ The post-civil rights era is witness to several changes in relationship patterns and family structure. These changes include the
retreat or delay of marriage, increased rates of divorce, increased nonmarital births and
single-parent headed households, and increased cohabitation (Bumpass & Lu 2000;
Cherlin 1992; Lichter et al 1992; Manning & Smock 1995; Mcloyd et al 2000; Schoen &
Canudas-Romo 2005). In fact, adulthood relationship experiences are becoming
increasingly varied with some marrying early, whereas others delay marriage, cohabit or
stay single (Raley 2000). Although these shifts in family patterns shape the lives of both
Blacks and whites, these changes indicate persistent instability of the Black family
structure.

The most pronounced shifts of the post-civil rights era are the delay of first
marriage and a decrease in marriage rates, which is characterized in the literature as the
retreat from marriage (Mcloyd et al 2000; Sweeney 2002; Teachman et al 2000; Waite
1995). Although a great majority of people will likely marry at some point there has
been a growing ambivalence about marriage. This ambivalence is exemplified by
increased social approval of singlehood (Thornton and Freedman 1982), a decline in
remarriage (McCarthy et al 1981; Waite 1995) and an increase in marital age (Fields
2003; Glick 1984; Manning and Smock 1995). In fact, the median age of marriage in
2000 was 26.8 for men and 25.1 for women up from 23.2 and 20.8 respectively in 1970
(U.S. Census Bureau 2001a). Marital delay and withdrawal is also associated with
greater participation of women in the labor force, a decrease in male and female income
differentials, and the persistence of a racial gap in economic status between both Blacks
and whites and Black men and Black women (Schoen and Canudas-Romo 2005; Schoen
and Cheng 2006; White and Rogers 2000). This retreat from marriage has continued into
the 21st century and appears to be on the rise. I will discuss the factors shaping marital retreat in detail in the following paragraphs.

Research indicates that marriage is associated with a variety of factors. Primarily, a main function of marriage is financial security. As a result, marriage is linked to economic opportunity and men’s economic standing (Becker 1981, 1992; Landale and Tolnay 1991; Lichter et al 1992; Manning and Smock 1995; Wilson 1987, 1996). In fact, research identifies that men’s employment and income play a role for both white women and Black women on marriage patterns (Lichter et al 1991; South and Lloyd 1992). Becker (1981, 1992) considered marriage a trade off in which men offer financial support and security and in exchange, women provide domestic and household services. Hypergamy- women marrying up in socio-economic status- is also associated with marriage. Women tend to seek spouses with higher educational attainment, wealth and social standing. Some research indicates that marriage is dependent on both socio-economic characteristics and the availability of a suitable spouse (Lichter et al 1991, 1992; South and Lloyd 1992). Clearly, the quality of the local marriage market- spatial arena where prospective partners seeks to “hire” a suitable partner- also impacts marital outcomes (Litcher et al 1992).

Blacks have a distinct history of marital disorder and have always married less than their white counterparts (Cherlin 1992; Schoen and Kluegel 1988). As slaves they were denied the right to enter into legalized marriage and after slavery marital disintegration endured. In the post-civil rights era, this trend of Black marital instability is maintained. Blacks regularly report less marital happiness and satisfaction than whites even when accounting for economic resources, education, premarital cohabitation, and
patterns of marital interaction (Mcloyd et al 2000). Accordingly, Black marriage rates continue to be low and rapidly declining (Bumpass & Lu 2000; Cherlin 1992; Farley & Allen 1987; Schoen and Kluegel 1988; Waite 1995). Research indicates that Blacks, particularly Black women (Lichter et al 1992; Schoen 1987; Waite 1995), have led the marriage retreat and that, compared to whites, a large portion of Blacks never enter the institution of marriage (Mcloyd et al 2000; Waite 1995). Among women, whites compared to Blacks disproportionately expect to marry by age 28 (80% to 50% respectively) (Lichter et al 1992). Although contemporarily whites also have a propensity to delay marriage, they continue to have higher marriage rates than Blacks (Cherlin 1992; Lichter et al 1992; Manning and Smock 1995; South and Lloyd 1992).

Factors that help explain the recent marital retreat among all women are their increased educational attainment, workforce participation and earning potential. Becker (1981) argues that women’s participation in the workforce and their ability to financially support themselves threaten the usual exchange of a traditionally balanced marriage. So that, for working women the economic gain of marriage is reduced because they no longer rely on the financial support and security previously provided by a husband. Therefore, Becker (1981; 1992) asserts this shift accounts for the retreat from marriage. However, this argument does not explain Black women’s marital retreat. Historically, Black women have played a significant economic role for their families by working outside of the home in order to help their families survive (Brown 1999; Goldin 1990; Jones 1985). In most Black families women are expected to work because Black men are generally vulnerable to employment instability and low wages (Blee & Tickamyer 1995; Jones 1985; Krivo et al. 1998; Malson 1983; Wilson 1987, 1996).
Moreover, the notion of hypergamy implies that as women’s education and workforce participation increases, the sample of possible marriage partners decreases (Mare 1991; Lichter 1990). This implication does not hold true for both white and Black women. In fact, Blacks are still disadvantaged relative to whites with respect to hypergamy. The gap in educational attainment and employment is greater among white men and women then between Black men and women, meaning white women are more likely to marry up with regard to educational attainment than Black women (Farley and Bianchi 1987; Farley 1988).

For Black women, the marriage market as well as the potential for marital hypergamy remains bleak. In contrast to white women, Black women have a history of workforce participation and financially supporting their families (Brown 1999; Goldin 1990; Jones 1985). Black men, compared to Black women, are disproportionately affected by low educational attainment, high rates of incarceration, unemployment and joblessness (Krivo et al. 1998; Mauer 2000; Wilson 1987, 1996). Black men also experience disproportionate rates of incarceration compared to rates of college enrollment. In 2000, there were more Black men in local jails and state and federal prison systems than were enrolled in higher education. In fact, one out of three Black men between the ages of 20 and 29 are in some part of the correctional system (Mauer 2000; Schiraldi and Ziedenberg 2002). Even with the increasing economic success and independence of all women, educational and economic gains through marriage (i.e., marrying up with respect to education and earnings) still advantage white women more than Black women.

These differential educational and economic marital outcomes can be linked to the persistent structural disparity between whites and Blacks in educational attainment.
and income. The gap between whites and Blacks earning college degrees has widened in recent decades. Among adults age 25 and older, 26 percent of whites but only 14 percent of Blacks had earned college degrees by 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). According to 2006 Census reports, Black household incomes were 39 percent lower than white household incomes. In fact, the median income for Black households was about $32,000 whereas white households were averaging $52,423 (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2007). The gross racial discrepancies discussed above demonstrate that structural conditions differ by race and therefore provide differential access to choices about marriage and family structure.

Contemporary racial differences in marriage patterns and marital retreat have largely been explained by socio-economic advantage or disadvantage (Goldscheider and Waite 1991; Manning and Smock 1995; Litcher et al 1991, 1992; Wilson 1987). Specifically, economic factors contribute to the changing family patterns for Blacks as well as the persistent family instability among Blacks. Research shows that there is a positive relationship between stable employment and marriage rates (Manning and Smock 1995; Sweeney 2002; Wilson 1987; 1996). Although whites are concerned with economic security, Blacks place greater emphasis on economic support and stability than whites (Bulcroft and Bulcroft 1993; Manning and Smock 1995; Sweeney 2002). Therefore, education and employment might have a greater effect on Blacks’ decisions about marriage.

Research shows that men’s employment and income influence marriage patterns and marital status (Litcher et al 1991; South and Lloyd 1992). In fact, men’s unemployment and low earnings correspond with low rates of marriage among Blacks.
(Wilson 1987). Therefore, the transition to marriage for Blacks might be more affected by women’s economic opportunities than for whites. Wilson (1987; 1996) contends that men’s deteriorating economic standing are in a large part responsible for the retreat from marriage and may explain race differences since Black men have increasingly poor economic opportunities. In the 1970s, a mass exodus of whites and middle class Blacks out of the city to the suburbs resulted in a significant reduction in socio-economic resources in urban areas (Kasarda 1989, 1995; Testa et al 1989; Wilson 1987). As a result, Black men’s employment opportunities have greatly decreased and there has been a sharp increase in joblessness. Moreover, the worsening economic conditions have made even employed Black men vulnerable to unemployment and declining real incomes (Testa 1991; Wilson 1996). The epidemic of poverty, unemployment, and joblessness has reduced the incentive for Blacks, especially Black women, to marry (Litcher et al 1992; Schoen 1987; Testa et al 1989; Wilson 1987).

In addition, Litcher et al (1992) showed that race differences in marriage can be explained by the structural condition of local marriage markets more so than individual characteristics. Due to the problems of unemployment and joblessness, Blacks have a more restrictive marriage market than Whites (Litcher et al 1992). Economic instability in the Black community influences lower rates of marriage because the economic potential of men is directly related to their eligibility and attractiveness as desirable mates. In fact, Black women are less willing to marry a man with fewer resources than themselves (Bulcroft and Bulcroft 1993). A growing deficit in the supply of economically attractive men has made the marriage market slim for Black women (Litcher et al 1991; Litcher et al 1992; South and Lloyd 1991; Wilson 1987; 1996).
These deficiencies in the Black marriage market reduce the incentive for Black women to marry and are illustrated by their delay of marriage (Litcher et al 1992; Schoen 1987; Testa et al 1989; Wilson 1987).

Although most research suggests that economic independence delays marriage, some studies report that women’s employment increases their marital options. Recent studies claim that men increasingly prefer to marry employed women (Goldscheider and Waite 1986; Oppenheimer 1992). In fact, it may be that women with financial security are perceived as better equipped with resources for marriage and children and as a result are more appealing as potential marriage partners (Goldscheider and Waite 1986; Litcher et al 1992; South 1991). The demand for employed, self-sufficient women is especially important among Black men. Black men, more than white men, place greater emphasis and prefer to marry women with stable employment, similar earnings, and career determination (Melton & Thomas 1976; South 1991). However, increasing economic success and independence of Black women improved the perceived advantages of marriage for Black men but not necessarily for Black women (Farley 1988; Wilson 1987). For Black women, this discrepancy may be accounted for by the apparent unequal marital exchange by marrying Black men. In any case, some research indicates that for both white and Black women their education, current employment and earnings are positively associated with entry into marriage (Litcher et al 1992).

Corresponding to the retreat from marriage, there has also been an increase in the rate of divorce in the post-civil rights era (Seltzer 2000; Smock 2000; Sweeney 2002; Teachman et al 2000; Waite 1995). Not only are adults marrying less, but among those who are marrying they are more likely to divorce. In recent years, almost 50 percent of
marriages have ended in divorce and it is expected that anywhere from 40 to 60 percent of new marriages will eventually end in divorce (National Center for Health Statistics 2002). Many of the factors that contribute to the retreat and delay of marriage - women’s increased educational attainment, workforce participation and earning potential- are also associated with the increased rates of divorce (Mcloyd et al 2000; Schoen and Cheng 2006; Waite 1995). The shift in family structuring is also associated with the changing context and associated meaning of the institution of marriage. In the past, marriage was assumed to be a lifelong commitment but it no longer has the emphasis on permanence that it once held (Furstenberg 1997). In fact, marriage is increasingly defined as a short-term commitment (Thornton 1989). Laws no longer presume that marriage is forever and instead are constructed with the assumption of dissolution (Cherlin 1992; Farley & Allen 1987; Weitzman 1985). Therefore, divorce is not only more common but also more acceptable (Thornton 1989).

In the U.S. Blacks’ rate of divorce and separation have historically been higher than all other groups (Ruggles 1997) and this trend persists (Cherlin 1992; Farley & Allen 1987; Mcloyd et al 2000). Mcloyd and his colleagues (2000) reported that in the 1990s Blacks had higher divorce rates compared to the general population. Moreover, marriage is less stable for Blacks than whites (Phillips & Sweeney 2005; Raley & Bumpass 2003; Teachman 2004). In effect, Blacks are more likely than whites to separate and divorce, and are less likely to remarry (Mcloyd et al 2000; Taylor et al 1997). However, whites also are ending marriages in increasingly large numbers and are not remarrying quickly after (Waite 1995). Nonetheless, Blacks still spend less time married than whites (Taylor et al 1997).
The contemporary shift away from marriage and subsequent increase in divorce has also resulted in an increase in non-marital births and single parent headed households, especially among Blacks. Specifically, the number of children living with both parents has dropped dramatically since the 1970s from 75 percent to less than one half (Ruggles 1994). Historically, Black children, compared to white children, have been more likely to live in a single parent home and this discrepancy still persists. The continued disintegration of Black marriages coupled with the increase in Black divorces has meant a decrease in two parent Black families (Avery, Goldscheider and Speare 1992; Cherlin 1992; Farley & Allen 1987; Ruggles 1994; Smith et al 1996). Fields (2003) reported that more than 50 percent of Black children live in single-parent families, while only 20 percent of white children experience a single-parent household. Furthermore, research indicates that pregnancy is a strong impetus for marriage among whites but not among Blacks (Manning 1993; 1995). Taylor et al (1997) suggests that the high rate of non-marital births among Blacks contributes to continued instability of the Black family structure because Black men are now less likely to marry due to pregnancy and more likely to have children outside of marriage.

In the post-civil rights era, there has also been a rise in unmarried heterosexual cohabitation (Manning 1995; Seltzer 2000; Smock 2000; Sweeney 2002; Teachman et al 2000; Waite 1995). Since the 1970s, cohabitation has not only increased but now has become commonplace (Bumpass & Lu 2000; Bumpass & Sweet 1989; Smock 2000). In fact, most young adults will cohabit at some point in their lives and more than 50 percent of all marriages begin as cohabiting relationships. Therefore, cohabitation is no longer perceived as deviant. Instead, cohabitation has become socially acceptable, and perhaps
even a social expectation of adult coupling (Bumpass & Lu 2000; Manning and Smock 1995; Smock 2000).

The rise in cohabitation and the increased acceptability of cohabitation can be linked to a couple different factors. First, the retreat and delay of marriage contribute to the shift in cohabitation. The change in the meaning of marriage from lifelong commitment to something less permanent has also meant a shift in the meaning of cohabitation. Research indicates that there are two notions about cohabitation: it is either considered a step in the marriage process or it is a substitute for marriage (Brown and Booth 1996; Bumpass et al 1991; Bumpass & Lu 2000; Manning and Smock 1995; Smock 2000). Clearly, if people are delaying or withdrawing from marriage but are still coupling, cohabitation becomes a part of the practice. However, cohabitation is most often thought of as a step in the transition to marriage. Young adults agree that cohabitation is a worthwhile pre-marital experiment and tend to see it as an opportunity to assess marital compatibility (Bumpass et al 1991; Thornton 1989). In general, cohabiters either already had plans to marry or thought they would eventually marry upon cohabitation (Bumpass et al 1991). In their transition into older adulthood, some young adults view cohabitation as an acceptable practice even if the cohabiters are not planning to marry (Thornton 1989). In effect, cohabiters do not reject marriage but they do not see marriage as defining of their families or their happiness (Bumpass 1995).

Second, increased educational attainment and workforce participation of women and the subsequent shifts in family patterns have contributed to the change in cohabitation. Research indicates that social attitudes have changed and are more accepting of nonmarital sex, unmarried childbearing and divorce (Bumpass 1990; Waite
As well, women’s higher economic standing increases their marital bargaining power, thus decreasing marriage and increasing cohabitation (Cherlin 1992). Moreover, the rising individualism that resulted from industrialization initiated a focus on personal attainment and private happiness (Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel 1990; Thornton 1989) and placed higher value on individual freedom (Thompson and Colella 1992). Therefore, cohabitation has become less stigmatized. As well, those who cohabit tend to be less religious (Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel 1990; Thornton 1989), more egalitarian (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg and Waite 1995) and hold more liberal views than non-cohabiters (Bumpass 1990).

Although cohabitation has risen since the 1970s, it is not a new phenomenon. Blacks have always cohabited more than whites. Historically, poor Black couples in particular have lived together without formal marriage. Blacks are still overrepresented among cohabiting couples (Brown 2000; Bumpass et al 1991; Macklin 1983; Manning and Smock 1995; Glick and Spanier 1980). A growing body of research suggests that among whites cohabitation serves as a prelude to marriage, where as among Blacks it is often a long-term substitute or alternative to marriage (Bennett, Bloom & Craig 1989; Lichter et al 2003; Manning 1993; Raley 1996). White cohabiters compared to Black cohabiters, are not only more likely to get married but also move into marriage from cohabitation sooner (Manning and Smock 1995). According to Manning and Smock (1995) White cohabiters are 129 percent more likely to marry than Black cohabiters after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics like school enrollment and full time employment. Research consistently demonstrates that differences in socioeconomic factors (Bulcroft & Bulcroft 1993; Manning & Smock 1995; Smock, Manning & Porter 1995).
2005; Oppenheimer 2003), childbearing outlooks and behaviors (Loomis & Landale 1994; Manning 1993; Manning & Landale 1996; Manning and Smock 1995) and relationship quality and attitudes (Brown 2000; Brown 2003; Sanchez, Manning & Smock 1998; Osborne 2005) are associated with race differences in cohabitation.

Blacks and whites have various dissimilarities in their relationships, marital and family experiences. Historically, Blacks have endured greater marital instability and family disruption and this trend persists. The chronic discrepancy in family stability among Blacks and whites is associated with structural obstacles which continue to inhibit Blacks from fulfilling the white conception of marriage and family. In the next section, I detail the structural obstacles confronted by interracial couples as well as the relationship and marital outcomes of those relationships.

**Interracial Intimate Coupling**

In the following paragraphs, I review the literature on interracial intimate coupling. Interracial coupling and marriage generally refers to intimate relationships between two people who are from different racial groups (i.e., white and Asian, Black and Hispanic, Black and white and so forth). In this section, I provide a brief overview of the general intimate interracial relationship experience. However, the focus of this section and this dissertation is Black-white heterosexual unions. I offer specific attention to the historical changes and development of these unions from slavery to the present and discuss how racial ideologies may have operated and still do function in these unions. I also discuss the way in which racial ideologies have shaped interracial coupling outcomes.
There have been great changes in race relations and racial attitudes in the past 50 years especially with regard to interracial contact and intimate interracial relationships. Since anti-miscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional, interracial dating, partnering and marriages have increased (Davidson 1992; Heaton & Jacobson 2000; Jacobson & Heaton 2003; Kalmijn 1998; Qian 1997, 1999). In 1970, less than 1 percent of all marriages were interracial, by 2000 more than 5 percent of marriages cross racial lines. According to the U.S. Census, in 2000 there were 1.5 million interracial marriages and the number of children living in interracial families had quadrupled to more than 3 million (Fields & Casper 2001; Lee & Edmonston 2005). Of the 5 percent of marriages in the U.S. that are interracial, 75 percent are either a white person with non-black minority or two non-whites (Gaines & Leaver 2002; U.S. Census Bureau 2006). In fact, Black-white coupleings only contributed .06 percent of all interracial marriages in 2000. In any case, it is expected for the number of interracial marriages to continue to increase (Pugh 2001; U.S. Census Bureau 2006).

Similar to attitudes about race in general, attitudes regarding interracial coupling and marriage have become more favorable. Research indicates that adults have become more accepting of interracial unions and would even consider dating outside of their race (Gregory 1993; Todd and Mckinney 1992). However, interracial relationships are still discouraged (Moe, Nacoste & Insko 1981; Spickard 1989). One-third of Americans still either completely disapproves or is uncertain if they approve of interracial marriages (Gregory 1993; Rosenblatt, Karis & Powell 1995). As recently as 1996, surveys reported that some 10 percent of the population still wished that anti-miscegenation laws existed (Goodwin & Cramer 2002). Interracial couples still experience disapproval and
encounter hostility, discrimination and harassment (Dalmage 2000; Golebiowska 2007; Killian 2001, 2002, 2003; McNamara et al 1999; Romano 2003; Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Yancey 2007). These levels of prejudice toward interracial marriages are remarkable at a time in our history when it is alleged that norms of nondiscrimination and racial equality are highly regarded (Mendleberg 2001). These marriage patterns and disproportionately low rates of Black-white unions coupled with persistent discrimination indicate that the color line is still pervasive (Kalmijn 1993; Qian & Lichter 2001; Rosenfeld 2002, 2005) and pinpoint the continued significance of race (Bonilla-Silva 2002; Qian 2002).

Although there is much agreement in the literature that there have been significant attitudinal changes by whites with regard to race and interracial unions, there is persistent disagreement on the pervasiveness of contemporary discrimination and racism (Krysab & Couper 2003; Mendleberg 2001; Romano 2003). The boosted rates of interracial unions and more favorable attitudes regarding those relationships generate an assumption that race relations are ameliorated and that racial lines are blurring. However, claims to a changing racial landscape mask the lingering opposition to interracial relationships, specifically Black-white unions. Black-white unions are much less acceptable to whites than those involving Latinos or Asians (Davis 1991; Feagin 2000; Ferber 1998; Frankenberg 1993; Rosenblatt et al 1995; Tubbs and Rosenblatt 2004). This discrepancy illustrates the dominant groups’ general acceptance of Asians and Latinos more than Blacks and is likely based on the notion that Blacks occupy a lower social structural position. Specifically, Blacks are less educated, earn lower incomes, and experience lower levels of job security than Asians and Latinos (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2007).
Consequently, Black-white intermarriages still remain relatively uncommon and among interracial marriages Black-white marriages are the least prevalent (Kalmijn 1993; Qian & Litcher 2001; Rosenfeld 2002, 2005).

Even with the persistent rise in intimate partner heterogamy, homogamous unions (especially marriages) continue to be normative (Kalmijn 1993; Surra 1990). When examining mate selection sociologist have recurrently found that people tend to date, couple with and marry those who share similar backgrounds (Gadberry & Dodder 1993; Houts et al 1997; Kalmijn 1998; Knox et al 1998; Stevens 1991; Surra 1990). People also tend to be attracted to others with the same or similar demographic characteristics (Surra 1990). For that reason, there is a propensity for people to couple with people like themselves. Spouses and partners tend to be similar in terms of race-ethnicity, educational attainment, religion, age, social class, and culture (Blackwell and Lichter 2000; Schoen and Cheng 2006; Zhang and Hook 2009). As well, geographic propinquity influences mate selection with similar neighborhood, schools and workplace contributing to couplehood (Kalmijn 1998; Mare 1991; Stevens 1991). There is evidence that suggest that married couples, more than cohabiting partners, tend to be homogamous unions (Blackwell & Lichter 2000; Harris & Ono 2000; Schoen & Weinick 1993), but usually homogamy characterizes couples in general (Blackwell and Lichter 2000; Schoen and Cheng 2006; Zhang and Hook 2009).

In conjunction with the norm of homogamy, couples also tend to abide by endogamy- the tendency to marry within one’s own social group. As a result, homogamy and endogamy both influence personal relationship and mate selection decisions (Dressel 1980; Knox 1975; Murstein 1986). Racial endogamy is the tendency to marry within
one’s own racial group. Racial homogamy is the expected norm and racial heterogamy is viewed as a deviation from that norm (Foeman & Nance 2003; Killian 2003). Race categorizations were constructed and are maintained by the dominant group to distinguish the superiority of whites and inferiority of Blacks and to protect the dominant group’s interests (Everett 1991; Stampp 1956). Considering the history of race construction and the importance of race distinctions, this standard has especially been a strong influence on Blacks and whites (Davidson 1991, 1992; Kalmijn 1993; Lewis & Yancey 1995). As the norm, there are ethnocentric and prejudicial justifications for maintaining homogamy which are often coded in phrases like “birds of a feather flock together” and “stick with your own kind” (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 2006; Killian 2003). Historically, crossing racial lines in families has challenged the structure of racial hierarchies and remains the most controversial form of heterogamy (Gadberry & Dodder 1993; Houts et al 1997; Kalmijn 1998; Knox et al 1998; Root 2001; Surra 1990).

As individuals tend to be attracted to and couple with people who have similar traits, dissimilarity can lead to instability of intimate unions. For example, religious heterogamy (e.g., Catholic/Jewish couple) can create issues when raising children because of distinct ideological and belief system differences between religions. Homogamy predicts that interracial marriages will be less stable than same-race marriages and research indicates that race still matters for union and marriage stability (Clarkwest 2007). Thus, Black-white marriages should be more likely to end in divorce than unions between Blacks and other Blacks or whites and other whites. Kreider (2000) reported that interracial marriages have shorter duration, and Heaton (2002) found that even when controlling for social and demographic characteristics interracial marriages
are 13 percent more likely than same race marriages to divorce. Research in this area maintains that there is a higher propensity for divorce among interracial couples (Heer 1974; Monahan 1970; Clarkwest 2007; Zhang and Hook 2009).

In addition, dissimilarity can result in other difficulties for interracial couples. Interracial couples experience negative reactions and diminished social support from strangers, community, family and friends (Childs 2002, 2005; Dalmage 2000). Moreover, interracial couples often face discrimination and prejudice. These behaviors range from insignificant stares and the expressed anger of strangers to one’s own group rejecting and ostracizing them based on claims of race betrayal (Childs 2002, 2005; Billingsley 1968; Dalmage 2000; Killian 2001, 2003). Black-white couples, more than other interracial unions, suffer most from these race-based acts of discrimination (Clarkwest 2007; Yancey 2007; Zhang and Hook 2009). This disproportionate level of discrimination is likely rooted in the historical maltreatment of Blacks, persistent tension between Blacks and whites, and overt and covert preference for racial distinctions. Today, these interracial unions and marriages are still stigmatized and perceived as inherently dysfunctional. These negative sentiments are motivated by racial stereotypes and further justified by social conceptions of ethnocentric and prejudicial attitudes about sexuality and psychological pathology (Foeman & Nance 1999; Kalmijn 1998; Yancey 2007). These social perceptions indicate enduring race issues and persistent social distance between Blacks and whites.

Although Black-white interracial unions outwardly violate the norm of homogamy, partners in Black-white marriages generally have similar backgrounds, education, religion and socio-economic status (Monohan 1976; Pavela 1964; Rosenfeld
2005; Schoen and Cheng 2006), meaning their form of heterogamy is primarily race based. Homogamy assumes that couples with similar characteristics have more stable relationships because they generally have less misunderstandings, fewer conflicts and experience greater social support from family and friends. Research indicates that endogamous marriages also experience greater stability than those that differ on factors of social significance like education, socio-economic status, race and religion (Bahr 1981; Jones 1996; Kalmijn et al 2005). Consequently, interracial couples employ various strategies to mitigate their violation of the norm of homogamy.

Killian (2001, 2002, 2003) found that a number of interracial couples prioritize their similarities as to make their unions appear more homogamous and to demonstrate their strengths as a couple. These couples tend to stress their commonalities, make claims of normalcy, and maintain they are both a part of the human race. Black-white couples also make an effort to de-emphasize race. They do so by avoiding discussions and steering their focus away from their differences and instead, they exemplify their similarities. Killian (2001, 2002, 2003) affirms that these couples find salience in other demographic commonalities and instead of constructing their identity by race, interracial couples use those other characteristics to structure a joint identity. For example, one couple who individually were raised as Jehovah’s Witnesses and currently are practicing Jehovah’s Witnesses feel a special bond and connection because of their shared religious ideologies and beliefs. They attribute their experiences of hostility and discrimination to their religious membership rather than their race difference (Killian 2001, 2002, 2003). It would follow then that in keeping with the suppositions of homogamy, interracial couples
that have more similarities than differences and embody those commonalities may experience greater relationship stability.

_Race-Mixing During Slavery and the Pre-Civil Rights Era._ Interracial unions are not a new phenomenon. Evidence shows that Black-white intermixing dates back to before Blacks came to the U.S. and were exploited as slaves (Smith 1966). However, the following paragraphs specifically review Black-white race mixing that occurred during slavery and prior to the Civil Rights Movement and how racial ideologies shaped those unions.

In the time of slavery, whites constructed race to qualify racial superiority and inferiority, distinguish dominant and subordinate statuses, and perpetuate white-dominate group privilege. Whites established slave codes in order to control all aspects of a slave’s life (Everett 1991; Stampp 1956) and to designate slaves as property (Doob 1999; Schaffer 2006). By law, Blacks occupied a position of property and were viewed and treated as non-human entities. Therefore, they were expected to serve the white plantation owners. For Black men in particular, this servitude required physical labor to grow and maintain the herds and crops and Black slave women were expected to act as sexual servants to the white male masters. The overt racial ideology predominant during slavery constituted a disproportionate operation of power within the racialized social system.

As the ruling elite, white men held power and benefited from their dominant status. Therefore, white male sexual privilege was customary and widespread. Specifically, male slave holders had unlimited sexual access to female slaves (Yancey 2003). Black women were physically and sexually exploited, forced to perform sexual
acts and raped by white men. This sexual dominance often resulted in Black women bearing the children of their white slave masters (Bennett 1966; Everett 1991; Smith 1966; Stampp 1956; Williams 1995). However, because white men had property rights over their female slaves, the sexual exploitation was not considered rape and the children that resulted from the sexual assault were “hers not his” (Graves 2004; Smith 1966). In an effort to protect the resources of the dominant group and ensure that mothers and their racially mixed children would not have inheritance rights, whites established anti-miscegenation laws and the one drop rule (Bennett 1966; Everett 1991; Heer 1966; Smith 1966; Stampp 1956).

In order to justify the exploitation and lessen the white man’s guilt of being a slaveholder and rapist, whites manufactured and constructed Blacks’ sexuality as bestial and depraved. From at least the 17th century, Blacks were stereotyped as hyper-sexual and controlled by their sexual desire (Smith 1966). Black men were portrayed as having exceedingly strong sex drives and Black women were depicted as sexual beasts and characterized as temptresses, whores and harlots (Beigel 1966; Lewis 1964; Smith 1966). Therefore, the sexual exploitation of Black women committed by white slave owner was justified; after all, white masters could not be blamed for submitting to the seductiveness of Black women (Graves 2004).

The social construction of race and the manufactured notions of Black sexuality were rooted in whites’ interest in maintaining power and privilege. The racial ideology operating was so blatantly anti-Black and anti-race-mixing that any interracial intimacy was reduced to sexual curiosity and exploration. Consequently, white plantation owners feared that Black men would seek revenge for the ills of slavery and the mistreatment of
Black women by bedding white women. Whites were also concerned that Black women would try to exert motherly rights for their illegitimate mixed children. This fear of a Black insurgence and speculation about their motives fueled the need for discriminatory legislation to alleviate the fears and concerns of whites. As a result, anti-miscegenation laws, outlawing Black-white unions and banning interracial sex were established. These legal sanctions were insidious, harsh and widespread and denied Blacks access to civil, political and legal rights essential for social equality (Golebiowska 2007; Heer 1966; Smith 1966). Some anti-miscegenation law violations held sentences of up to 10 years in prison (Zabel 1965). Nearly 80 percent of the 50 states held anti-miscegenation laws at some time from their inception in the early 17th century until they were reversed as a part of the civil rights fight (Sanjek 1994; Weinberger 1966). In fact, until the landmark case of Loving v. Virginia in 1967 deemed laws banning interracial marriage unconstitutional, intermarriages were still illegal in 17 states (Davidson 1992; Gaines & Ickes 1997; Qian 1999; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan 1990; Zinn 1980).

After the emancipation of slaves, Blacks as freed people made some strides with regard to educational and occupational advancement. However, whites continued to socially dominate and interracial contact between Blacks and whites was still discouraged. Interracial unions were socially and legally prohibited and segregation ensured that interracial contact remained minimal. Race continued to be constructed so that the opportunity structure facilitated inequality and preserved white racial domination.

Prohibition of interracial marriages and racial segregation were enforced and justified by a racial ideology that professed the alleged innate superiority of whites and inferiority of Blacks (Frankenberg 1993). Therefore, prior to the civil rights movement, if people
made interracial contact or engaged in intimate interracial relationships they had to break away from the dominant racial ideology and in some cases even risk their lives to do so (DeMott 1995; Zabel 1965).

Although it was illegal and there were great risks involved, Black-white unions rose after the emancipation and peaked by the early 1900s (Davidson 1992; Qian 1999; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan 1990; Porterfield 1982; Schlesinger 1992). Most research indicates that Black-white unions began to increase again after the desegregation of schools in 1954. Since the Loving v. Virginia decision, Black-white unions, including marriage, have been and continue to be on the rise (Aldridge 1973; Barnett 1963; Powledge 1963; Heer 1966; Mayer and Smock 1960). Decreased neighborhood and school segregation is considered one of the factors that initiated interracial contact which facilitated the possibility of Black-white unions (Heer 1966). As well, the rise in interracial unions post-slavery has been linked to the increased residential, economic, occupational and spatial propinquity prompted by emancipation and social-structural shifts (Barron 1946; Golden 1959; Heer 1966).

After slavery, there was a greater propensity for interracial marriage between Black men and white women than for unions between white men and Black women (Barron 1946; Burma 1952; Drake & Clayton 1945; Golden 1953; Lynn 1967; Wirth & Goldhamer 1944) and most often these couples were older than average marrying couples (Burma 1952; Golden 1953; Lynn 1967; Risdon 1954; Strauss 1954). As well, those living in urban areas (Drake & Clayton 1945; Golden 1953, 1954; Wirth & Goldhamer 1944), previously married (Golden 1954; Pavela 1964; Wirth & Goldhamer 1944) and less religiously devout (Schnepp and Yui 1955) were more likely to marry interracially.
However, even with the emancipation of slaves and the legislative strides, the enduring legacy of slavery and segregation was evident in the lingering disapproval of Black-white interracial unions. Interracial relationships continued to be burdened by prejudice. Research indicates that interracial couples had problems with housing, occupations, and relationships with family and peers (Drake & Clayton 1945; Golden 1954; Risdon 1954). Those negative stereotypes regarding interracial coupling were unrelenting and prominent in the pre-civil rights era and are deeply embedded in the history of race relations (Gaines & Liu 1997; Sanjek 1994).

*Interracial Relationships in the Post-Civil Rights Era.* Since the civil rights movement, important legislative advancements have made interracial contact more common and the possibility of interracial intimate relationships more likely. Moreover, by changing the structure and eliminating legal barriers, interracial contact (i.e., working together, forming friendships, civilly co-existing) is supported by laws and cultural norms. As a result of the civil rights initiative, ideological norms of nondiscrimination and racial equality are highly regarded and racial diversity is encouraged and celebrated at the macro-level (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2001, 2003; DeMott 1995). In fact, the predominant racial ideology, color-blindness, supports interracial contact. However, color-blind ideology assumes interracial contact should no longer be considered remarkable because in our color-blind society we are not supposed to notice race (Carr 1997; Frankenberg 1993; Williams 1998). Therefore, those who engage in interracial contact are no longer breaking away from the dominant ideology but rather are following and operating from within it (DeMott 1995).
Gordon W. Allport (1954) developed the Contact Hypothesis which expects that interpersonal contact will facilitate the decline of prejudicial attitudes between majority and minority group members. Allport (1954) suggested that under the right conditions the more contact one has with people from other groups, the less likely they are to hold prejudices against members of that group. Contact Theory also proposes that all forms of positive intergroup contact should lead to increased favorable and positive intergroup attitudes and less prejudicial ideas (Allport 1954). Kalmijn (1998) suggests that close personal interaction serves to weaken negative racial stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes and allows people to realize the variety of attributes among people of other racial groups. Close and sustained contact with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds encourages and promotes positive, tolerant, and open-minded attitudes toward other racial groups (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998; Ellison and Powers 1994; Powers and Ellison 1995; Sigelman and Welch 1993). Research indicates there is an association between having friends of other groups and lower intergroup prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp 2000, 2006) and intergroup anxiety (Stephan & Stephan 1992, 2000). Increased interracial contact even at the macro-level in education, occupation and social associations facilitates the opportunity for meaningful social relationships across racial lines which results in the possibility for friendships and other relationships to transpire.

Much of the increase in intimate interracial relationships can be attributed to increased intergroup contact. Changing demographics and social structure have increased interracial contact in neighborhoods, schools, colleges, employment and social life. Increased contact and awareness with regard to interracial relationships has helped to generate interracial unions, and racial diversity and heterogeneity also provide an
opportunity for interracial contact (Kitano et al 1984). The increasing diversity has been associated with the prevalence of interracial unions (Blau & Schwartz 1984; Cready & Saenz 1997; Harris & Ono 2000; Hwang et al 1997; Lievns 1998). For instance, increased educational opportunity for Blacks inevitably increases interracial interaction and has fueled the rise in Black-white relationships. In effect, interaction at school or college is linked to increases in interracial coupling. Educational attainment is positively associated with rates of interracial marriage among Blacks (Gilbertson, Fitzpatrick & Yang 1994; Heaton & Jacobson 2000; Heer 1974; Kalmijn 1993, 1998; Qian 1997). Forbes (1997) found strong support for the contact hypothesis especially between individuals who share common goals, interdependence, social status, and whose contact is supported by expected norms (Forbes 1997; Jackman & Crane 1986). Therefore, it is no surprise that common experiences and close associations are linked with increased interracial coupling (Barron 1946; Charles 2000; Emerson et al 2001; Golden 1959).

Color-blind ideology’s endorsement of interracial contact and tolerance promotes positive attitudinal change and fosters the abundance of politically correct jargon that is so prevalent, especially with regard to race (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; DeMott 1995). Research on attitudes toward interracial coupling and marriage has tended to focus on sociodemographic and political predictors as variables that influence attitudinal positions of all groups. However, less research has focused on race distinctions across all factors. Considering the distinct history of Blacks and whites it is important to distinguish between their positions on interracial relationships. The following paragraphs detail attitudes toward interracial coupling post-civil rights as well specify race distinctions.
Changing structure by eliminating legal barriers and establishing norms which expect macro-level interracial contact is one thing, but changing attitudes, perceptions and behaviors is quite another (Krysab & Couper 2003; Mendleberg 2001). Although interracial unions are more common and attitudes regarding them have become more favorable, there are still complex and conflicting messages from families, friends, media and the community (Dalmage 2000, Feagin 2000, Frankenberg 1993; McNamara, Tempenis & Walton 1999; Rosenblatt, Karis & Powell 1995). In 1968 only 20 percent of Americans approved of interracial marriage, today more than 60 percent report approval (Gregory 1993). However, research indicates that people still have negative feelings about interracial relationships. In fact, about 1/3 of Americans still disapprove or are uncertain if they approve of interracial marriage and interracial couples are likely to be met with disapproval (Belkin & Goodman 1980; Porterfield 1982; Rosenblatt et al 1995

Public attitudes are much less accepting of Black-white interracial couples than those involving Latinos or Asians (Davis 1991; Feagin 2000; Ferber 1998; Frankenberg 1993; Rosenblatt et al 1995; Tubbs & Rosenblatt 2003). Among interracial unions, Black-white marriages are the least approved (Gregory 1993; Lewis & Yancey 1995; Solsberry 1995; Spickard 1989). Opposition to Black-white unions is rooted in the history of slavery and segregation and is based on belief that they violate the biggest race mixing taboo (Dalmage 2000, Feagin 2000, Frankenberg 1993; McNamara, Tempenis & Walton 1999; Rosenblatt, Karis & Powell 1995). In fact, even with greater acceptance and comfort about interracial couples, many whites still view these couples as an anomaly that do not “fit” into the racial stratification system (Motoyoshi 1990; Rosenblatt, Karis & Powell 1995). These negative attitudes often result in interracial
couples isolating themselves (Ho 1990; Solsberry 1995) and disconnecting from negative individuals by building relationships and a community with people who offer acceptance and support (Hill & Thomas 2000).

Whites and Blacks believe that interracial unions are typically met with dissatisfaction and aversion by their communities and families (Frankenberg 1993; Killian 1997; Zebroski 1999). Some interracial couples detail experiencing disapproval, conflict and alienation from community members, friends and even family because of their interracial relationship (Frankenberg 1993; Killian 1997). For example, couples report being stared at or having strangers “turn around for a second look” in public places. From family and friends, couples report severed or limited contact, not being allowed into their spouses’ family members’ homes, being excluded from family events and in several cases family members refusing to come to the couples’ wedding (Childs 2005; Killian 2001). Research indicates that Black-white unions experience the greatest amount of problems with the relationships closest to them and that the strongest opposition is within families (Childs 2005). Families tend to socialize us about race and therefore play a role in constructing support or opposition to interracial unions (Hartigan 1997). A family’s standpoint and reactions shape interracial couples understanding and interpretation of their relationship (Essed 1991). Therefore, it is important to understand their perspectives and beliefs about race-mixing (Hartigan 1997) and the function families hold in constructing racial meanings about interracial couples within the racialized social system (Childs 2002; Omi & Winant 1994). This opposition from those people closest to the couple can cause issues with their relationship, work environment,
living space and public perception (Dalmage 2000; McNamara et al 1999; Rosenblatt et al 1995).

Although post-civil rights attitudes towards interracial relationships have become more favorable, the literature clarifies that many Blacks and whites are still opposed to interracial marriages (Harris & Kalbfleisch 2000; Todd et al 1992). This opposition is varied and distinct across race. Research has found that among whites younger, more educated, wealthier, less religious, and the ideologically liberal tend to view interracial unions more positively than older, less educated, poorer, more religious, and ideologically conservative whites (Fang, Sidanius & Pratto 1998; Schuman et al 1997; Wilson 1996; Wilson & Jacobson 1995; Welch et al 2001). Conversely, among Blacks younger, male, more educated, wealthier, urban dwellers tend to view interracial unions more positively than older, female, less educated, poorer, rural dwelling southern Blacks (Heaton & Jacobson 2000; Jacobson and Johnson 2006; Kalmijn 1993, 1998; Qian 1997).

Even though whites’ attitudes toward interracial marriage have generally become more positive, they are still hesitant about interracial marriages of close family members (Romano 2003; Wilson & Jacobson 1995). Whites’ hesitations may be influenced by socio-economic status and rooted in the low social structural position of Blacks (Childs 2002). In terms of occupational attainment and income Blacks, especially Black men, are the most disadvantaged racial group. Therefore, whites may identify Blacks as less socioeconomically profitable and consequently, perceive them as less attractive as family members and mates for their loved ones. Research also suggests that racial construction and cumulative negative assessment about Blacks might influence whites’ attitudes about interracial marriages (Yancey 2003; Golebiowska 2007). Historically, whites have
created damaging stereotypes about Blacks which are reflected in negative assumptions about their intelligence, work ethic, violence and morality (Allport 1958; Drake; 1987; Katz & Braly 1933; Lee, Jussim & Mccauley 1995). Golebiowska (2007) contends that whites’ reluctance to embrace a Black person as family is a manifestation of lingering racial prejudice and racism. Even though some research has indicated a lessening of negative stereotype endorsement, many whites still consider Blacks lazy, irresponsible, lacking discipline, aggressive and even violent (Peffley, Hurwitz & Sniderman 1997; Sniderman & Piazza 1993).

Negative stereotypes influence judgments and assumptions (Peffley et al 1997) and are evident in unconscious or unintentional behaviors (Rosenblatt, Karis & Powell 1995). Golebiowska (2007) suggest that whites who harbor negative stereotypes about Blacks are more disapproving of Black-white unions than those who do not endorse negative Black stereotypes. In fact, findings indicate that whites’ rate Blacks 82.3 percent more negatively compared to their ratings about other whites. As well, 77.3 percent of whites either strongly oppose, oppose, or neither oppose nor favors welcoming a Black person into their family (37.3 and 40 percent, respectively). If this were simply a matter of a same-race preference and not an anti-Black sentiment, then it should be reflected in similar approval and opposition for other groups. However, Golebiowska (2007) reports that whites’ opposition to Hispanics and Asians marrying into their family is much lower (21.5 and 21.8, respectively). Therefore, negative stereotyping about Blacks is specific to less support for Black-white interracial unions. Furthermore, even though there has clearly been progress regarding whites’ racial ideology (Romano 2003; Rosenblatt, Karis & Powell 1995; Sniderman & Piazza 1993; Wilson & Jacobson 1995),
these findings indicate that racism continues to characterize white ideology (Golebiowska 2007).

The limited research on Black attitudes toward interracial unions suggests that Blacks have much more accepting attitudes than whites (Schuman et al 1997). Consequently, Blacks are more accepting of Black-white unions than whites (Childs 2002; Dalmage 2000; Frankenberg 1993; Rosenblatt et al 1995; Todd et al 1992). As well, research indicates Black families are more willing to recognize and support Black-white couples and are more likely to accept the white person as family than whites (Childs 2002, 2005; Dalmage 2000; Frankenberg 1993; Rosenblatt et al 1995). According to Jacobson and Johnson (2006), 85 percent of Blacks are report acceptance of interracial marriage. This Black-white discrepancy in acceptance has been the case historically. In 1972, the Gallup poll reported that 76 percent of Blacks compared to less than 30 percent whites approved of interracial marriage. In 1997, Blacks’ approval increased to 83 percent where as whites only climbed to 67 percent (Schuman et al 1997).

Even though Black attitudes toward interracial coupling tend to be more favorable than whites, there is still opposition on the part of Blacks. Much of their opposition is based on the history of race relations and fears about lingering racism rooted in slavery, the sexual exploitation of Black women and discriminatory practices like segregation and lynching (Collins 2000, Davis 1981; Essed 1991; Williams 1995). For Blacks, the notion of Black women with white men brings up the historical wounds of rape and physical abuse by the white slave masters (Williams 1995). Furthermore, based on the history of abuse, lynching and even murder experienced with regard to interracial intimacy, Blacks expressed genuine concern for the safety of Black men (Childs 2002). These concerns
often translate into a general distrust of whites (Collins 2000, Davis 1981; Essed 1991) and apprehension about white partners’ relationship motives and intentions. Specifically, Blacks expressed anxiety that whites might not fully understand or embrace their Black partner’s experiences, and therefore exert racial privilege or use racial slurs in arguments (Childs 2002). Another issue raised about Blacks who couple interracially is the notion of “selling out.” For some Blacks interracial coupling signifies a lack of moral and economic commitment to the Black community. Blacks report apprehension about those who couple interracially and are concerned that they might have negative images of self and their blackness, negative feelings about Blacks in general, or might become disconnected from the Black community (Childs 2002).

Although some research indicates that Black women are the least threatened by race-mixing, most research is in agreement that interracial coupling is particularly difficult for Black women. In fact, Black women typically express the strongest opposition (Collins 2000; Rosenblatt et al 1995; Spickard 1989) and are much less accepting of interracial coupling than Black men (Heaton & Jacobson 2000; Kalmijn 1993, 1998; Qian 1997). Black women tend to harbor resentment towards interracial unions because they feel as though Black men are rejecting their Blackness as well as Black women and that the good Black men are with white women (Collins 2000; Rosenblatt et al 1995). Furthermore, there are structural limitations that reduce the desirable dating pool of Black men. For instance, Black males experience high rates of drug abuse, homicide and incarceration and Black women tend to live longer, achieve higher education and occupational stability than Black men (Lichter et al 1992; Ross 1997). Nevertheless, Black women generally prefer and feel pressure from peers and
family to date and marry intraracially (Clark 1989). These structural limitations coupled with the increased rate of interracial unions results in a relationship disadvantage and a dating-marriage market deficit for Black women who prefer to couple with Black men (Litcher et al 1992; Todd et al 1992). Consequently, Black women who are socialized to prefer same-race coupling are more threatened by interracial coupling.

Although interracial coupling has increased, racial mixed intimate unions are still unusual. Contemporarily, less than 5 percent of all marriages in the U.S. are interracial. Moreover, interracial couples are disproportionately cohabiters. In fact, 10 percent of all cohabiting unions are interracial couples (Fields & Casper 2001). Among interracial marriages, Black-white marriages remain the least prevalent (Kalmijn 1993; Qian & Litcher 2001; Rosenfeld 2002, 2005). Black-white couples make up less than 25 percent of interracial unions and are typically relationships between Black men and white women (Kalmijn 1993; Monahan 1976; Qian 1997). In 2000, the U.S. Census reported that 74 percent of all Black-white couples were between Black men and white women (Lichter & Qian 2004). In addition, those who marry interracially are characteristically well educated, older and often on their second marriage (Barnett 1963; Burma 1963; Kalmijn 1991; Mare 1991; Monahan 1971; Qian 1997; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan 1990).

There are various myths associated with Black-white interracial unions that are rooted in historical prejudice and stereotypes. During slavery, Blacks were characterized as sexual beasts with fervent sex drives and whites’ feared the outcomes of their sexual prowess (Beigel 1966; Lewis 1964; Smith 1966). Today, notions of jungle fever characterize whites’ interest and desire to experience sex with someone of a different race. These notions deprave the sexual intimacy of interracial couples and minimize it to
sexual curiosity. Moreover, these stereotypes are used to create myths about sexual obsession for Black-white interracial unions in order to rationalize opposition to these unions (Foeman and Nance 1999; Yancey 2003). However, there is no empirical support for unusual sexual attraction or sexual relations by interracial couples (Porterfield 1982; Smith 1966; Yancey 2003).

Another common myth is that Blacks marry whites for a status increase (Davis 1941; Foeman and Nance 1999; Kalmijn 1993; Merton 1941). The notion of hypergamy or status marrying assumes that Blacks, particularly Black men, marry white women and exchange personal assets like higher socio-economic standing for the higher racial status of white women (Blau 1964; Davis 1941; Foeman and Nance 1999; Homans 1961; Kalmijn 1993; Merton 1941; Schoen & Woolredge 1989; Yancey & Yancey 1998). Research indicates that similar to same-race couples, interracial couples tend to be alike across status factors. In fact, the literature illustrates that Black-white couples are similar in educational attainment, social class and background (Gadberry and Dodder 1993; Heer 1966; Pavela 1964; Schoen & Woolredge 1989). Moreover, Monahan (1976) questioned the notion of hypergamy and Black-white exchange and found that whites often marry Blacks of lower occupational status. Therefore, hypergamy and exchange of racial status is not supported in the literature.

Another common assumption is that whites who marry Blacks are attempting to act out, punish families or make a social statement (Brown 1987; Foeman and Nance 1999; Smith 1966; Solsberry 1995). These unions are often viewed as pathological and outsiders assume that those who interracially partner have ulterior or problematic motives or are deficient in psychological well-being (Foeman and Nance 1999; Gaines & Ickes
1997). These negative suppositions translate into the suggestion that all interracial unions are unstable. However, research suggests that Black-white unions are no less stable than same-race marriages. Studies that explore the effect of cultural variables on interracial relationships found that relationship dynamics are similar between interracial and same race couples (Aldridge 1978; Shibazaki & Brennan 1998). Some research even points out that Black-white unions are more stable than same-race unions, especially Black couples (Barnett 1963; Burma 1963; Monahan 1971; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan 1990).

Although there are negative conjectures associated with interracial relationships, these couples have similar expectations and experiences as same race couples. Gaines et al (1999) found no evidence indicating dysfunction regarding interpersonal behavior among interracial couples. Instead, evidence confirms that similar to same-race couples, interracial couples share and exchange affection and respect, embrace a belief in the sanctity of their relationships and hold relationship-oriented values regarding the need for love and the ability to show love in order to strengthen their relationships (Gaines & Liu 1997; Gaines et al 1999; Parham 1993). Studies identify that relationship quality for interracial couples is more affected by social pressures than race differences and that likeness instead of difference might increase interracial unions (Chan & Smith 1998; Shibazaki & Brennan 1998). Research indicates that equity instead of disparity might increase interracial unions. In fact, evidence points out a positive relationship between social factors (consciousness) like social exposure, social equity, and social acceptability and the likelihood of interracial marriage (Blau, Blum & Schwartz 1982; Blum 1984; Kouri & Lasswell 1993; Macpherson & Stewart 1992; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan 1990).
Color-Blind Ideology and Intimate Interracial Relationships

In the following paragraphs, I briefly revisit color-blind ideology and its operation in contemporary race relations. The literature on color-blind ideology and interracial relationships is also reviewed. I suggest that color-blind racial ideology, as the dominant racial ideology, is likely a major factor in the structuring and construction of intimate interracial relationships. It is color-blind ideology that is the underpinning of the expectation of homogamy and operates to stall interracial contact.

Contemporary racism is characterized as “color-blind” because it is manifest in subtle racial practices, embedded in the operation of institutions and remains relatively hidden (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2001, 2003). Color-blind ideology minimizes racial distinctions and conceals persistent racism by crediting the legislative strides of the Civil Rights movement with eliminating racial injustices (Brown et al 2003, Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Carr 1997; Doane 2003). However, color-blind ideology rationalizes the existing racialized social system which is constructed to preserve white privilege and reproduce inequality. The mutual interplay between structure and ideology strengthens the social-structural positioning of racial groups and reinforces the disproportionate opportunity structure. Specifically, the relationship between the racialized social system (structure of society) and color-blind racism (the predominant ideology) is reflexive and therefore works cooperatively to perpetuate inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Carr 1997).

The connection between structure and ideology and the operation of the color-blind racism corresponds to the dominant groups’ construction of race. However, it also represents the direct experiences of both the dominant and subordinate groups because they co-exist in the racialized social system. That is, the racial ideology of the dominant
group not only characterizes their use of power, but also pervades subordinate groups’ ideological framework. Research indicates that even though whites subscribe to color-blind ideology more than Blacks, both demonstrate color-blind racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Carr 1997). Carr (1997) reported than 77 percent of whites and 40 percent of Blacks claim they are color-blind about race.

Recent research has explored color-blind ideology and its influence on attitudes about interracial coupling. In accordance with racial attitudes in general, whites typically articulate a color-blind ideology with regard to interracial couples (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Eliasoph 1999; Feagin 2000; Wilson 1997). In fact, Bonilla-Silva and Saenz (2000) report that most college students claim to be color-blind about matters of love which suggests approval for interracial relationships. Childs (2005) also reports that white college students apply color-blind ideology with regard to interracial dating. They claim there is nothing wrong with interracial couples and that dating interracially is not a problem. However, many of these same respondents say they would not likely interractially couple because they have never thought about it, its not their preference or they are more comfortable dating other whites (Childs 2005). Conversely, Black students do not necessarily advocate color-blind ideology about interracial dating. Instead, they openly expressed their issues with interracial coupling rooted in negative perceptions of Blacks and interracial unions as well as their experiences of racism and discrimination (Childs 2005).

Color-blind ideology is manifest in family interactions when trying to negotiate acceptance of a family member’s interracial relationship. Research indicates that whites have difficulty discussing their family’s position and reaction to their interracial
relationships (O’Brien and Korgen 2007). These white families were typically reported to be either ambivalent or struggling to accept interracial relationships. Another usual pattern was that white family members were able to accept the black partner, but continued to have issues with interracial coupling and marriage in general. For the individual involved in the interracial relationship these reactions seem contradictory to being raised “color-blind” (O’Brien and Korgen 2007). However, these responses are very much in line with color-blind ideology and the notion of attitudinal support without institutional support.

Another common color-blind practice among families is to deemphasize the relationship and instead identify the children as the problem. “What about the children?” is frequently posed question which defers to the problems biracial children will face in society and deflects from the family’s own concerns (Childs 2005; Sullivan 2005). Even Black families express apprehension and worry that it might not be fair to bring a child into that situation, into a racist world. However, Blacks have historically welcomed biracial offspring into the Black community (Collins 2000). In fact, most couples agreed that Black families are more accepting and supportive of interracial unions than whites (Childs 2002; Dalmage 2000; Frankenberg 1993; Rosenblatt et al 1995).

Childs (2005) revealed that some interracial couples adopted a color-blind approach to manage their interracial status. Both the Black and white partners would deemphasize their distinctiveness as a couple by claiming they are just an ordinary couple with a normal relationship. As well, these couples did not see race issues as a part of their lives. They felt race was not their problem, rather it is society’s problem or that the media made race an issue. In these cases, the couples would maintain that we are humans
and bleed the same; we are people not a color. And even within their own relationships
some interracial couples claimed that race is not a factor. One respondent even
commented that her partner was her husband, not “her white husband” (Childs 2005,
p.35).

Clearly, color-blind ideology operates in both attitudes and responses to
 interracial coupling within peer, family and societal interactions. As well, some couples
seem to operate from a color-blind approach within their own relationship and in dealing
with the response of the outside world. In general, whites articulate color-blind ideology
about race issue and about interracial relationships. In most cases whites will even claim
to be color-blind about race and love. Although Blacks express color-blind ideology to a
lesser extent, they still make color-blind claims and within interracial relationships it
seems that they may have a greater propensity to exemplify that ideology. Therefore,
individuals and couples likely actualize a racial ideology and the individuals in these
couples may express a similar or different ideology.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN

The goal of this dissertation is to investigate the lived experiences of Black-white heterosexual intimate couples through the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews. Such an approach illuminates these lived experiences in the words of the couples (Devault 1996). The focus of the dissertation is to examine the development and maintenance of interracial intimate relationships and explore how color-blind ideology (see e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Lewis 1999), a typically macro and/or group-level concept, shapes Black-white intimate relationships. In this chapter, I begin by discussing my use of feminist methodology and grounded theory as a methodological framework. I apply feminist methodology to a marginalized group other than women--Black-white couples. I use the grounded theory approach to allow the data to emerge in common themes. Next, I discuss the meaning of the lived experience and its importance to the study of these couples and explain the rationale and value of utilizing interviews for this research. The discussion of methodology is followed by an outline of my sampling strategies and a description of my sample. Finally, I present a detailed summary of the interview process.
Feminist Methodology and Grounded Theory

Feminist qualitative methodology guided my research process. I chose this methodology because of the feminists’ commitment to represent, understand and give a voice to a marginalized, suppressed group (Collins 1991, 2000; DeVault 1996; Harding 1987). Feminist methodology shares a commitment to lessen harm and negative consequences in the research process, as well as support the value of research focused on an “ignored” group with the intention of leading to beneficial social action (DeVault 1996). Feminists advocate these goals by employing a consciousness raising method, breaking away from traditional, positivistic research and dismantling the power dynamic between researcher and research participants (Collins 1991, 2000; DeVault 1996; Farganis 1986; Reinharz 1992; Sprague and Zimmerman 2004). Although feminists direct these commitments to women specifically, I apply these tenets to Black-white couples with the use of feminist methodology. Similar to women, Black-white unions represent a marginalized group. They characterize less than 1 percent of all interracial marriages and they experience prejudicial disapproval and discrimination (Gaines & Leaver 2002; Qian & Litcher 2001; Rosenfeld 2002, 2005).

The women’s movement of the 1960s is characterized as “second wave feminism” and brought about the notion of feminist sociology. These feminists were immediately tentative about traditional social research methods and were determined to seek out alternative forms (Reinharz 1985, 1992). At the root of this initiative was a method of consciousness raising--an empirical, systematic approach to questioning that challenged mainstream knowledge claims (Allen 1973). Women began socializing and gathering to share knowledge and mutually learn from one another. Women began
socializing and sharing knowledge. They found through those gatherings that they mutually learn from one another. By sharing their significant experiences, women found a “voice.” Feminists used this strategy to include women and their concerns in research to provide a more precise, comprehensive understanding of society (Stanly and Wise 1979; Neilson 1990).

A general distinction has been established between positivistic social research and feminist research. Positivism constructs objective generalizations in an effort to systematically explain social realities and formulate broad understanding of the social world (Collins 1991, 2000; Farganis 1986). According to feminists, mainstream social scientific methods are problematic because they assume a value-free, unemotional, objective research process which situates respondents as objects of research and distances researchers from both respondents and the knowledge generating process (Allen 2000; Asante 1987; Collins 1991, 2000; Jaggar 1983; Reinharz 1992). Collins (2000, p. 255) argues that by following positivist methodological requirements researchers seek to “distance themselves from the values, vested interests, and emotions generated by class, race, sex or unique situation” and therefore, “become detached observers and manipulators of nature.” Detached objectivity strengthens the distance between the researcher and research participant, inhibits rapport building and compromises an in-depth understanding of the respondents’ experiences. Moreover, the utilization of standardized measures in positivist research results in data that are “fragments of decontextualized human experience” (Sprague and Zimmerman 2004, p.41).

Contrary to positivism, feminists reject detached objectivity as a goal of the research process and refute the likelihood or desirability of objective outcomes. Instead,
feminist methodology encourages subjectivity and shared personal experience (Allen 2000; Reinharz 1992; Sprague and Zimmerman 1989). In contrast with mainstream research, Reinharz (1992) emphasizes the role of the feminist researcher in the research process and recognizes that feminist research often derives from the researchers personal experiences. For instance, Childs (2005) credits her previous interracial relationship with inspiring her to interview other interracial couples to elucidate their experiences and uncover whether the opposition she observed was operating on a societal level.

Feminists certainly recognize it is not necessary for researchers to have personally experienced a phenomenon in order to study it, nor is it required that they have a personal relationship with their respondents (Reinharz 1992). However, feminists advocate this approach because the utilization of personal experiences allows the researcher and participant to more easily understand and empathize with one another. This approach can facilitate a stronger connection between the researcher and respondents while also fostering a breakdown of subject/object power dynamics characteristic of mainstream research (Munday 2006). In an effort to dismantle those power differentials, feminists acknowledge the research subjects’ agency in the construction of their own lived experience and work to give the participants a voice in order to privilege that subjective knowledge (Collins 1991, 2000; DeVault 1996; Munday 2006).

The grounded theory approach also guided my research process. Grounded theory can be understood as an inductive approach to qualitative research in which theory is developed from the data (Straus and Corbin 1990). As a methodology, grounded theory was first developed by Barney Glaser and Anslem Straus to provide systematic practices to analyzing qualitative data. This approach is a detailed and precise method of
study linking the reciprocity of data collection, analysis and theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Glaser 1992). Unlike traditional research, one does not begin the process with theory and then work to prove it. Instead, one begins with a phenomenon or topic of interest and allows relevant information to emerge (Glaser 1992; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Charmaz 2006). The emergent nature of grounded theory is what is relevant to and what informs my methodological approach. I chose to include the essence of grounded theory in my research effort to allow the data to emerge and inform a comprehensive understanding of the lived stories of these interracial couples.

**Feminist Methodology and Grounded Theory: The Current Study.** Through the use of qualitative feminist methodology, the goal of this research is to examine the lived experiences of Black-white couples from their perspective, in their own words. I use the feminist framework in an effort to emphasize the subjective knowledge of these couples and to make visible their experiences as an interracial couple in our color-blind social world. I utilize grounded theory to allow their lived stories to emerge, identifying the main elements of their experiences as an interracial couple. By examining how color-blind ideology shapes these unions and influences the development and maintenance of interracial relationships, I consider a typically macro conception at both the micro and meso level which past research in this area has not adequately explored.

Although feminists employ a variety of research methods ranging from interviews to focus groups to multiple methods, I chose semi-structured in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are a discovery-oriented method with the primary goal intending to deeply explore the respondent's point of view, feelings and perspectives (Rubin & Rubin 2004). The in-depth interview method compliments the inductive approach of grounded
theory by letting the lived experiences of the couples speak for themselves. Also, this method emphasizes researcher and participant interaction and the interchange of ideas. From a feminist standpoint, these interviews were the best method to explore the lived experiences of Black-white couples because it gave them a voice and an opportunity to share their lived experiences as an interracial couple in their own words.

At the beginning of each interview, I tell the couple that I am there to hear their story, to learn about their lived experiences, and that they are the expert of their story. By acknowledging their expert position, I attempt to eliminate the power differential between myself as the researcher and the couple as the research subject. By relying on the couples’ expert knowledge I try to shift the power and control to the respondents. Each couples’ story is unique and distinct so that they ultimately guide the interview as they discuss their experiences from their point of view. My overall objective in doing this exploration is to give a voice to an often unheard and overlooked group (interracial couples) and to offer a comprehensive knowledge of their perspectives. In doing so, I provide important insight into the lives of Black-white interracial couples and the operation of color-blind racism in their lived experience. By listening to their stories I am able to garner thick descriptions and gain important insight into their social reality (Geertz 1973).

In addition to promoting the participants’ expert knowledge, I identify my own subjective relationship and interest in the research topic in an effort to reject the dichotomous nature of subject and object in the research process (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006). Pursuant of a feminist framework, I adopt a more holistic and dialectical approach to research. As is the case for many feminist researchers, my personal experiences in
interracial relationships and challenging the dominant race discourse prompted me to ask questions about the operation of covert color-blind racism within Black-white intimate unions. Therefore, I reflexively revisit my place in the research process by acknowledging my ardent interest in understanding interracial relationships and contemporary racism. This research contributes a micro and meso understanding of contemporary racism among an understudied group and adds to the growing sociological knowledge of race relations and the experiences of interracial couples.

The Sample

Upon receiving approval to use Human Research Participants from Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) in February 2009, I began finding participants for my study. In order to be considered for the study, participants need to be at least 18 years old, heterosexual, Black or white, and currently involved in an interracial relationship with a Black or white partner. The choice to focus on Black-white couples is based primarily on my interest in studying Black-white race relations and contemporary racism against Blacks. Blacks have unique history of oppression and cumulative disadvantage and still are the most underprivileged minority group across all life outcomes (Corcoran 1995; DeNavas-Walt et al. 2007; Feagin and McKinney 2003; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Krivo et al. 1998; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Wilson 1978, 1987, 1996). In addition, although interracial coupling has taken place since the time of slavery, these unions only became legal in all U.S. states in 1967 and still Black-white unions are the least prevalent (Kalmijn 1993; Qian & Litcher 2001; Rosenfeld 2002, 2005).
**Convenience Sampling.** I initially used convenience sampling--sampling based on cases readily available and easily obtainable at the time of the study (Singleton, Straits, and Straits 1993) - to assemble my sample. My convenient sample was achieved through personal and professional contacts. Due to my closeness and interest in the topic of study, I had an accessible pool of Black-white interracial couples to attempt to recruit for my research. In some cases I simply made initial contact directly to the couples of interest and in others I reached out to a friend or colleague to put me in contact with possible participants. For example, I contacted the white female partner (I knew her growing up) via Facebook after seeing pictures of her with her Black fiancé. In another case, one of my close friends worked with a girl who was involved in an interracial relationship and I asked my friend to inquire if her co-worker would be interested in participating in my study and mind if I contacted her with the details. Another convenient sampling strategy I employed was after meeting Black-white couples at a social event among mutual friends (i.e., wedding), I would casually inquire about their interest in participating in my study and if they were interested then I would get their contact information and follow up soon after the event.

**Snowball Sampling.** After I began interviewing, I found snowball sampling--using existing study participants to recruit more participants--an effective method for locating Black-white interracial couples. In each interview, I ask the respondents if they knew another other couples that fit my criterion and would be interested and willing to participate. In such cases, I have used the current participants as a liaison between the potential participants. This method has proved fruitful in expanding my sample.
Sample Diversity. My sample consists of 10 couples and one woman whose husband did not want or was unable to participate. All respondents are Black men and white women and reside in Ohio, Michigan or Texas. They range in age from 25 to 60, average age of women is 38 and the average age of the men is 39. Individual incomes range from less than $15,000 to more than $75,000. However, when considering joint household income, all joint incomes exceed $75,000. With regard to educational attainment, all but two respondents (one just graduated from high school and the other has some college) have a college degree. Of those who completed college, two respondents earned associate’s degrees and the rest earned bachelor’s degrees. Also, six of the respondents have earned master’s degrees and one respondent is a medical doctor. Thirteen respondents have children. Nine of the eleven couples are married and six of those married couples have children. Occupations range from sales clerk to teacher to surgeon.

Interview Process

In order to understand the experiences of Black-white interracial couples, the primary data collection strategy was semi-structured in-depth interview. Field notes were also taken to enhance the data provided by the interviews. My first interview was conducted in March of 2009. Initially, I thought the first interview may operate as a practice interview to give me interview experience, enhance my comfort and to test the utility and effectiveness of my interview guide. The first interview did provide useful information regarding question organization, interview structure, as well as interview
content and flow. Nonetheless, it also rendered fruitful data to be analyzed for this study so I decided to use it as a part of the data and not just a practice interview.

The interviews lasted from between an hour and twenty-five minutes and five hours, but typically they took a minimum of two and a half hours. I realized early on that the respondent were more flexible and felt more comfortable if I came to their place of residence to conduct the interview. Therefore, in determining locations for interviews I always offer to come to their living space first and in all cases the interviews were conducted in the respondents’ residence.

Before beginning the actual interview, each participant is given an informed consent form and I give a detailed explanation of its contents. The informed consent form provides an overview of the study and all relevant contact information. Participants are advised that their involvement is voluntary and confidential and that pseudonyms would be used to maintain confidentiality. I offer each participant the option to choose their own pseudonym and in each case the participants chose names for themselves. Each participant is told they can choose to stop at anytime or not answer some of the questions posed during the interview and that they can do so without any explanation or negative consequences.

Each participant is also asked for consent to tape record the interviews. This form allows respondents to approve or disapproves the use of a recording device, to hear the recording if they chose after the interview and before the data are used, and to approve or disapprove the use of recorded interviews for professional presentations and publications. All participants have signed aforementioned forms, indicating their consent to participate in the study as well as have their stories taped and used for professional and academic
development. A couple of the respondents indicated an interest in either hearing the recorded interview or reading the transcripts at some point in time but did not want to delay my progress or ability to move forward with the study. In those instances, I had the individuals specify their request in writing on the consent form. Prior to the start of the interview, I also ask the participants to fill out a survey which asks demographic information (e.g., age, race, income, educational attainment etc.)

In the interviews I use an interview guide, although I rarely follow it exactly. As experts of their story, I allow the couples to share their story as they experience and perceive it with intermittent probing from me. However, as a means to reveal their lived experiences I follow the interview guide closely insofar as making certain all relevant questions are addressed. I begin all interviews by explaining that socialization is fundamental to our human development and continues across the life course and explain that start the interview trying to learn about each of their background and upbringing. In most cases, beginning the interview in this way helps to ease the respondents into the process and functions as a good segue into sharing their stories. There are four core areas tracing the life course that the interview addresses: background, relationship history, specifics of the current relationship, and race specific and potentially sensitive subjects.

After the interview is finished, I ask each participant to fill out a three question post-interview survey that solicits information about their perspective and position on color-blindism and contemporary race issues. In some cases, respondents asked to tape

4 Demographic Survey is found in Appendix B.
5 Full interview guide is found in Appendix C.
6 Post-Interview Questions are found in Appendix D
record their answers in private at that time or to fill out the survey and send or email it to me at a later date. All respondents have completed the post-interview questions. Upon completion of the interview and survey, I inform the participants that if they wish to receive preliminary results of the project they may do so by using the contact information provided on their copy of the consent form. I also remind them that I will make sure they get a copy of the final project once it is completed.

After leaving the interview, I typically take a moment to decompress and allow the experience to soak in a bit. After the first few interviews, I took detailed field notes directly after the interview once I returned home. However, I began to realize that after the interviews I was completely exhausted and emotionally drained. Therefore, I would record my thoughts on the drive home and in the next few days write up detailed field notes about the physical setting, each respondent, my feelings during the experience, key themes or striking points that emerged during the interview, and any other relevant information that I feel might assist in my future analyses. Within days of the interview I would listen to the tape and often take detailed notes. Then I would go back into the field notes and revisit the experience. I feel this practice provided additional material to help with analyses. The field notes are transcribed after interview transcription.
CHAPTER IV
COLOR-BLIND SOCIALIZATION AND REACTIONS

Contemporary race relations are evident in the predominant racial ideology, color-blindism. Color-blind ideology promotes a race-neutral social context and exemplifies the notion of a post-racial society where race is no longer an important social factor (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Lewis 1999; Lewis 2003). Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues that color-blind ideology minimizes racial differences and maintains that race and ethnic distinctions should be ignored. The widespread belief in a color-blind environment has produced a new racial understanding, which is based on the invisibility of racial significance. As a result, racial distinctions are overlooked, disregarded, and even ignored by the dominant group (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Lewis 1999; Doane 2003). Race issues are dealt with by not “seeing” color, not being aware of race, and claiming the “sameness” of everyone. Within this discourse, race no longer matters (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Doane 2003; Lewis 2003). In a post-racial society where race is no longer viewed as significant a discussion of explicit racism becomes unnecessary (Lewis 2003). Instead, individual merit is what matters. From a color-blind standpoint, individuals should be judged by their worth, not their race. Introducing race into the discussion is contradictory to the tenets of color-blind reasoning.

Research confirms that color-blind thinking pervades both the dominant and subordinate groups. Although whites assert color-blind ideology more frequently and to
a greater degree than Blacks, both groups espouse color-blind principles (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Carr 1997; O’Brien 2001). Within the intimate interracial context, couples often use color-blind practices to manage their interracial status (Childs 2002, 2005; O’Brien and Korgen 2007). I discovered that color-blind ideology is expressed by both white and Black partners in my sample of interracial couples. Specifically, color-blind rationales operate as color-blind “ideology” among whites and color-blind “logic” among Blacks. Ideology can be understood as a comprehensive viewpoint or philosophy proposed and advocated by the dominant group of a society and logic can be explained as situational reasoning and rational judgment utilized by subordinate groups of a society. I make this distinction between color-blind ideology and color-blind logic because it is clear that color-blind principles are operating in these interracial relationships (Childs 2002, 2005; O’Brien and Korgen 2007) but function differently for whites, compared to Blacks.

Color-blind ideology operates among whites because it is the prevailing racial ideology, which is constructed and advocated by the dominant group (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Carr 1997; Doane 2003; Lewis 2003). It promotes a race neutral discourse which benefits and privileges the white majority. As a result of white privilege, whites navigate through society without having to pay close attention to minority groups. Undoubtedly, whites can live their lives, interact with people of all races, and even enter into interracial relationships without having to consider or think about race (McIntosh 1988; O’Brien 2001). Therefore, whites typically engage in color-blind ideology when confronting racial matters.
Conversely, for Blacks it is nearly impossible to be "blind" to or not “see” race. In every facet of their lives, Blacks are very much aware (consciously or unconsciously) of their minority status and cognizant of their white counterparts (Collins 2005; O’Brien 2001). Because race is not invisible to Blacks, they cannot fully adopt white thought and assume a post-racial ideology. Rather, they use color-blind logic—the logic that things have to be interpreted and handled in a specific way in order to participate in society—in mainstream racialized practices. That is, Blacks are required to espouse a color-blind position or use color-blind logic to survive. However, the use of this logic reinforces the established ideology and structure and therefore, serves to strengthen white privilege (Doane 2003; Lewis 2003; O’Brien 2001).

My findings indicate that color-blindism can exemplify itself consciously (blatant function) and unconsciously (subtle function). Therefore, color-blind ideology and color-blind logic function in blatant and subtle ways among both whites and Blacks. Nevertheless, in either case the significance of race is continually discounted. The blatant operation of color-blind ideology and logic is characterized by the obvious delivery of “the party line”—the adherence to the assumptions of color-blind thinking—i.e., “I don’t see color, just people” (Bonilla-Silva 2003). The subtle operation of color-blind ideology and color-blind logic unfold in different ways. For whites, color-blind ideology operates subtly when race, culture or difference is recognized in some way, but without the conscious understanding that the acknowledgment of racial distinctions is contradictory to color-blind assumptions. For example, white families suggesting that life will be more difficult if your intimate partner is of a different race or that biracial
children will face difficulties. Meaning, in many cases whites would still claim they are “color-blind” even after asserting color-conscious concerns.

For Blacks, color-blind logic operates subtly when individuals have all the information—they acknowledge race and recognize their deprived location relative to whites—but maintain color-blind reasoning to survive. Although most Blacks are aware (consciously or unconsciously) of their subordinate position and understand that a “race neutral” viewpoint works to perpetuate their disadvantage (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Lewis 1999; Carr 1997), in order to function in society they still use color-blind logic to navigate the social world. For example, Black men who work in predominately white professions deciding not to flaunt their marriage to a white woman until their colleagues get to know and respect them outside of their interracial relationship. Blacks unconsciously employ the predominant color-blind philosophy to assimilate into the white world without realizing that this practice reinforces the racialized status quo.

My research indicates that although color-blind ideology is typically considered a macro and/or group-level concept, color-blind principles permeate all levels of social structure and social interaction, meaning that they function at the macro, meso and micro-level. Color-blind thinking influences interracial contact and operates in the way these couples build and maintain their relationships in their personal, social and professional lives. Among these couples, color-blind ideology and logic is manifest at the macro level through their interactions in the greater social world and in what “society” thinks about their interracial status. Color-blindism is visible at the meso-level in the communities in which they live and interact. And at the micro-level, color-blind values are revealed in these couples’ interactions with each other, their partners and their families.
In this chapter and the following chapter, I discuss the ways in which color-blind ideology operates within the relationships and lives of the interracial couples in this study by tracing the life course from racial socialization through their current intimate relationship. Recall, a central goal of this work is to elucidate how color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Lewis 1999) shapes intimate interracial relationships and to reveal new information concerning the interaction of structure and ideology in this context. My exploration of the structure of interracial intimate relationships and the current racial ideology suggests that both white and Black partners assert color-blind rationales. I discovered that color-blindism functions both consciously and unconsciously at macro, meso and micro-levels and operates as color-blind ideology for whites and color-blind logic for Blacks. The data lead me to explain the findings in six ways, which outline phases of the life course. Each phase will be detailed through the lived experiences of these couples. In this chapter, I focus on the first three phases: racial socialization and initial interracial interest, family reactions, and individual reactions.

Racial Socialization and Initial Interracial Interest

The first phase of the life course explored in this study focuses on socialization. Specifically, I examine the racial socialization and the subsequent emergence of an attention to diversity among the participants of this study. Many of the people involved in this study were taught in their families of origin not to “see color” and such racial socialization has been transferred to their initial attraction to diversity and their intimate interracial relationships. It was expected that these individuals, both white and Black partners, would make color-blind claims with regard to upbringing and intimate
interracial contact (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Carr 1997; Lewis 2003). However, these race-neutral assertions are experienced and expressed differently among whites and Blacks. In the following paragraphs, I will detail the distinctions between the function of white ideology and black logic in the color-blind messages received from parents. I will also share examples of the early attention to difference and curiosity about interracial intimacy expressed by white partners.

“What’s Color Got to Do With It?” Socialization is an integral part of the life course. The socialization process begins at birth and continues throughout our lives. In this process of personhood formation we learn culture, social expectations and social norms and are given the skills to participate in society (Danziger 1971, Stoller & Gibson 2000). Through social learning, we internalize social conventions, which formulate and mold our attitudes and beliefs. The process of socialization is patterned by various factors, of which one major contributor is race. Racial socialization teaches us about group classification, racial identity, and race related issues (Lesane-Brown 2006; Sanders Thompson 1994). It is through racial socialization that we formulate our racial ideology and learn expected racialized practices (Demo & Hughes 1990; Thornton 1997).

In an effort to get to know and understand these couples, I began every interview by discussing the importance of socialization and would ask each person to share with me a bit about their background and upbringing. This initial step gave me a sense of the geographic, socioeconomic and racial environment of their childhood and adolescence. This exploration also offered a bevy of information with respect to their familial and peer relationships, during the same period of time. Nevertheless, the main goal of this portion
of the interview was to help uncover how prominently and in what ways race played a role in their early years.

If respondents did not reveal cues about their racial socialization while sharing their backgrounds, I ask them directly: 1) Did your family talk about race? 2) What were those discussions like? and 3) What were you taught about race?” Generally, both whites and Blacks were given color-blind racial messages from their families about how to treat people and expected behavior with regard to interracial contact in their upbringing. Even so, Blacks also received some direct “cautionary” racial messages from their parents. Below I discuss some of the different ways in which Black versus white parents communicated this notion of color-blindism to their children. To begin with, I discuss the messages given to the white respondents (i.e., the women in the sample), and then, I discuss separately the socialization messages given to the Blacks in the sample (i.e., the male partners).

Emanating from socialization in their families of origin, common messages communicated by whites were that all people are the same and should be treated and thought of as equal. In other words, the message was to treat people the way you wish to be treated, and do not judge people unfairly. These messages clearly conveyed moral ideals about the value and treatment of people. However, these ideals were not shared directly in racial terms. Instead, these color-blind messages were implied through non-racial generalizations. Despite the race-neutral delivery, for the recipients these lessons

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7 Race socialization literature suggests that Blacks communicate direct messages to their children about being careful in social settings, not completely trusting white people, and that they have to be twice as good to get rewards similar to whites (Demo & Hughes 1990; Lesane-Brown 2006; Sanders Thompson 1994; Thornton 1997).
communicated that individual worth and the supposition of equal treatment applied to all people, regardless of race.

Kiki, a 35-year-old, who has always dated Black men and is currently in a long-term committed relationship with TJ, reflected that she learned racial lessons more by example from her parents than by direct discussions about race. Kiki’s father regularly played touch football with a “very racially diverse group of people” and was the first white wrestling coach at a predominately Black high school; as a result, her interracial contact began at a young age. She felt by surrounding the family with socio-economically and racially diverse people that, “quietly they [her parents] just instilled in us that people are people” and not to see difference. Kiki maintained that although she does not recall having a specific racial conversation, “I do just know that my parents always instilled in us that you look for the core of a person and if at the core they are good, the rest of it doesn’t matter.”

Kelly, a 32-year-old inner city special education teacher, is in her first year of marriage to her longtime boyfriend, Derek. Kelly grew up in a predominately white, upper-middle class, and tight knit community. Nevertheless, she reflected that she probably tended to gravitate toward diversity and that her really good friend, since elementary school, is one of the few Black women from her community. Kelly recalled, “We never thought of her as different growing up, just because she was like one of us.” Regarding racial messages in her upbringing, Kelly also claimed, “I honestly don’t remember having a race discussion with my family, ever.” She went on to say that she “can’t remember a conversation or anything where my parents would even have to say [anything] besides treat everybody fair…just respect everybody.”
For some, the color-blind messages they received were rooted in their religious affiliation and faith in God, but again were not race specific. Molly, a 27 year old working in corporate sales, was raised in a small, white middle class community. Her family is quite religious and she recalled that her parents raised her with openness and taught her to be accepting of all people:

It was never about race, but it was just don’t judge people. My religion is always, everyone is God’s child. And so, you know, accept everyone no matter what they are…if you see somebody that’s struggling or something, pray for them, they are God’s child.

Coraline, the youngest of four children, is 47 years old and married to Lorenzo. She also grew up in a white middle class environment and did not remember any conversations about race specifically. However, she explained that she and her siblings grew up in the church and were always taught, “Treat everyone the same, treat everybody equal, treat them how you want to be treated.”

Although not race specific, each woman was taught explicit lessons about being open and accepting of all people based on egalitarian notions of sameness and parity. And, each woman interpreted those messages to also mean that you do not judge people based on the color of their skin. These exchanges were fundamental to their racial socialization. The delivery of these messages in a non-racial way and the assumption that they apply to racial matters is quintessential color-blindism. Not having to specifically address race is rooted in white privilege. The ability for some, namely whites, to disregard race in the messages that are given to children about how to interact with others is a quiet lesson in privilege. These messages are executed and received at the micro-level but are affected by macro-level influences.
Clearly, these color-blind racial messages influence color-blind rationales among whites. All of the women in this study grew up in predominately white, middle class environments where they had very little cross racial contact and did not have to confront racial matters. It is easy to frame a non-racial stance when you have very little interracial contact and experiences and come from a place of privilege. Growing up in affluent white environments, these women are able to be non-racial and color-blind because race does not matter in their daily existence and they were not required to confront race in any real, meaningful way.

Similar to whites, Blacks were also given color-blind racial messages in their upbringing with regard to treatment of others and interracial contact. However, for Blacks these color-blind messages were voiced directly in terms of race. They were told, regardless of race, all people should be valued and thought of as equal and you should treat people the way you wish to be treated. These color-blind messages were often coupled with cautionary information. Blacks were alerted to the possibility that they may not always be afforded the same respect and equal treatment. These warning signs are indicative of color-blind logic because rational reasoning and interpretation is used in order to navigate and endure the social world. In this case, Blacks use color-blind logic both to encourage open-mindedness and acceptance of all people, but also to promote their own safety and comfort in social interactions.

Jerry, a 25 year old professional in a committed relationship with Molly, claimed his parents taught him to be accepting of all people. As the son of two physicians, he was raised in an affluent white neighborhood and attended private school. Although his parents divorced when he was very young, Jerry remains extremely close to both of them.
Jerry explained that both of his parents have an affinity for traveling and made sure that he experienced many different cultures. From Jerry’s perspective, it was those opportunities that really advanced his open-mindedness. With regard to race specifically, he claimed that his mother was “impartial, she would never say bad [things] about anything, about any race of people.” Jerry went on to say that his parents “always raised me to…accept everybody and going beyond the Black and white thing, I was raised to speak up when anybody is being racist about any [group].” During the interview, Jerry appeared to exemplify the conventional characteristics of color-blindism even though he was warned about and understood the realities of racism.

Davante, a bi-racial commercial banker, is happily married to Tracey. At two weeks old, he was adopted into a Black family and grew up in a predominantly white, blue-collar town. Davante explained that although his parents divorced when he was just two, he always has maintained close relationships with both of them. From a very young age his parents talked with him about being adopted and encouraged him to be color-blind. They were always open and honest with him about racial matters and raised him to be accepting of everyone:

Love everyone, accept everyone ‘cause you’re different. It makes no sense in you going out and being one way, and here you are, you’re biracial. And so, they always taught me to appreciate my differences and never ever shun anyone because they’re different, accept them because you don’t want to be treated that way. It was always treat people the way you want to be treated. So I had those values and that structure.

Because Davante’s parents were so forthcoming about race, they also taught him to be vigilant about the people he interacted with. They cautioned:

There [are] going to be good whites and there [are] going to be bad whites. There [are] going to be good Blacks and there [are] going to be bad Blacks. Always
surround yourself [with] those who are doing what you want to do…whether it is white, Black, red or yellow.

Davante claimed that growing up biracial in a Black family and being educated in predominately white environments resulted in little physical resemblance to his family or peers. Therefore, early on he was conscious of race and taught to appreciate his differences. This awareness helped to shape his “unbiased” color-blind thinking.

Bo, a biracial 35 year old, is happily married to Dee and the proud father of their first child, Emma. At one year of age, Bo was adopted by a white physician and his wife into their ready-made family, including three biological children. The community he was raised in was comprised of predominately white, middle to upper class, educated professionals. Bo felt that everyone was welcoming and accepting of him as part of his new family and the community. From a race perspective, Bo commented that it was very interesting to be a Black person growing up in an affluent white community. However, he felt that he was not only welcomed with open arms, but also was taught about his Black heritage. Bo explained that his adopted white mother “went to a predominantly Black (90%) high school and was basically raised in an African American community.” [As a result], she had a lot of the values and thought processes of [the] Black community.” Growing up she taught him about Black culture, history, and types of tolerance issues the she thought he would have to confront. Bo felt the most significant message he got from his mother that he still carries with him was:

Knowing that you are different, you look different from the rest…you have to be tolerant but yet don’t take any shit from anybody because of your looks…she always instilled me you are a person you are not Black, you are not white, you are not yellow, you are not pink, you are a person.
Bo reflected and commented, “It’s funny because I see myself now, I have that approach with people…I don’t care what color, what size, you know, whatever.” For Bo, it was both the quiet messages of complete acceptance he received through his family, friends and the community and his mother’s deliberate efforts that inclined his color-blind thinking.

Lorenzo, a 43 year old, was adopted at birth by Black parents and raised primarily in Black lower-working class communities. At nine, his parents divorced. Although he said the family dissolution was difficult, he managed to maintain a close relationship with both parents and his extended family on both sides. In his upbringing, Lorenzo attended a racially mixed church, went to racially diverse schools, and had many family members that were in interracial relationships and had biracial children. Through those relationships and experiences, Lorenzo feels he was taught good values about race and treating people equally. He expressed that growing up he was told that the “world was changing” and that he should always treat people fairly. He was also told that he had the right to speak up if he was mistreated. His parents cautioned him:

There’s going to be altercations as you grow up…love who you are going to be with, love your friends, and make sure you respect everybody. They just taught me good values. And they said, it’s not a big deal when someone is disrespecting you because of your race, speak up, protect yourself, just use your head, use your smarts, don’t be stupid, don’t start picking fights and stuff like that. They taught me real good values.

Lorenzo felt that his openness carried over into high school. He remarked, “I interacted with everyone. I dated Black girls. I dated white girls. I was friends with everyone. I think I had more white friends than I did black friends.” In his adult interactions,
Lorenzo also maintains relationships with a diverse group of friends and claims, “They don’t see us as white and Black, they see us as Lorenzo and Coraline.”

Frank, a 38 year old photographer, was raised by a single mother in a working class Black community. He claimed that growing up race was not a factor because his mother did not make it a big deal, “I was raised never really seeing color, so it was this thing that I knew, well I kind of knew it was there… knew there was a difference, but didn’t really know.” He explained that it was especially “no big deal” because his first memory of playing with kids was two little twin white girls---the daughters of the lady for whom his mother’s aunt was a housekeeper. He affirmed, “So, I grew up with these girls thinking, you know, this is what it is, I mean it's not, it wasn’t any big deal, I really didn’t see color at that point.” For Frank, his race-neutral perspective was attached to this notion that even if differences exist that these distinctions are “no big deal.”

Frank’s recognition about racial difference became more concrete during the transition from elementary school to junior high because his best friend in elementary school, a white kid, came back to school after the summer and said, “My mom and dad don’t want me to talk to you anymore, because you are black.” Frank was devastated, hurt and confused. He remembers wondering, “What is going on? I know the person that I am, why would anyone treat me any differently because I am Black?” This situation clarified the importance of color for Frank and taught him more about what to expect from people outside of his race. It was at this point that his mother was forthright and direct about racial matters. She explained:

Hey, look, you know what, there are going to be some tough things in life that you might not understand now, but they are going to happen to you...you are black, they are white, this is what I have been talking about, you are going to be
treated differently, just because of your skin, now does that make it right? No, it doesn’t. It is what it is.

Among Blacks, color-blind logic was used in the expression of color-blind racial messages as well as the interpretation of those messages. Each man was taught race specific lessons from his parents about treating people of all races with dignity and respect. As well, Black families cautioned their children that even though they are to be respectful and fair that the same courtesy might not be afforded to them based on their race. Those messages implied that as a Black person even though you are expected not to judge people based on the color of their skin, you may be judged based on yours. Different than the operation of white color-blind ideology, whereby whites can ignore race and their whiteness in constructing lessons about treatment of people, Blacks must always think of their interactions in terms of their race and relative to whiteness. This dominant-minority group reality originates at the macro-level, wherein all resources – including the privilege of ignoring race – are captured and held by whites.

In addition to the cautionary advice attached to color-blind messages, Blacks also directly caution their children about their social structural position relative to whites. As the race socialization literature suggests, Blacks tend to warn their children that they have to “work twice as hard” and “be twice as good” as their white counterparts (Demo & Hughes 1990; Lesane-Brown 2006; Sanders Thompson 1994; Thornton 1997). Priest, a 60 year old clinical psychologist, is married to Cece. With regard to racial socialization Priest claimed, “My father especially, [told me] you have to be twice as good---at whatever, to get noticed or to even have a chance…that was drilled from day one.” Eddie, a 36 year old chef, has been married to Mary for ten years. He insisted that he did not
receive racial messages from his family but explained that those messages came from his best friend’s mother. Eddie recalled that she was very forthcoming and tried to make it clear that nothing is given to you. She stressed, “You do need to work hard to get where you’re at…you do need to work harder than the average white man just because of your color and where you’re coming from.” Similarly, Derek claimed the message that he must “work twice as hard” was apparent because of his parent’s occupational experiences. He recalled that his mother always had to work “under” and “for” a white man and he remembered hearing his parents vent about their white bosses when they discussed work. From those experiences he felt it was, “understood that I will probably have to work harder…act a certain way and be polite and stuff like that.”

Davante also received messages concerning the need for Blacks to work twice as hard as whites. Even though he was brought up to be color-blind and treat all people equally, he maintains that there are “all these cautions---I call them---within the black community that you’re raised with and understand.” Essentially, it is made clear within the Black community that compared to whites “you’re not equal. It is just how it is.” Davante said that his father always warned him:

Even though you go to school [with whites] you got to work twice as hard. Their friends with you now but one day, there’s going to be something that might happen and they’re not going to be your friend or they’re not going to be as nice to you as they are now…I always had at the back of my mind, you know, that I have to work harder, one day they’re not going to be as friendly as they are now…You can invite them to your house. You can give them a pair of tennis shoes if they don’t have any and you do, but you're still not going to be good enough in their eyes. So you have to work twice as hard to get the same things that they have.

Together with the color-blind lessons promoting love and acceptance, Davante’s father cautioned him to not fully trust whites and prepared him to work harder than whites to
accomplish the same success. For Davante, it seemed that both messages shaped his racialized perception and actions.

Frank is happily married to Claire, a 35 year old executive salesperson. They are also recently the proud parents of their first child. From an early age, Frank’s mother always made sure that he tried different things and involved him in several different activities and sports. In elementary school he joined the orchestra and began playing tennis. He recalled, “My mom…she was always telling me…you are going to have to be twice as good as everyone else just to make it.” Frank recalled that at the time he did not really understand what she was talking about because she never mentioned color or that he had to be twice as good because he was Black. From his experiences he felt, “I didn’t have to be twice as good to be better than anyone, in anything whether it be sports or academics, it was really pretty easy.” Frank explained that all his young life, even when his mom got sick with cancer she would insist that he had to work twice as hard. He shared:

Towards the end, she was really bad, she lost all her hair and she was teeny tiny, in the end she didn’t even recognize me, but I can remember her telling me- still at the very end, all the things that I had done, I am still going to have to…‘you’re going to have to work, you are going to have to work, whatever it is you do, you are going to have to work twice as hard.’ And at that time, at that point I kind of understood what she was saying…that it wasn’t about what I knew or what I did, it was more [about] color.

Frank’s mother raised him with a color-blind framework. Although she did offer cautionary messages, she would just let life happen and explain racial matters as situations came up. He never felt that she misled him or was dishonest because she was always willing to discuss anything with him. Frank clarified that by the time his mother passed (he was a freshman in college), they had discussed race issues and he had
experienced racial discrimination so he more clearly understood that her messages were race focused.

In varied ways, these men were presented information about behavior that will reasonably be expected of them, especially in mainstream interactions with whites. These strong cautionary messages are evidence of the operation of color-blind logic. In order to survive in a white world, Blacks espouse a color-blind position without fully adopting white ideology. During racial socialization, Blacks are taught to interact with whites using conscious color-blind reasoning (e.g. regardless of race, accept and love everyone). Color-blind logic is also taught by warning Blacks about white perception and the differential opportunities they may face based on race. Within a social structural context that is allegedly post-racial, it is logical to teach Black children the ways in which personal, social and professional interactions with whites should be interpreted and handled to participate in the mainstream. Even though direct warnings about needing to work twice as hard and be twice as good seem overtly racial, Blacks are still teaching their children how to endure and be successful in this post-racial world. Color-blind logic among these Black families is rooted in macro-level suppositions and impacts the function of macro, meso and micro-level color-blind thinking. Specifically, color-blind logic influences and structures Black identity, social interactions and global racial perspectives and practices (Barlow 2003).

“Something Different, Damn it!” In the following paragraphs, I highlight examples of the operation of color-blind ideology among whites illustrated by a history of attention to, interest in or sensitivity about difference. As we know, socialization continues throughout the stages of the life course. Although racial attitudes tend to be
formulated in early childhood, they are malleable and evolving (Demo& Hughes 1990; Sanders Thompson 1994). During childhood and adolescence individuals develop feelings of self-worth and begin to interact and associate with larger groups, which often results in peer relationships (Danziger 1971). For some of the white participants, the color-blind socialization cues they received in their upbringing led to a fascination with diversity. This history of interest regarding difference is characterized by early and continual curiosity about and compassion toward different cultures. This stance often leads to the initiation of or an increase in interracial contact. In some cases the initial contact was a friendship relationship, exploring culture through an educational outlet, or even an intimate interracial relationship.

Many of the white partners in these unions expressed an ongoing curiosity about diverse cultures and racial groups -- the music, food, norms and customs that are associated with different groups and cultures. However, in most cases whites grew up in communities, attended schools and were socialized in predominately white environments. Therefore, they had very little interracial contact. Kelly acknowledged that because she grew up in a homogenous setting she was always attracted to learning about and experiencing different cultures:

In middle school my mom always said I wanted to be Jewish…in high school I think it was with the music, I guess I started getting into hip hop and then just started getting into the Black culture more…I kind of did go towards the few Black kids that were at our school and like I say whether it was because of the dancing or the music or just being a whole different culture. Then when I got to college was when I really, as my mom would say, “I probably wanted to be black in college.”

For Kelly, her concentration on Black culture lead to a close friendship with a Black man her freshman year and she recalled going to his house and his family being the most
welcoming warm people she had ever experienced and that through them she “learned more about and felt welcomed into Black culture.”

Susan, a mother of four (two biological children and two step children), is married to Marc. Susan recalled that even though she had very little contact with or even information about Blacks in her upbringing, she was somewhat fascinated with Black culture. She remembered learning about historically significant racial issues like slavery and the Underground Railroad on a family trip to Williamsburg. She claimed that slavery appalled her and as a result she, “was always interested in the Underground Railroad” and thought it was “so cool.” However, Susan remarked that her interest in the Underground Railroad “was never really a race thing” because race was not a topic that ever really came up. She also recalled that growing up she really wanted to be Denise Huxtable from The Cosby Show because she thought Denise was:

The coolest girl ever and not even realizing, like wait minute, you can’t ever look like her. I mean, I do not remember thinking like, if I were black. I didn’t even think she was black…I just thought she was really cool.

In the mid-1980s America was introduced to the Huxtables---an educated, upper-middle-class Black family. The Cosby Show was hailed as groundbreaking because of the predominantly Black cast and its positive portrayal of Black family life. However, Susan was unable to make that connection despite obviously being a fan of the show and paying close attention to the character of Denise\(^8\). Even her interest in difference is generated and expressed in color-blind terms.

\(^8\) There is an interesting juxtaposition between Susan’s conscious acknowledgement of race with regard to the tragedy of slavery but her inability or unwillingness to connect race to the positive images associated with The Cosby Show. In the interview, Susan even made sure to distinguish that Lisa Bonet (Denise Huxtable) was biracial.
Molly claimed that even though she did not have much diversity in her upbringing, she has always been intrigued by different cultures. She talked about her Spanish teacher from middle school who was not from the US and remembered that she loved going to that class because, “it was like real, you know, and it wasn’t text book, she really knew what she was talking about and she cooked Spanish dishes and brought them in for us, and we did salsa.” In college she briefly dated a Lebanese man and found it fascinating. She affirmed, “It was intriguing to me, because, you know, he had like, the culture.” Even though her background lacked diversity, Molly’s best friend since elementary school is Black. Molly said her curiosity about other cultures was influenced by that relationship and that she loved learning about Black culture though Carla’s family:

They cook all the time and so I just would love sitting in the kitchen and watching how they cook and what they do and it was just really interesting, I would always ask them all these questions and stuff. So, I have always had like, I guess a natural curiosity as far as culture goes.

Molly also expressed a commitment and sensitivity to difference. She is intolerant of disparaging remarks or discrimination against people based on minority status. She shared different stories about her having a Black best friend and working with the disabled. A major goal for her is to be accepting and kind to those who are shunned:

I would get pissed off like at shit at high school, if there was, racial slurs or this and that and, I just I don’t have a tolerance for people that judge people without even knowing them or that are rude, flat out rude and they don’t even know the person, it's makes me irate…I don’t tolerate that well at all…So, I have always been very open minded I guess, I think I am, when it comes to people and diversity, whether its physical disabilities, whether its cultural, whether its social, whatever.

Molly shares that she has always been sensitive to bigotry and that any expression of prejudice infuriates her. It may be that the close relationships with her Black girlfriend
coupled with the anti-race-mixing undertones of her family influenced her unrelenting defensive position. However, her color-blind reasoning is apparent by her seemingly unintentional omission of race or rather, her supposition that race is synonymous with culture.

Tracey’s fascination with culture and difference began very early in her childhood because her uncle married a woman from Thailand. She always thought it was so interesting to have an aunt from another country and culture. Tracey also grew up in a predominately white environment, but explained that beginning in 5th grade Black students were bused in to her school. She revealed, “I remember being excited that we were actually going to have some Black kids in our class. I thought that was neat because I was always just interested in people who were different than me. I don’t know why, all I know is, I was.” As her interest in diversity grew, she sought out and was excited about contact with diversity especially Spanish culture:

I went to [a Big Ten] state university so that’s just a whole smorgasbord of people, which I loved and I really wanted to go to a large school because well one, I wanted to get out this small town and then two, I loved the variety of people and then three, because I was a Spanish major, Spanish education…I loved, the first thing I did when I got the course catalogue, I was just fascinated and I still, I love the thought of this -- all those languages that I could take -- I just thought that was the coolest thing compared to other smaller universities. So for me I’m definitely driven to the language and culture. I am fascinated by it.

Similar to Molly, Tracey also expressed intolerance for prejudice and acts of discrimination. In her first marriage, Tracey married a white guy from her hometown. She recalled that throughout that marriage she often heard her husband’s family members use racial slurs and express racist thoughts and that it always bothered her. Instead of submissively allowing that to continue, she would speak up and express her discomfort.
Tracey claimed, “my ex mother-in-law was…the biggest bigot and racist and I was always a black sheep in that family because I would always defend and stand up or take her to task for comments that she would make.”

For some women, the curiosity and interest in difference manifest in an attraction to racially and ethnically diverse men from an early age. In some cases, these women did not have any real contact with diversity but remember being curious and interested. Susan distinctly remembered being attracted to Black men early on, recalling she had a crush on Blair Underwood growing up. In college, Susan found herself attracted to Black men on campus, but never really had any social contact with Black men until she met her husband. Cece, who is married to Priest, also did not date outside of her race until she met Priest. She stated that she was always attracted to darker skinned men: “In elementary school, I loved this guy and he was Hispanic…I just thought he is so good looking and loved his brown skin and brown eyes and his dark hair and everything about him.” She also remembered that she and her first husband, who was white, went to a party once where one of the girls brought a Black guy. She said, “I was so attracted to him and I was like, oh my God I would love to get on that... I just always felt like an attraction and he was very attractive...he was gorgeous.”

From a color-blind framework, “love sees no color” is often expressed with regard interracial coupling (O’Brien 2001). Susan and Cece both shared that they were attracted to dark-skinned men from an early age without having interracial contact. Neither woman engaged in interracial intimacy until their current husbands. Color-blind ideology operates subtly among these women because they are distinctly attracted to men based on race but do not qualify their marriages to Black men in racialized ways.
Martha is a 47 year old nurse anesthetist married to C.E, a 55 year old surgeon. She also shared an early memory of an attraction to Black men. She did not remember ever hearing anything about race at home and had never met Black person until sixth grade. She remarked, “He was my first crush ever. We held hands on the playground.” It was not until after she finished nursing school that she would begin to date outside of her race. At that time, no hospitals in her area were hiring and she was offered a job and moved to Texas. She remarked that because her upbringing had been so “lily-white” she was interested in anything different with regard to men and experiences,

I ended up in San Antonio, Texas and I dated a lot of people down there and all of them were Mexican. I never had any interest in dating white guys. I always ended up with Mexicans. I just thought they are more interesting…[because they are ] more attractive, more physically attractive, dark hair, I like dark-dark eyes, brown skin, I just seem to be more attracted to that and just for me having lived in such a square white environment, to be honest, I think anything different would have been great.

When she moved back home she again felt like everything was the same, boring, lacked culture and realized:

Most people didn’t see things the way I do. They just weren’t very open-minded. They didn’t want to interact with different types of people or they didn’t even, something as basic as food, they didn’t want to try different cultures of food, they were so uncultural and they weren’t interested in anything outside their own little square. Well, that’s how I came up and you know, I was like over that whole thing…Then dating guys up here, they just were always the same, it was just boring, it was uncultural, I guess. It was just nothing. I don’t want to live like that. I wanted to travel and meet different people and that sort of thing.

In some ways, Martha’s attraction to dark-skinned men derived from her frustration with an exclusively white upbringing. She expressed that when she moved to Texas she was searching for anything that was different and when she returned home she again felt bored by the excessive whiteness and sameness of everyone. There is a concurrence
within Martha of color-blind philosophies about people’s equality and worth and her conscious attraction to and active pursuit of diversity.

Recall, color-blind ideology operates subtly for whites when they acknowledge race and cultural difference but do not distinguish that from their color-blind position. All of these women were genuinely captivated by difference and diversity. They sought out and reveled in opportunities to explore that interest. However, their curiosity about difference is articulated as “culture” or by minimizing the racial component. Identifying difference as culture and playing down race is indicative of color-blind thinking. Whites find themselves compelled by difference and want to explore diversity through interactions, experiences and education but they characterize their positive interest in diversity as cultural distinctions more so than racial difference. Attributing “Blackness” to the notion of “Black culture” instead of race, is in and of itself an expression of color-blindism because whites do not see or do not acknowledge their attention to diversity as an interest in “color” or “race.” The specific omission of race signifies the operation of color-blind ideology. “Diversity” and “culture” are euphemistic words used to dance around race. Whites should see “race” in diversity in an effort to recognize and represent people of color not just include them.

Also, whether it was just a curiosity about culture or a specific attraction to dark-skinned men, these women’s ongoing fascination with diversity resulted in long-term romantic relationships with Black men. This pattern is indicative of the operation of

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9 Diversity and culture basically mean—black people. Such that, when people speak of diversity or qualify culture, they mean race. In color-blind communication, people tend to dance around race and avoid racial issues. Rarely do people, especially whites, get to the heart of the matter. Euphemistic language is just one way that color-blind ideology prevails.
color-blind ideology in the intimate context. The interest in difference is an acknowledgment of race and cultural distinctions but is not differentiated from a color-blind viewpoint. Therefore, the interest and exploration of diversity with regard to coupling would beget a race-neutral, open-minded viewpoint, which is exemplary of a color-blind perspective. As I detail later, many whites claim they do not see their intimate partner as Black. A major element of color-blind ideology is to diminish racial significance and discount race. Not seeing the race of your “Black” partner reifies color-blindism.

These women’s interest in interacting with “culture” and seeking out difference can be explained by their internalization of the information they were given about intimate relationships coupled with their color-blind racial socialization. Generally, social norms encourage homogeneity – i.e., encourage the individual to seek out sameness. The norm of homogamy confirms that people couple with those who share similar backgrounds and characteristic like race, education, socioeconomic status, age, religion and other demographic variables (Killian 2001, 2002, 2003). Given this norm, racial homogamy is expected and racial heterogamy is viewed as a deviation from that norm (Foeman & Nance 2003; Killian 2003). As a result, families tend to socialize their offspring to seek homogamous partnerships. We also know that whites are racially socialized to be color-blind, which embodies a belief in sameness. Color-blind philosophies diminish dissimilarity of people and instead, endorse equality of people. Recall, these women were taught to treat people equally because all people are valuable. Such that, color-blind socialization influenced their persistent interest in difference and
efforts to seek out and participate in interracial relationships. Yet they still qualify that curiosity and explain their interracial relationship in color-blind ways.

Family Reactions

An essential goal of life course development for many adults is to find and sustain lasting intimate relationships. This process often begins in adolescence with dating and carries through to adulthood in the form of long-term relationships. Within families, it is perfectly reasonable that parents and even extended members would weigh in on intimate relationships (Heaton 2002; Mintz & Kellogg 1998; Teachman et al 2000). After all, those partners and spouses also become apart of a larger family unit. This acceptable interaction opens the door for criticism and offers a powerful playing field for color-blind excuses. When confronting interracial unions, family members can cite countless non-racial concerns--commitment issues, inability to provide for a family, different backgrounds, conflicting values and so forth. Families also can address race-specific concerns--fears about life being harder, anxiety about discrimination, worries for biracial children and even preference for cultural preservation.

Research indicates that color-blind reasoning epitomizes what is expected and politically correct regarding race relations. Therefore, a color-blind perspective implies that whites encourage Blacks to fully participate in society and are receptive to interracial interaction (Bonilla-Silva & Lewis 1999; Carr 1997; DeMott 1995; Doane 2003; Lewis 2003; Williams 1998). It follows then that whites would also be open to friendships with Blacks and that white families would welcome Black friends into their lives and homes. After all, if you are not judging people based on color or race then Black friends are no
different than white friends. Research also identifies that even though white families welcome platonic interracial relationships, they tend to be less comfortable crossing racial lines within family or intimate relationships (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Childs 2002, 2005; O’Brien and Korgen 2007; Romano 2003; Wilson & Jacobson 1995).

Generally, Blacks, compared to whites, have much more accepting attitudes about interracial coupling and are more accepting of Black-white unions (Childs 2002; Dalmage 2000; Frankenberg 1993; Rosenblatt et al 1995; Schuman et al 1997; Todd et al 1992). Black families tend to be more willing to recognize and support Black-white couples and accept the white partner as family (Childs 2002, 2005; Dalmage 2000; Frankenberg 1993; Rosenblatt et al 1995). Interracial coupling can be especially difficult for Black women to support or participate in. Among Blacks, Black women convey the strongest opposition (Collins 2000; Rosenblatt et al 1995; Spickard 1989) and tend to be much less accepting of interracial coupling than Black men (Heaton & Jacobson 2000; Kalmijn 1993, 1998; Qian 1997).

As described by the interviewees in this study, white families generally operate from a color-blind framework with regard to interracial interaction. They teach their children to treat everyone fairly and are tolerant and even supportive of friendship interactions with Blacks. When it comes to intimate interracial interaction, family support is varied and in most cases whites are apprehensive about interracial intimacy. White families use all sorts of justification for their disapproval ranging from non-racial excuses to more race-specific concerns. In any case, whites still operate from a color-blind framework.
Black families also use color-blind reasoning to manage interracial interaction. Parents socialize their children to value all people and treat them fairly, regardless of race. Even if they initially are apprehensive, Black families tend to be supportive and accepting of interracial relationships and are welcoming to the white partner. Unlike whites, when Black parents disapprove of interracial intimacy they share their concerns in race-specific ways. Below I discuss some of the different ways that Black and white parents react to and handle their children’s interracial relationships. I start by discussing various reactions by white families, and then, I separately explain the responses of Black families.

“Don’t You Just Want to Be Friends?” Among these women’s families, color-blind ideology operates as they navigate and manage their daughter or relative’s interracial relationships. In the following paragraphs, I draw attention to the operation of color-blind ideology revealed through messages and reactions from family that having Black friends is acceptable but romantic interracial relationships are not. This message is made clear in four comprehensive ways. First, white families directly tell their children that they are allowed to have Black friends but not Black lovers. Second, parents discount race as a factor for disapproval and instead name non-racial reasons. Third, families express more race specific concerns about interracial coupling. These “larger” concerns manifest in fear regarding the possibility of external discrimination and most commonly, concern about potential struggles for biracial children. They fear that biracial children may struggle with fitting in and being accepted in society. Finally, in some cases families justified their disapproval with a preference for cultural preservation.

Many of these women received direct messages from their families that cross-racial friendships were perfectly acceptable and even encouraged, but that partnering
interracially was not permitted. Some whites grew up having close relationships with Black friends. They shared stories about spending a great deal of time at each other’s homes and with each other’s families. As a result, it was clear to these women that their parents not only permitted friendships with Black people but were also comfortable with them. However, when it came to intimate interracial relationships, it was also clear those were unacceptable.

From a young age, Dee received clear messages from her father that she was not to date Black men. Dee went to a Catholic private high school with a good bit of diversity and recalled:

> It was really strange because my dad never had any problems with guys coming over white, Black- girls, white, Black it didn’t matter, but when it came to getting asked to homecoming, to prom or going on dates with a Black guy, I wasn’t allowed.

Dee reiterated that her parents were very accepting of Black friends. As long as they were just friends, they were welcome. She explained, “They came over and hung out and ate, my parents loved that…we would have pre-football game festivities at the house, people would come over in the summer and swim, parties after homecoming…but when it came to dating, it was a no go.” Dee’s father explained once that the reason she could not date interracially was that he was afraid of external (public) reactions and that extended family disagreed with race mixing. Dee clarified:

> He was worried about someone beating us up…family members having issues with it, in his family, extended family, cousins having issues with it and us being out eating and someone just disagreeing with it and taking it to the next level. It was my grandparents, one set is from Italy and the others on his side were born here, but those were the people that he was worried about and then some cousins and extended family.
Her father consistently maintained, “I really don’t think that’s a good idea, no.” However, he rationalized his disapproval by alluding to his fear of discrimination and his extended family’s disagreement. Dee explained that her mother never had a personal problem with interracial dating but still discouraged her from doing so. Her mother justified the disapproving position claiming, “Grandma and grandpa don’t really agree with it, you are young and let's just not go there.”

Tracey, a 39 year old small business owner, was raised in an almost all white small, industrial town. She recalled that growing up her step stepfather would freely use racial slurs when referring to Black people. However, he also had a “very good Black friend” that worked for him and would come over to their house every couple of weeks for a few hours to drink beers, hangout and talk. For Tracey, her step father’s behavior somewhat provided her with a mixed message about cross-racial interaction. Nevertheless, her mother and father provided a clear message that Black friends were permitted but her family disapproved of interracial relationships:

You don’t date outside of your race. That was very clear. I don’t even know how old I was, but it was just something I was just taught. I can concretely state that, that I know I heard that message from my mother and my father both. Definitely, I was fine being able to have friends who were Black because I played volleyball and, you know, I was on student counsel, I ran track things like that--so that was all fine but as far as dating, absolutely not.

Tracey mentioned that even the direct message was a little ambiguous because two of her uncles were interracially married and the family was accepting of both unions. One uncle married a woman from Thailand and the other uncle married a Mexican
women. Tracey expressed, “So I think that’s why I was confused, as to but she’s [they are] not white.” Tracey revealed that although the contradiction was puzzling to her, she still understood that she was not to partner interracially.

Kelly also received messages from her family that having Black friends is acceptable but not necessarily romantic relationships. However, Kelly felt these expectations were expressed indirectly. Kelly and Derek had been friends since early her freshman year in college. He played basketball for the college and early on her parents would visit Kelly at school and would often go to Derek’s games. Kelly always felt that her parents were very supportive of their friendship. She shared that one summer she came home from college and Derek stayed, so she would occasionally go back to visit him. Before her first visit, she remembered a conversation with her mother discussing the weekend plans and she said she would be staying with Derek. Her mother affirmed, “You can’t stay in his room” and followed with, “Don’t you just want to be friends?” Kelly remembers laughing and plainly answered, “No not really.” When her mom realized Kelly was exploring more than a friendship with Derek she expressed her concerns about interracial dating. Kelly explained:

The first thing she thought of was, what will your cousins think? Her side of the family who I have heard my cousins say the N word in very derogatory terms...they are pretty much, pretty rural like just white lower middle class, like no black people live in their neighborhood and she has probably heard them say very racist things.

Similar to other parents, Kelly’s mother also expressed that interracial partnering was not a good idea but did not claim personal ideological views as reasons for her uneasiness.

Among whites, Black-white unions are much less acceptable than those involving Latinos or Asians (Davis 1991; Feagin 2000; Ferber 1998; Frankenberg 1993; Rosenblatt et al 1995; Tubbs and Rosenblatt 2004). This discrepancy may be evident in her family’s acceptance of her uncles’ unions, while maintaining that interracial coupling is not tolerated.
Instead Kelly’s mother identified extended family members’ disapproval as the source of her concern.

Color-blind ideology is demonstrated in two specific ways among these women’s families: First, by supporting interracial friendships they maintain the racial status quo. According to color-blind ideology, we are no longer supposed to notice race and therefore, friendly interracial contact is normative, not remarkable, behavior (Carr 1997; DeMott 1995; Frankenberg 1993; Williams 1998); and second, white parents often attributed the disapproval of interracial unions to extended family or outsiders instead of claiming their own ideological or personal disagreement.

White families also enacted color-blind ideology by framing their disapproval of interracial relationships in non-racial ways. Parents draw upon alternative objections in an effort to not have to acknowledge that “race” is the reason for their lack of support. By scape-goating race and emphasizing other issues, familial disapproval about race-mixing reinforced color-blind tenets. Kelly and Derek were very good friends and then began dating in college. She describes their college and early dating years as a “nightmare” because he was more focused on basketball than being a reciprocating boyfriend. After college, Derek became more involved and attentive to their relationship. However, Kelly remembers that as they grew more involved she got the sense that her family did not approve. She explained, “I soon knew I just [couldn’t] talk about Derek around them.” Her parents claimed they were concerned that he was not a “good boyfriend.” Kelly remembered they asked, “What was he doing for me?”

At the time, Kelly chalked up their hesitation to non-racial factors. She remarked, “I don’t know if it was as much the race thing…I think they were more concerned about
me.” As their relationship progressed and got more serious Kelly explained that her parents remained apprehensive. She shared, “They kept saying it wasn’t a Black-white thing, so, even if it is, or was…they never came out and said that…they were more concerned about his job, would he be able to take care of me, his motivation and all that stuff.” Kelly did not think that it was explicitly a racial issue for her parents, because they never said their disapproval had anything to do with the fact that Derek was Black. Both Kelly and her parents used color-blind rationales to justify their apprehension. Eventually, Kelly just told her parents to move beyond their concerns and try to get to know him because she was going to be with him.

After dating for about a year, Claire and Frank became more serious. Claire recalled that her father was especially unsupportive of their relationship. Although he expressed his disapproval, he did not tell Claire that his lack of support was based on Frank’s race. Instead he said, “I just don’t think you have made a very good partner choice…I don’t think it’s good for you, I don’t agree with your choice of partner.” Claire admitted that even though her parents were not directly saying that their issue with the relationship was because Frank is Black, she sensed it. As their relationship continued to progress, her parents found other reasons to criticize the union. For example, when Frank was trying to open a gym—which he later successfully accomplished—her parents relentlessly criticized the business plan. They questioned how he could make a living and support Claire. Essentially, they demeaned his entrepreneurial potential.

Another variable her parents used to justify their disapproval was family structure. Frank was an only child raised by a single mother and she died of cancer his freshman year in college. After she passed away, things became contentious with his extended
family and he discontinued contact with them. Claire’s parents questioned, “Seriously, he doesn’t have any family?” Her father went so far as to have her aunt who was married to a Black man call her and discuss their concerns. Her aunt insisted that it was not a Black thing [obviously], it was about family, “It’s all about your childhood and Frank doesn’t have family and how was he raised… I just don’t know if this is right for you.”

By basing their opposition on Frank’s business efforts and his family structure, Claire’s family is masking racial objections with seemingly non-racial concerns. Although their attempt to disguise racial opposition may be unintentional, both objections are illustrative of commonly held racial stereotypes and the social-structural reality for Blacks. The gap in socio-economic status between Blacks and whites is persistent (Schoen and Canudas-Romo 2005; Schoen and Cheng 2006; White and Rogers 2000). Blacks tend to be less educated, earn lower incomes, and experience lower levels of job security (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2007). And this reality is even more daunting for Black men (Krivo et al. 1998; Mauer 2000; Wilson 1987, 1996). Claire’s parents’ doubt in Frank’s ability to be a successful business owner and provider is representative of this notion that Blacks occupy a lower structural position and experience less occupational achievement. As well, Black children, compared to white children, are more likely to grow up in a single parent home (Farley & Allen 1987; Fields 2003; Ruggles 1994; Smith et al 1996). Claire’s parents focus on Frank’s lack family is insensitive to the number of Black children raised in single parent families. A strong indication that their concerns were race-specific is that both Claire and Frank expressed it was fairly clear to them that her parent’s opposition was essentially based on his race. The fact that her parents
(consciously or unconsciously) continued to express their apprehension in non-racial terms is indicative of the operation of color-blind ideology.

When Frank and Claire decided to get married, it was really important to her that Frank asked for her father’s blessing. Frustrated with her parents’ lack of support, Frank hesitantly complied. Frank shared, “So, I asked him…he says ‘no I’ll, we’ll never support you guys.’” Claire explained that her father claimed he feared that they would likely be discriminated against. Both Frank and Claire recalled her father’s explanation:

I don’t want that for my daughter…no parent wants their child to go to through these hardships and I don’t think it’s a good idea. Claire, I have been a volunteer, advocating for Blacks and education--and blah, blah, blah--and I have seen this and I think you are just setting, the two of you are setting yourself up for difficulty throughout your life, and I just don’t think it’s a good decision.

At this point, Claire’s father directly points to race as a concern about their union. Yet, he focuses that concern on external factors instead of his own racial beliefs. He also boosted that he has been supportive of Blacks’ rights and volunteered for the cause, as though that makes his objections less offensive. Claire’s parents’ actions are characteristic of color-blind reasoning.

Similar to both Kelly and Claire, Molly’s parents also communicated ambiguous opposition to interracial coupling. Molly remembered a conversation she and her father had when she was in high school about interracial dating. A friend of hers was dating a Black guy and her father expressed that he did not approve of the match. Molly asked if he disliked the guy on a personal level or if he disapproved because he was Black. Her father responded, “You know, I don’t think he is a good person…I don’t have a problem with, you know, you dating Black people, or, you know, somebody dating a Black person,
it's just I don’t think he is a good person." After that discussion, she was not fully convinced that race was not a factor for her father and got the feeling he did not want to express his discomfort directly. Molly was doubtful because she knew that her grandparents were against interracial coupling and she had received indirect innuendo from her parents that they held the same belief. In our conversation, Molly realized that she was probably pushing her father to admit or explain his position. She clarified that when she began dating Jerry, her mother was unabashed and more outright about her disapproval. Her mother expressed:

   Well maybe we should have stressed our opinions more when we talked about [your friends’ interracial relationships]. You know, maybe we just didn’t talk to you enough about that and give you our opinion on that…maybe we could have been more vocal.

For Molly there was a conflict between her color-blind upbringing and the varied messages she receive from her parents and grandparents. However, it was clear that her father was apprehensive to openly express his opposition in race-specific terms, which is in line with the normative expectations of color-blindism.

   One of the most common reasons used by family members to justify opposing interracial relationships is concern about the welfare of biracial children and the difficulties they may face (Childs 2005; Sullivan 2005). Often these concerns were verbalized by questions akin to “What about the children?” In some cases, the concerns for biracial offspring were expressed through vague associations to the struggles they may encounter. Molly explained that, from the beginning of her relationship with Jerry, her mother was more verbal about her discomfort than her father. She emphasized, “My
mom’s biggest thing has always been, the kids will suffer. That’s like her whole philosophy in interracial dating is the kids will suffer.”

Mary and Eddie recalled that once they decided to get married her parents were more forthcoming with their disapproval and their concerns became race specific. Her parents questioned how they would handle having biracial kids and argued that society will view their children differently. Eddie remembered being annoyed with her parents’ supposition. He argued back:

I don’t care what anyone would think about my kids, [I’ll] do what I can to raise them good and that’s all that matters. No matter what race you are, you’re going to have people who got a problem with you, so why should I not do what I want just to suffice society? I don’t care about society.

Mary’s father did not think that Eddie’s viewpoint was a good way to look at it and he felt Eddie and Mary needed to more carefully consider the consequence of having biracial children. They both disregarded her parents concerns and recognized that their fear was rooted in their disapproval of interracial marriage.

From Kelly’s recollection, her parents made very few explicitly racial comments. However, early on in her relationship with Derek she remembered that her mother did express concern about biracial children. Her mother asked, “Well, what about your children?” Kelly explained that her mother had fears about biracial children struggling with self-esteem and not fitting in:

She was teaching class [at a large state college] at that point in human development and she had maybe looked at some studies or something of biracial kids and had that concern, you know, on her mind…just that they wouldn’t fit in. Just about their self esteem about the difficulty in raising a child and like what culture do you raise them in?
At that time Kelly played down the question reassuring her mom that she was 20 years old and nowhere near having kids. Kelly did express that she felt her mother’s worry was very genuine and that if and when she had biracial children she would need to revisit those concerns.

Similar to Kelly, Cece grew up in predominately white upper-middle class suburbs and felt that her family did not have a lot of discussions about race. During the course of the interview, Cece remarked that in retrospect it seems as though there were some subtle messages about race. She remembered one occasion as a teenager when her family drove through a racially mixed neighborhood and her father commented about a mixed child they passed. Cece shared:

I don’t recall exactly, but I know that there was this little black kid and he had kind of like sandy colored hair, but he was kind of tan, he was probably mixed or his parents were mixed or whatever and I remember my dad making a comment and then it really bewildered me, because I was trying to figure it out, because he goes, “that poor kid doesn’t know what he is.

She assumed her father meant the kid “didn’t know whether he is black or he’s white” but claimed “I was just kind of puzzled about that.” She remarked that no more discussion or explanation was given. She also recalled her father making the statement that he was a bigot. She said, he just stated, “I admit it, I’m a bigot.” Yet again, she cannot remember any further dialogue or even to what that statement was pertaining.

Cece reflected that conceivably she internalized such instances and they influenced her interracial interaction. That incident in particular indicated to her that her father was not completely comfortable with or approving of race-mixing. Consequently, even though she was never told directly that she was not to date Black men, Cece certainly thought that it might be a problem for her parents. Therefore, when she started
dating Priest she did not tell her parents about him. When they moved in together, she kept a separate phone line to keep up the appearances that she was living alone. After dating Priest for more than two years, it was finally on a visit home to California that she told her mom about their relationship. Cece recalled, “I just said, ‘he’s Black’ and she goes, ‘Black, Black?’ I was kind of like, ‘yeah.’” Cece commented that she thought her mom was just taken back more than anything and that much like in her upbringing no real discussion followed.

With regard to specific cautions about raising biracial children, Cece remembered that the dentist she works for (whom she is close to like family) expressed genuine concerns about the problems that could arise with having biracial children. Cece explained, “I can remember talking to her and I think I was pregnant with Tammy [their first child], but I am not positive and she was like, ‘I have to tell you, you have a hard road to go. That will not be easy.’” Cece shared that her friend said things to her in a cautioning, somewhat judgmental way, but never directly said that she disagreed with race-mixing.

Growing up, Claire also did not receive direct messages about race or interracial coupling. Even so, similar to Cece, by reflecting back she was able to identify a number of subtle messages about race from her family. Her aunt was married to a Black doctor from Ghana and had two children. For Claire, simply having a Black uncle was symbolic of acceptance and openness on the part of her family concerning Black people and interracial relationships. Claire recalled that her family was close to her aunt, uncle and bi-racial cousins and they spent time together as a family. In the summers her cousins would come and stay for a few weeks. Claire was a figure skater and she remembered
that when they would go to the ice rink for practice her mother told her not to tell people that Desi was her cousin. Her mom claimed, “I don’t want people to know or think certain things.” Claire shared that at the time she probably understood her mother was embarrassed because her cousin was different. In retrospect, Claire recognizes that her mother was never really accepting of her aunt’s interracial marriage. These realizations are representative of the subtle cues in her upbringing that her parents did not approve of interracial relationships.

It is evident that Claire unconsciously internalized those messages because she was cautious about sharing her interracial relationships with her family and waited a while to tell her parents that Frank was Black. When she did finally tell her parents they immediately made reference to her bi-racial cousins and the difficulties they had growing up. Her parents argued, “We just have concerns about this, you know, your cousins grew up their entire life not knowing, were they black were they white, there are so many problems that come with this.” In that moment Claire placated their concerns by insisting that “we are just dating, I’m not marrying the guy.” Nonetheless, her parents wanted her to understand that biracial children can face a host of difficulties because of their mixed race status.

Color-blind ideology is operating among these women and their families. These families frequently used fears about the well-being of biracial children to explain their objection with interracial relationships. Although parents’ discomfort with interracial childbearing indicates that race is a factor for interracial unions, they defer to external

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11 Interestingly, all of these women (except Molly) are now married to their Black partners and express that they have good relationships with their families. This trend seems exemplify the operation of color-blind ideology and will be discussed more in the following chapter.
expectations and the problems biracial children may encounter outside of their family in the larger social world. By placing culpability on society, white families reiterate many aspects of color-blindism. They employ color-blind reasoning by deflecting from their own concerns and instead referring to societal demands. Most of these women maintain that their parents taught them to be accepting of everyone or offered almost no racial information. Either way these women tended to minimize or discount their parents’ racial concerns and operate from a color-blind framework. However, they still recognize race as a factor concerning their intimate relationships because in many cases they kept their partners race or details of the relationship from their parents. It’s as though they want to believe their parents actually are color-blind but they essentially know that is not the case.

Some families expressed their objections to interracial intimacy and childrearing in terms of cultural preservation and the notion that people should “stick with your own kind.” This position is connected to the notion that Black friends are acceptable but Black intimate partners are not. Social norms dictate that interracial interaction is expected, but it is also expected that intimate partners share similar characteristics and backgrounds. Therefore, racial homogamy is a normative standard. Given this norm, interracial couples represent a deviation from social expectations because racial heterogamy challenges the conventional racialized structure (Gadberry & Dodder 1993; Houts et al 1997; Kalmijn 1998; Knox et al 1998; Root 2001). However, these claims of cultural preservation are ethnocentric attempts on the part parents to comply with and defend the norm of homogamy. Even though race is clearly identified as a reason against
interracial coupling, their effort does not preclude race neutrality with regard to non-intimate cross-racial interactions.

Molly’s family has always been welcoming and supportive of her friendship with her best friend, Carla. As a result, Molly knew from an early age that her parents approved and were comfortable with friendships with Black people. However, she also received both indirect and direct messages from her family that they did not believe in cross-racial coupling. Molly’s grandparents openly expressed that she was not to date interracially. During the interview, Molly conveyed that a part of her felt as though her parents endorsed that position because of her grandparents’ adamancy. She thought that there was a possibility her parents’ disapproval was flexible and that if came to their own children they could be persuaded to support an interracial union. Despite that, in an effort to understand her grandparents’ opinion Molly remembers asking her grandmother why she was against interracial relationships. Her grandmother contended it is about the preservation of culture:

If we all mixed together we wouldn’t, like our cultures would be lost…you wouldn’t be able to have like the individuality of, you know, a white person or an African-American or a Chinese [person] and it would all just be meshed and you would lose that culture and the traditions and the sense of the persons’ ethnicity and background.

On the one hand, Molly recalled that in a way it made sense to her and it seemed that her grandmother’s intention was not fueled by prejudice. On the other hand, she felt confused by her grandmother’s explanation because her “great, great or maybe great, great, great grandfather married a Native American” and that seemed to be contradictory to her grandmothers’ position. Molly’s ability to relate with her grandmother’s assertion is indicative of color-blind thinking--in that way of “it’s natural” and fulfils the norm of
homogamy; Black people can preserve their individuality too. As well, she believed her
grandparents were comfortable with and supported her friendship with Carla—so the
proverbial “My best friend is Black”.

An interesting comparison surrounding beliefs about cultural preservation
surfaced during our interview about Molly and Jerry’s families’ beliefs about cultural
preservation. Jerry reflected on her grandmother’s beliefs as he discussed his racial
socialization and his mixed background. Jerry said he could sort of see where her
grandmother was coming from and thought “what her grandma said was interesting…the
cultural preservation that would come with not intermingling.” He explained further, “I
think that is interesting because…from my family’s perspective like, it’s the onus of the
parents to carry on, you know that tradition.” He went on to say that his family cooks
polish dishes and soul food from his grandmothers’ recipes, his mother collects various
cultural artifacts and that they have travel to all the places that represent his heritage
(except Africa). He remarked that these things are done in an effort to preserve his
family’s heritage, all parts of his heritage. Jerry explained:

With our family like we try to keep all of that as a predominant part of our life
like, you know, acknowledging all the cultures and really being privy to who we
are and where we come from…it’s really important for our family to preserve
whatever cultures that you know, make us.

Jerry’s family has accomplished exactly what Molly’s grandmother claimed she
feared would not happen as a result of race mixing. It's just that in Jerry’s family it is
multi-cultural preservation. Nevertheless, it is still about preserving and knowing who
you are and where you came from. Jerry’s heritage is mixed and multi-cultural but all
parts are given attention and preserved. Molly’s grandmother feared that individuality
would be lost, but Jerry’s family maintains their individuality, albeit multifaceted and
distinct. In essence both families advocate for cultural preservation; however, Molly’s
family believes in unicultural ethnocentric preservation while Jerry’s family promotes
their multi-cultural preservation.

Coraline and Lorenzo were best friends for ten years before they ever dated. When Coraline
announced to her family that she was marrying Lorenzo, her parents were
adamantly against the union and her mother insists that she did not believe in race-mixing.
Her mother argued that people should stick with their own kind. Coraline was blindsided
by her parents disapproval because she believed in the color-blind messages she was
taught growing up. She explained that through sports and work she had plenty of Black
friends and that was never an issue with her family. However, marrying a Black man was
completely unacceptable to her parents:

My mom said, not just because he’s Black he could have been Hispanic, he could
have been Japanese, Vietnamese, people should stay with their own, you should
stick with your own kind…whites should stay with whites, Blacks should stay
with Blacks, Chinese should stay with Chinese, and Indians should stay with
Indians…I just don’t think you should mix cultures and mix colors [or] ethnicities.

Coraline was baffled and argued back, “Mom we have Irish in us, a little bit of Italian,
very minute amount of Cherokee-Indian, no one is 100% pure. What are you talking
about?”

Color-blind ideology was articulated by Coraline and her family. Coraline
explained that her parents raised her with color-blind messages, they never had anything
negative to say about her Black friends, and they never gave her even an inkling of an
idea that they were against race mixing. When confronting racial matters, whites
typically engage in color-blind ideology because white privilege allows whites to
navigate the social world without having to really consider or think about race (McIntosh 1988; O’Brien 2001). It appears that her parents are operating from a color-blind framework. Coraline and I discussed that her parents may have been delivering messages of “the party line” in order to maintain the racial status quo; they wanted to be the good white folks that were accepting of Black people in work and even social interaction, but assumed they would never have to confront interracial marriage. When “race-mixing” threatened to encroach on their family, they were not having it.\textsuperscript{12} For Coraline, her claims to her family’s mixed heritage are a regurgitation and reification of the color-blind ideology she grew up believing---we are all everything, equal and the same. In a typical color-blind manner, white partners acknowledge racial and ethnic distinctions but do so by referencing the sameness of those distinctions. These claims purport that racial and ethnic distinctions are a connection among all of us and should not be used to divide us.

\textit{The Logic of Color-Blindness in Families.} In accordance with previous research, these Black families, compared to white families, were generally more accepting of interracial relationships (Childs 2002, 2005; Dalmage 2000; Frankenberg 1993; Rosenblatt et al 1995). Among Blacks, Black women are more likely to oppose interracial coupling than Black men (Heaton & Jacobson 2000; Kalmijn 1993, 1998; Qian 1997; Rosenblatt et al 1995). Although these couples experienced far less opposition from Black families, almost all of the resistance came from Black women, usually mothers. Nevertheless, in most cases objections were short-lived and easy to overcome.

\textsuperscript{12} Coraline had Cancer in her early 20s and is not able to have children. For her parents, race matters simply by crossing racial lines in marriage not even childbearing.
Color-blind logic operates among these men’s families as they navigate their son’s or relative’s interracial couplehood. In the following paragraphs, I draw attention to the operation of color-blind logic revealed as these Black families accept and welcome white partners even in the face of their own discomfort. Similar to the way Blacks convey their color-blind and cautionary messages, they expressed their concerns about interracial coupling in race-specific terms -- meaning, these men understood that their family’s issue with them partnering interracially was based on race. Even if the families have problems with interracial coupling or prefer same-race coupling, these men were never told they could not date white women. And, their families tended to be welcoming and open to the relationship. The Black families’ generous acceptance of white partners illustrates color-blind logic. In keeping with a color-blind framework, these Blacks use reasoned judgment and accept the white partner and their relationship. In the cases where mothers maintain their opposition, their sons use color-blind logic and offer racial neutral justifications for their mother’s disapproval.

Davante was raised in a predominately white neighborhood and attended a multicultural church. As a result, his interracial interaction started at a young age. However, he did not begin dating seriously until college. Although Davante recalled being interested in white women during adolescence, he did not date interracially until after college. In fact, he was with one girlfriend for the entire four years of college and she was a Black woman. He recalled, “I really didn’t socialize with whites when I was in college.”

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13 Davante attended a large state university. At his school they created the African-American Living and Learning Center in an effort to keep the small number of Blacks from fading into the woodwork and
When it came to intimate relationships, Davante shared that both of his parents are very protective of him and always had high expectation of any women he dated, especially concerning education. Davante felt that both his parents encouraged color-blind reasoning but that they expressed those messages somewhat differently. His father had a tendency to be direct and upfront and offer cautionary messages in connection with his race-neutral lessons. Davante described his mother as a little softer, less cautious and more open-minded. He even remembered that many of her closest friends were white. Nevertheless, when Davante became interested in girls and dating, he felt as though his mom was a bit bothered by his interest in dating white girls:

When I started dating and was interested in girls a lot of them where white and I don’t think that she was that comfortable with that at first…I think it kind of hurt her a little bit because she’s Black and I am her son and we have a very close relationship and although she has raised me…to be color-blind so to speak, it kind of bothered her a little bit. But I mean she’s gotten…I think she’s gotten over that.

Davante explained that his mother did not express her discomfort directly and never actually said that he should not or could not date white girls. Instead, he assumed she wanted him to keep an open mind and not develop a preference or propensity for white women. He claimed, “It’s not that she was saying anything but she was like “Well, she’s a white girl…haven’t you, like looked [or considered Black] girls?”

Among the men in this study, Davante was the only one who received objections about his interracial relationships from his father. Before dating Tracey, Davante only brought one white woman home to meet his parents. He described that meeting as
uncomfortable and said his father was a bit stand-offish, nice but distant. He understood that his father was not comfortable with him dating interracially:

He was just raised okay, you’re nice to people but you just don’t -- you don’t date outside your race. And he would…tell me, your grandmother, she would have never allowed us to do it but she wouldn’t have said anything to you guys because she understands it’s generational. But she would have never allowed us to do it.

This reserved, standoffish behavior resumed when Davante and Tracey were dating and it was uncomfortable for both of them. Davante said that it was clear:

My father had a little bit of an issues with it, and he wouldn’t say anything but like just his mannerisms and his actions you can tell, he is very standoffish, almost where he made -- well he did-- it made everyone uncomfortable because he just was not for it.

Even though his father never said anything directly, Tracey and Davante felt his disapproval and it was a recurrent source of arguments between them. After a while, Davante decided he needed to talk to his father but his stepmother beat him to the punch. She had noticed Davante’s father’s demeanor and pointed it out, telling him he was not acting right. His stepmother initiated the conversation between Davante and his father. In that discussion Davante said, “you know if I decided that I am going to be with her and you’re my dad…that isn’t going to change. So we need to figure how this is going to work.” Davante said his father immediately replied, “You don’t have to worry about that ever again. He said because I’m your father and I love you and if you are happy… that’s all that matters to me.” Since that moment, both Tracey and Davante express that there has not been an issue and that she and his father are very close. Tracey reiterated, “We’re like best buddies now.” Davante remarked:

And that’s how my parents are. I mean you treat people how you want to be treated…once he realized that I was going to fight it out and stay with her, then he
was going to support me and have my back and make sure that she understands that she has his support as well and my mom has just been awesome from day one - once she got over the fact that I date white girls.

Davante’s parents taught him to be color-blind but cautious. In the end, that is exactly how they operated. Both his mother and father exercise color-blind logic by teaching Davante to be color-blind in interracial interaction and encouraging him to seek out that interaction. They help him understand that the same rules that apply to whites folks do no apply to him and to expect that as a part of interracial interaction. Finally, they are utilizing color-blind logic by overcoming their own concerns about interracial intimacy and welcoming a white person into their family. It is as though the greater level of acceptance of interracial couples among Black families is an outcome of color-blind expectations.

Derek and Kelly dealt with a good bit of family opposition to their relationship. Recall, Kelly’s family offered all sorts of reasons they were not in support of her relationships with Derek. One of the underlying concerns was whether or not she would be accepted by his family. Kelly admits that this was also a real concern for her because when she first began dating Derek, he told her that his parents would not accept an interracial relationship. Kelly remembered, “Every three months things will [would] be going well and then he would be like I can’t do this…he would say because his parents wouldn’t accept it, like it wouldn’t be okay with his family.” Kelly claimed that all through college she was petrified of his parents and scared that they would not accept their relationship.

I then asked Derek if what he told Kelly accurately expressed what his parents had led him to believe. Derek began by explaining that he did not date at all in high
school because he was focused on his studies and basketball. Therefore, he had very little experience and knowledge about dating. He did mention that when the subject of girls came up he was teased by his mom and sisters. In addition to his inexperience with relationships, Derek had very little interracial interaction. The only real communication he had with white people was what he heard his family say about whites. He explained that because of the way his family spoke about their interactions with white people, he got the impression that they were not supportive of crossing racial lines in intimate relationships. The strongest memory Derek has is of his mother complaining and speaking disparagingly about her white employers. He clarified, “So I would think well if she is thinking that about her boss or whatever, she probably would think that about of her [Kelly], so I probably was a little afraid to even mention it.” Without ever asking her directly, Derek believed that his mother would not support him dating interracially:

I would think okay, if I am dating somebody and she is white, then I think well maybe she [his mom] is really going to [disapprove] and I haven’t even really had a conversation with her, I am just assuming that she probably wouldn’t [approve]. Now that I think about it, it was probably silly to even just assume something like that, but I guess that’s the way I thought and I hadn’t even, you know, had a conversation or even mentioned it.

Both Derek and Kelly feel as though once they stopped assuming the worst and just were together that his family has been very welcoming and open to Kelly and their relationship. Kelly shared a story to reaffirm his parent’s acceptance:

I mean over Christmas it was funny because we got there and his mom wasn’t there and so, I am like making lasagna for them for the next day in her kitchen and I’m like...all this is crazy to me because I never would have thought, you know, back in college that I would be in this women’s kitchen, making food without her, she comes home and she’s like, well hi daughter-in-law.
Derek’s perception and expectation that his mother would disapprove of interracial coupling is indicative of his racial socialization. He was taught that he need to work twice as hard as whites and still might not achieve comparable success. However, his parents’ ability to accept and welcome Kelly despite their experience with white people illustrates the significant power of the dominant racial ideology. Blacks are expected to acquiesce to whites even in their personal family lives.

Similar to Davante and Derek, TJ also understood that his family, especially his sister, did not exactly support the notion of him dating interracially. TJ knew she had a problem with race because when they lived in a predominately white community she was treated very poorly by white people. Growing up, white girls in particular picked on her and made fun of her in school. His sister remains sensitive about those experiences and as a result is guarded with white people. TJ clarified, “When it came to me she never put those values on me…it was never like a problem to where she was like oh, I don’t want to be around them [his white friends], it was just kind of like I guess she was just more cautious.” However, he does recognize, “My sister doesn’t have a problem with me dating white women, but I know honestly if she had to choose that might not be the first choice, because of her experiences.”

TJ shared that once he knew he was really serious about Kiki he wanted her to meet his mother and sister. He explained, “In previous relationships, even girls that met my family it wasn’t like, it was to meet the family not you're a part of the family.” Before he introduced them to Kiki he expressed to his mother and sister how important Kiki was to him:
So, I was like well you know she is a part of my family, so you guys got to kind of accept it…[I] put it out there…[I told them] it wasn’t their decision like you could not like this, its still going to happen.

Before the meeting TJ told Kiki that his mom was going to love her but warned, “My sister might not like you, just because you’re a white girl.” Kiki was very understanding and prepared for the possibility of tension but recalled, “There may have been some of that underlying, but it wasn’t ever like, I never walked into any situation and felt like I was being judged or, that they didn’t like me, I never felt uncomfortable.”

The simple fact that all three of these families willingly, using situational reasoning, opened their hearts and family to a white partner after already having experienced or felt discomfort with those unions is symbolic of color-blindism. They adopt the framework’s expectations and in the spirit of “race does not matter” Black families comply with the racial status quo. In comparison to white families, color-blind logic operates in relationship to white privilege. Whites can disapprove of interracial coupling and maintain that disapproval for various racial or non-racial reasons. However, Blacks are required to espouse color-blind principles and thus, be accepting and open to whites.

C.E. grew up in New York City during the Civil Rights Movement and felt as though his parents made a concerted effort to expose their family to everything possible. He remembers being in picket lines as a part of civil rights protests, going to Broadway show, camping outside of the city and even taking swimming lessons at the Jewish community center. From C.E.’s perspective, “I was exposed to really almost every kind of culture.” He distinctly remembers that his parents taught him, “You really have the same rights to do whatever anybody else has the rights to do. We all ought to be treated
the same.” Even with these color-blind messages and experiences, C.E. felt like he was supposed to date Black women and not to date interracially. He shared, “It was just like an expectation I guess and I don’t remember anybody ever saying anything to me directly about that but… I kind of felt that’s what I’m supposed to do.” C.E. did not date much in high school but ended up going to an all Black college partly because of the pressure he felt to date Black women.

The expectation that he was to intimately partner with Black women stuck with him through a large part of his adult life. His first marriage was to a bi-racial woman whom he thought was Black until she told him she was biracial. After they divorced, he explained, “I was looking for another substantial relationship… So, I joined a dating club… specifically so I could find a person of color.” However, after C.E. and Martha went on their first date there was no turning back because they were both in love. They describe the experience:

(C): That was the first time in my life I felt like this is what love is. I was so like hyped, I couldn’t sleep that night. It was really -- it was quite an incredible feeling. There was nothing I had ever had in life to compare to it.

(M): We both felt it separately.

(C): I didn’t know… yeah, didn’t know how she felt.

(M): And I didn’t know how he felt and we both had it separately… He sent me flowers and then I kind of knew what he was thinking because he wrote a nice little card, which I’m sure I still have upstairs and then we went out on our second date. This is two weeks after the first date and on the second date, he asked me to marry him and I said, “Yes” because we just knew.

After C.E. and Martha began dating his mother became resistant to their relationship. C.E. claimed his mother never directly stated that she was against him marrying a white woman, but that she certainly caused problems and tried to discourage
his relationship with Martha. At the time, he attributed her nonverbal communication to her having an issue with him marrying a white woman. For example, after Martha had moved in and they had decided to marry, his mother came for a visit. During that visit, she brought with her six or seven women from her women’s support group all of which were Black, single, educated, and C.E.’s age or younger. Both C.E. and Martha recalled it was as though she rounded up New York’s finest eligible Black women and brought them with her. C.E. recalls, “So, my mother comes with a bevy of eligible bachelorettes to spend -- to stay at my house -- with my new fiancée.” And Martha chimed in, “Camping out, in their sleeping bags, presented. I’m just laughing to myself thinking, what the hell are you doing? Because obviously, it’s very obvious what she was doing…you are not going to marry this white farm girl from [a Midwest state].” To which C.E. commented, “Yeah, the white part, I don’t think was the biggest part of it. I think she just viewed you as not being New York sophisticated.”

Lorenzo and Coraline have experienced disapproval and a lack of support for their relationship from her parents as well as his mother. Lorenzo’s parents taught him to respect everyone and treat all people equally, regardless of race. He grew up in a very mixed environment and from a young age he interacted with many different races. Lorenzo dated Black women and white women and was previously married to a biracial women. When I asked Coraline if she was close with Lorenzo’s family she said, “Not his mother…Her mother [Lorenzo’s grandmother] loves me to death, her sister and brother, his aunt and uncle love me, and everybody loves me but her. I think it has something to do with his ex wife.”
Lorenzo explains that his mother associates the break up of her marriage to his father with his marriage to his ex-wife, whom she maintains a close friendship with. Specifically, his mother claims that the lady his father married after he left, broke up her marriage and she believes that Coraline did the same thing to Lorenzo’s first marriage. Lorenzo is baffled by his mother’s behavior. He affirms, “It’s astounding. It’s not a race issue because she has -- some of her best friends are white, she dated white guys in school back when she wasn’t supposed to. It’s just she can’t get past it.” Coraline disagreed and reminded Lorenzo, “No but your ex-wife also [was] saying negative stuff to her like, the white whore, calling me the home wrecking white whore, so that’s what I was.” In response to his mother’s hateful attitude, Lorenzo defends Coraline and their relationship:

You need to know that your son is being taken care of, he has a good woman, and he has a great beautiful wife. You don’t have to worry about me. You never had to before but rest assured that I have someone who loves me, who is a great person.

Interestingly, both C.E. and Lorenzo were brought up in very diverse and multicultural atmospheres and were taught to be color-blind. However, they both experienced disapproval and objections to their interracial marriages from the same parents that taught them color-blind lessons. C.E. and Lorenzo both respond to their mothers’ opposition using color-blind logic. They diminish race as a factor for their disapproval and instead argue there are other reasons their mothers do not support the relationships. In either case, race is clearly a significant aspect to their mother’s oppositional positions.
Individual Reactions

Given the norm of homogamy, crossing racial lines in families has historically been discouraged and remains the most controversial form of heterogamy (Gadberry & Dodder 1993; Houts et al 1997; Kalmijn 1998; Knox et al 1998; Root 2001; Surra 1990). Black-white unions typically confront the most problems with the relationships closest to them and receive the strongest opposition from families (Childs 2005; Dalmage 2000). However, Black families tend to be more supportive and accepting of interracial unions than white families (Childs 2002; Dalmage 2000; Frankenberg 1993; Rosenblatt et al 1995). The couples in this study experienced negative reactions and diminished social support from their families, especially their parents. In agreement with the research, Black families were less oppositional than white families. This opposition from those people closest to the couples can cause issues with their relationship, their families and their interactions with the outside world (Dalmage 2000; McNamara et al 1999; Rosenblatt et al 1995). In this section, I discuss some of the ways that these couples handle their families’ opposition.

In order to understand these partners’ individual responses to their families’ lack of support and acceptance, I review their efforts to counter family resistance. I begin by discussing their use of race-neutral assertions and claims of not distinguishing race within the intimate interracial context. I first explain the responses of the white partners and then share the reactions of Black partners. Then, I detail the articulation of self-verification and self-reinforcement by white partners through their resolution to continue their interracial relationships. As well, I discuss the use of color-blind logic by Black partners to rationalize disapproval and prejudicial behavior.
“Love Sees No Color!” In reaction to their families’ disapproval and in an effort to manage their interracial status, many of the partners in these unions offered race-neutral declarations about their partners. Color-blind ideology operates through individual partner’s claims of “not seeing color” within the intimate interracial context. This manifests in two specific ways among these couples. First, in defense of their Black partners, whites often demonstrate color-blind ideology by questioning why race and color matter. As an alternative, these women argue for the strengths and good qualities of the person they love. Second, within their intimate relationships, whites claim they do not even think of their partner as Black. For the Black partners, color-blind logic was embedded in claims that it’s a “women thing”---the notion that they love all women and do not make choices about women they become involved with based on race.

Regardless of color-blind messages or communication of obvious disapproval in their upbringing, many women confronted objections to their interracial relationships from their parents. This resistance was often expressed with a simple question, “Why a Black man?” Molly explained that in various discussions over many months her mother kept questioning why, why, why? She persistently made her condemnation all about skin color. Molly remembered being frustrated by the endless questioning and feeling like it was all just ridiculous because she was so happy with Jerry. He was so good to her. In defense of Jerry, Molly repeatedly responded to her mother, “He’s not a Black man…he’s a great guy that I love and I care about.”

Tracey was previously married to a white man who treated her terribly. After they divorced, she began dating Black men. She remarked that before she dated outside of her race for the first time she thought, “I don’t know how comfortable I am with
this…it was just kind of unknown to me…interracial dating…I’ve never done this.” But, then she asked herself, “Why would I pass up this nice man? I was with [a] white man who mistreated me. Why pass up someone because of their race, their skin color, when I could be passing up a really wonderful person?” After Tracey began dating Black men, her mother continually expressed her discomfort. Tracey pointed out to her mother, “you know I was married to a white man who did this to me [i.e., hurt and mistreated]…So why would I not date a nice man? He is a man and that’s what I kept driving at her, he’s a man, him being black is just a side note.”

Coraline recalled that after she announced her engagement to Lorenzo she was blindsided by her parents’ disapproval. It was upsetting for her that her parents had such a prejudicial position after raising her to believe all people are equal and should treated as such. Coraline was especially hurt by her father’s resistance. He was her role model and the person she looked up to most. In defense of Lorenzo she argued:

This guy treats me like a queen, no one has ever treated me, accepted me for the way I am, not judged me for anything I have ever done and he knows everything I’ve done, and that [has] happened. He’s never judged me, not once and you’re going to say something about color of the skin…What does Lorenzo’s color have to do with it?

After three months of not talking to her parents, Coraline confronted her father and affirmed, “You know Lorenzo is my best friend. I’ve told you everything about him. What does it matter what the color of his skin is?”

There is a fascinating juxtaposition of color-blind ideology and obvious color-conscious objection playing out between these women and their parents. It is clear that all three of these women love their partners and want to continue their relationships. It is also apparent that their parents’ disapproval is race-specific. Each woman was racially
socialized in different ways. Tracey was told directly that she was not to date outside of her race so her mother’s objection was somewhat expected. Both Molly and Coraline were given color-blind messages from their parents through religious faith. Even with those color-blind influences, Molly had some clear indications that her family did not support interracial coupling. Coraline was very hurt by her parents’ disapproval because she truly believed that race was a non-issue for her family in platonic and romantic relationships. All three of these women’s parents at some point explain their preoccupation with race-mixing by referencing that they were not raised to date outside of their race. This clarification illustrates the significant impact racial ideology has on the messages that are given during racial socialization. These women’s parents were raised that race mixing is not acceptable. Yet, they raised their children in accordance with the prevailing color-blind ideology, teaching them “race does not matter” in terms of social interaction. When actually in terms of intimate interaction, for these parents race does matter.

The women in this study had the tendency to discount race and reinforce color-blind notions of “not seeing color,” when their families construct race as a problem. In defense of their relationships, these women minimized their partners’ race and operated from a “color does not matter” perspective, which exemplifies the blatant operation of color-blind ideology. Claims that race does not matter, in part, diminishes who these men are and the centrality of race in shaping their experiences. This pattern is somewhat ironic, given the most usual retort to parental objections to dating Blacks: that it is the person who matters—obviously, ignoring the importance of race to their partners identity. Moreover, if these women were in relationships with white men they would not have to
defend his personhood, nor would they have to discount his race. In short, these white women are not required to acknowledge or think about whiteness, but they also do not have to minimize or discount it. Conversely, color-blind thinking endorses overlooking Blackness in order to accept interracial relationships, which represent the power of the social construction of race.

Not only do whites defend their partners and relationships in non-racial terms, but they also demonstrate color-blind ideas when they think about their Black partners. Claire, a 35 year old executive salesperson, is married to Frank. She recalled that the first time she saw Frank, she thought, “That’s a strikingly good looking Black guy.” Having never dated outside of her race, Claire recalled that her thought was specific to him being a good looking Black man, not just a good looking man. Then, as they grew closer, she expressed that she no longer viewed him as Black because she purely saw him as the man she loved. She explained, “It was the initial first instance of, that’s a good looking black guy, but I think after that year, I didn’t even view him as Black…the color thing goes away, it’s Frank.”

Coraline remarked that in all her years of friendship with Lorenzo even before their relationship she did not view him in terms of race. She shared, “I never saw him as black, ever. Even knowing he is black, he was just my friend and my best friend. I never looked at the color of his skin.” Martha also maintained that she never considered C.E.’s race. She stated, “I never even gave it a thought…I just thought, wow, a nice guy and we can talk. He is well educated. He is super smart, funny…all the things I have been looking for all this time. So, I was more interested in that stuff.” And Dee claimed,
while she acknowledges that Bo is Black, she simply sees him as her husband and the person she loves. She succinctly stated, “Yeah, I don’t see Bo as…Black.”

From a color-blind perspective, these women are oblivious to the impact that their non-racial classifications may have. They view their connection as superseding race and racial distinctions. For these women, the relationships are personal and their significant others are extremely special to them. However, neglecting to view their partners as Black disregards a significant part of their partner’s experience. It also ignores the structural disadvantage associated with their partners’ minority status. As these women claim that they view their partners in non-racial terms, they demonstrate the macro-level operation of color-blind justifications and potentially facilitate the perpetuation of racial privilege.

In general, Blacks cannot typically navigate the social world without considering race, so in their interracial relationships their color-blind views manifest in different ways than their white partners’. Blacks do not make claims that they do not see their intimate partner as “white,” but rather they make color-blind choices about with whom they become intimately involved. These men tend to disregard race as a criteria for dating and concentrate on other factors like common interests and value compatibility.

Davante maintained that he did not choose the women he dated based on race. He explained, “No it wasn’t that thought out, I just like women. I mean if you are attractive, you’re educated, you have that certain core.” Davante shared that previous relationships did not work out because they did not share core values. Priest expressed that before marrying Cece, he had dated women from many different racial and ethnic backgrounds—Black, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander. He commented that dating same-race or interracial was “absolutely not” a conscious decision and that race was not a
determinate of his relationships. Instead, he simply attributed his dating patterns to happenstance -- whom he happened to meet and shared interests. Finally, TJ claimed that when it comes to women and dating, he looks for a “mindset” and that race is not a factor:

I date women…I mean pretty much that was my motto, growing up I have always liked women- pretty [women], oh, you are white its okay…I went for more of a mindset of a girl. So all the women I was dating had pretty much the same mindset, so that took the racial issue out of it…for me it was a mindset. They were family oriented, intelligent, very strong women because that’s what raised me were intelligent, strong women, so that’s kind of what I was attracted to. The color never was it…it was, she is smart, she is cute, I like her- criteria met.

These men employ color-blind reasoning by diminishing the significance of race as a factor in coupling. They all claim that race was not one of the important criteria for choosing intimate partners. Presumably, Blacks can make partnering choices without making race a deciding factor. However, these men do not negate race as an existing component in their relationship. Even though they utilize color-blind logic in mate selection, because they are Black they are still aware of their partner’s race and their interracial status as a couple.

**Privilege and Logic in a Color-Blind Defense.** Despite obvious resistance, why would these women insist on interracial relationships? It seems that two key factors contribute to their resolve: 1) their color-blind socialization and their fascination with difference have been internalized into the self and 2) in order to counter opposition these women self-verify and self-reinforce. Our self-concept can be understood as---thoughts and feelings about the self that are derived from past experiences and interactions with others (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934). We all have an investment in our self-concept and are motivated to maintain self-consistency; therefore we engage in self-verification and self-reinforcement (Swann, Hixon & De La Ronde 1992). Self-verification is confirmation of
our self-concept from others, which occurs through self-confirming feedback from others and processing that feedback. We tend to behave in ways so that others will see us as we see ourselves in order to verify our self-concept (DeLamater and Myers 2007; Swann, Hixon & De La Ronde 1992). Self-reinforcement is an individual’s use of internalized standards to judge their own behavior and reward the self (Bandura 1971, 1982; DeLamater and Myers 2007).

Whites communicate self-verification and self-reinforcement through their unyielding determination to pursue and maintain interracial contact, regardless of family disapproval. Sometimes these women are blindsided, confused, and hurt by their families’ lack of support, but still are committed to their interracial relationships because it is salient to their self-concept. Despite pressure from others—including family members and societal expectations—that these women should not engage in these interactions, their self-concept is reinforced and verifies that interracial contact is completely acceptable. As well, continuing their intimate interracial relationships is consistent with what they have internalized about the self. In reaction to their parents’ disapproval, these women articulate self-verification and self-reinforcement by defending their position on interracial relationships and expressing their devastation concerning their parents’ discriminatory racial attitudes.

Molly’s sensitivity to difference is closely tied to her self-concept. Even when people challenge her, she has always stood for what she believes in because those beliefs define her. She insisted, “I have always taken [a] stand with my parents, I will never, I mean I don’t think I would ever go against that, because that is who I am.” When Molly and Jerry got together her mother questioned the relationship and was not supportive of
her daughter being with a Black man. Basically, her mother wanted her to end the relationship. In defense of Jerry and their relationship Molly explained:

I would just battle back and be like, Mom, if you want me to end this you will ruin everything that I stand for. Or I would say, that goes against everything that I stand for and who I am as a person. And I’m like, and part of that is you and dad, you raised me. So, I can do that and be miserable if that’s what you really want but that’s not what I want. And so we would just go back and forth [in the interview she began crying].

Tracey also expressed self-verification and reinforcement in reaction to her mother’s disapproval. She recalled that her mom was “not pleased” that she was dating Black men but continually chalked it up to “a phase.” Her mother was taught that she was not to date outside of her race. As a result, she was extremely uncomfortable with Tracey’s decision to date Black men. In an effort to manage her discomfort and minimize her disbelief, Tracey’s mom repeatedly claimed, “I just think you’re going through a phase.” Tracy found her mother’s assumption condescending and confronted her on many occasions. She argued, “Don’t belittle me by saying I’m choosing to date outside of my race [and have potential relationships] as a phase.” For Tracey, her mother’s conjecture was offensive and it demeaned her relationships.

Mary, who dated Black men in high school, always felt the disapproval of her parents. For Mary, the race messages she received were based on socio-economic status. She revealed that her parents would insist, “You need upper class, highest class that you could possibly be associated with in order to make it.” It was clear to Mary that this applied to the men with whom she was involved. Though her parents insisted their stance was not about race they told her, “whether it’s a white person or a black person, if they’re not…you can’t go below this class.” When she and Eddie got together, Mary remembers
being apprehensive about getting serious. She thought, not only is Eddie a Black man but his background and socio-economic status also did not meet her parents’ standards. She was very concerned about their reaction:

I was still so worried about, I was really, really, really worried about…my mom and dad would flash through my head every single time and I basically told myself that…I said, I’m either going to run with this and just go and do my thing or else…I’m going to be miserable my whole life.

Until Eddie, Mary had allowed her parents to control her choices and stifle her wishes. She had constantly made decisions based on their pressures and not her values. Mary expressed that this was a turning point for her. She finally decided to choose her self and do what was most salient to her. Therefore, even in the face of their disapproval she decided to be with Eddie.

Even though Molly, Tracey and Mary had different experiences and were taught different messages by their families, each woman felt that maintaining her interracial relationship was most in agreement with self values. It is clear that their relationships are cherished and essential to their self-concept. In the face of their parents’ prejudicial standards and judgments, these women self-verify and reinforce the importance of the interracial interaction. However, they did so in a color-blind manner. They often countered their parents oppositions by diminishing their partners Black racial identity with claims like “he’s not a Black man…he’s a great guy,” and arguing that ending their interracial relationship is inconsistent with their values. Nevertheless, these women defend their interracial relationship by discounting race. It seems a contradiction to fight for the acceptance of your interracial union, but not for recognition of your partner’s Blackness. A non-racial defense of a racialized relationship does not confront these
families’ racialized objections. Furthermore, race neutral arguments do not challenge the racial status quo or advocate for racial consciousness beyond the individual relationship. Instead, it reiterates their parents’ personification of color-blind ideology and reifies the racial order. These women maintain a color-blind position through their race-neutral insistence to continue these relationships and in the expectation of color-blind reasoning from their families.

Some women expressed their sadness and anger resulting from their parents’ resistance and disapproval about their interracial relationships. This frustration stemmed from the realization that their parents were prejudiced. Some women were aware of the disapproval but believed in their parents and thought that they would come around. Other women were unaware of their parents’ opposition. For instance, Molly and Claire both had at least some idea that their parents were not supportive of interracial coupling but believed that if it came down to it, they would have their parents support. Conversely, Coraline was completely blindsided and shocked by her parents’ lack of support because she had no idea that her parents believed it was “wrong” to marry a Black man.

Although Molly knew her parents did not approve of interracial relationships, she was genuinely surprised when her parents maintained their opposition after she began her relationship with Jerry. She expected that because of the kind of people they are -- good, moral, church-going folks who taught her to treat everyone fairly -- they would offer support to their daughter and acceptance to the man she loved. She stated, “I never thought that my own parents…if it came to the heart and it was one of their own children that they would take that opinion, they would take that road.” Molly internalized her color-blind upbringing and attraction to difference as the most salient part of her. As a
result, she truly struggled with her parents’ disapproval because it seemed contradictory to who she thought they were and who she knew herself to be.

Claire had similar feelings and she also struggled with her parents’ opposition. She recalled that growing up she probably did get signals from her parents that they did not approve of interracial coupling. However, she considered them fairly liberal and open-minded so she expected their advocacy. She explained, “For the most part, I felt as though my parents were accepting of Blacks and minorities and would support all of that [interracial coupling], I mean in a very democratic and liberal way.” For Claire, part of her self-concept was attached to what she believed about her parents and how that reflected a part of her. Claire was baffled and angered by her parents’ disapproval. She questioned how they could view her relationship in that way and not see the Frank that she sees. She hoped that they would open themselves up to see beyond the color of Frank’s skin and just see him. In essence, her expectation was color-blind.

For both of these women, their internalization of color-blind messages and an interest in diversity translated into color-blind expectations of their parents. These women were resolute in their decision to be in an interracial relationship despite the opposition they may experience. Even though both women knew their parents opposed interracial coupling, they still had faith that their parents would live up to who they believed them to be. They expected their parents to offer their acceptance and support. When that was not the case, both Molly and Claire felt their parents’ position was inconsistent with whom they believed their parents to be and their own self-concept.

Coraline was brought up with the values of her church. She was taught that all people are equal and believed that her parents embodied those values. They knew that
she and Lorenzo had been best friends for 10 years. However, they never said anything
to her about his race or their position on interracial relationships. When her parents
reacted negatively and were not supportive after she announced she was going to marry
Lorenzo, Coraline was completely stunned and devastated. She explained that their
disapproval, “Totally blindsided me after the way I was raised. I was never taught
anything about being prejudiced; accept everybody for who they are, there’s no
difference.” Coraline did not speak to her parents for almost three months. When she
finally did speak them she asked:

How could you never tell me growing up that deep down inside, you really had
these emotions or really felt this way about people because you never ever -- ever
taught me that? How could you all of a sudden just turn around and say this now
-- you want to say it now?

For Coraline, the realization that her parents were racist devastated her self-
concept. A significant part of her self-concept and who she understood her parents to be
was based on the values they taught -- that all people are equal and should be treated that
way. Still, her internalization of those messages made her believe that interracial
relationships were acceptable. Although she felt a bit broken by her parents’ resistance,
Coraline’s conviction about her relationship with Lorenzo was most consistent with her
self-concept. This self-reinforcement ensured that she would marry Lorenzo, defend him
and their relationship to her parents.

Color-blind reasoning is operating in two ways. First, the delivery and
internalization of the “accept everyone” message is the embodiment of color-blindism.
The confidence Coraline had that her relationships with Lorenzo would be perfectly
acceptable in her family is indicative of the blind faith associated with color-blind
reasoning. Although her family engaged in very little interracial contact and there were no interracial relationships among them, Coraline believed that their “accept everyone” message somehow translated into accepting her interracial marriage. Second, Coraline’s shock at her parents’ prejudice, as well as her adamancy about her relationship, demonstrates the subtle operation of color-blind ideology. Color-blind ideology is operating subtly because despite evidence that race is an issue for her parents, she still expects race to be ignored and her relationship to be accepted.

Blacks also articulate color-blindism through their reactions to the opposition and apprehension toward their interracial relationships. In contrast to white partners’ adamancy, Blacks attempt to placate objections and alleviate drama. In order to manage their interracial status, Blacks pacify injustice and validate their behavior and/or the behavior of others using color-blind rationale. These Black partners use color-blind logic to rationalize aversions to their relationships from their white partners’ family. They also have a tendency to employ color-blind practices in order to navigate their relationships with their partners’ families.

TJ recalled his mother’s apprehension about her son meeting Kiki’s father for the first time. She was generally nervous and concerned because of her various offensive experiences with white people. She wanted to caution her son and prepare him for the possibility of an unpleasant reaction from Kiki’s father. TJ kind of understood his mother’s concerns. He agreed that the meeting might be a little difficult because Kiki was recently married to a Black man who did not treat her right. However, from his perspective he had more positive exposure to white people and assumed the first meeting would go well. Using color-blind logic TJ remarked,
I never had anything really bad with race… you know I have been called nigger before…it always seemed funny like…to me, really a sign of ignorance.

I have never had bad experiences, like I said, I have been called the “N” word, I have been discriminated against, but it was more of an ignorant thing to me. I knew her parents were good, because she was.

TJ’s supposition is based on his claims that he has not had a bad racial experience with white people. However, he details previous experiences of prejudicial discrimination but rationalizes those as ignorance. His reconciliation of those acts of discrimination is evidence of color-blind logic. TJ’s utilization of color-blind logic is further exemplified by his confidence that Kiki’s father would be accepting of him.

When Jerry and Molly began dating she was apprehensive to share with Jerry her parents’ discomfort about interracial coupling. When she finally did, Jerry’s initial response was anger and frustration. In previous interracial relationships, he had not confronted disapproval. He was upset that they would not support Molly and had difficulty understanding how people could still think that way:

I was angry about the situation because I hadn’t really dealt with any…I dated all these white women and now I’m 25 fucking years old and I’ve got to deal with this shit. Like I didn’t really think it was still out there, but it is.

After the initial anger settled, Jerry handled the situation with Molly’s parents with understanding and patience. Although he was still frustrated, he felt that because he loved Molly he needed to stick it out and allow her parents to see him, for who he really was, not the stereotypes they may attribute to him. He detailed:

I knew that there was an issue with her parents about my race and, you know, it was hard for me…I guess I understood why, them being from...the top of Michigan, no black people up there and no diversity, no culture like that, I don’t mean no culture but, you know, what I mean. I understood why it was, but did I accept it? No. And, I wished it was different…but I think it was because I cared about her, I wanted to overcome my…my anger about that issue and, you know,
show my love to her and be in that situation and prove to them that I wasn’t what perhaps they thought the average, you know, the average scary black man was.

From Jerry’s perspective, racism comes from ignorance and a lack of experiential education with regard to different cultures. He recognized that he was fortunate to come from a family that emphasized travel and exploring other cultures. His family encouraged him to learn about how other people live and to view life through their realities. Jerry also recognized that not all people have those opportunities. He expressed that in some cases knowledge and experience could invalidate ignorance. Therefore, he tried to be more sympathetic and tolerant with her parents.

In the beginning of their courtship, Molly and her mother frequently discussed and even argued about her disapproval of Jerry and the relationship. However, Molly’s dad was less vocal and often deferred to her mother. Jerry offered an interesting point of view about her father’s lack of vocalization concerning his anxiety about their relationship:

He might have had a discomfort with it but knew what he would sound like vocalizing that discomfort and wouldn’t want to put himself in that light. I feel like he was uncomfortable with it but he knew it would make him sound ignorant to speak to that. So I think he probably didn’t vocalize it with her as much as her mother did…because I think, while he was uncomfortable with it he knows that, I think he knew all along that it really wasn’t that big of a deal and he had been preaching to [Molly]…so to say [her] whole life that, you know, color doesn’t matter, so on and so forth…while he was uncomfortable, he didn’t want to go against what he had taught [her] and what he stands for.

In order to function in white society and be in an interracial relationship, TJ and Jerry use color-blind reasoning by rationalizing potential and actual prejudicial treatment from their white partners’ family. When TJ’s mom shares her concerns that his first meeting with Kiki’s father may be challenging, he minimizes the potential difficulty
contending he has not had negative race-specific experiences with whites and expects this interaction to be no different. He clarifies that whites have used racial slurs against him and that he has been discriminated against but plays down those experiences by arguing they result from ignorance. It is reasonable that Blacks do not want to move through life expecting to be mistreated, but excusing blatant acts of prejudice and minimizing the potential for discrimination reveals the operation of color-blindness.

Jerry utilizes color-blind reasoning by exercising compassion and tolerance toward Molly’s parents despite their hesitation about him and their bigoted position on interracial relationships. Jerry’s initial surprise and anger is indicative of color-blind logic because he assumes that most people are supportive and comfortable with interracial coupling. However, his belief that racism is an outcome of the lack of knowledge and exposure to diversity also demonstrates the operation of color-blind logic. In order to manage Molly’s parents’ prejudice, Jerry attributed their narrow-mindedness to their surroundings and experiences. He even expressed that by showing them who he really is, he wanted to invalidate their stereotypical beliefs. When Molly’s father is less vocal about his discomfort, Jerry gives her father the benefit of the doubt and assumes he actually does not think their interracial relationship is a “big deal” and does not want to go against what he has taught Molly he truly stands for. Essentially, Jerry used color-blind logic to rationalize Kelly’s parents’ behavior.

Similar to Jerry, Frank’s initial reaction to Claire’s parents’ disapproval was anger and frustration. He recalled that after he met her parents and Claire told them that their relationship was serious, their objections became clear. Whenever she talked to them Claire became upset because of their persistent opposition to the relationships. As his
frustration increased Frank asked, “You know they don’t like me, why do you subject yourself to this every time they call?” Claire was trying to manage her parents’ disapproval without having to involve Frank. She explained, “I also didn’t want him to hear any of it, you know, it was my problem…not his problem.” Frank responded:

And I thought, I’m like this is our problem, but if they are going to hurt your feelings every time you call. Why do you call? I’m like just leave it alone just let it be and she couldn’t, so that used to kind of really upset me. I’m like how can your parents…I just couldn’t [understand]…how can your parents, you know, that supposedly love you, how can they treat you this way because of someone’s skin color? That just really upset me so I never wanted to be around to hear it because it always upset me. And, I didn’t really want to, you know, why do I want to talk to you [her parents] when I know how you feel about me.

At this point, Frank really began to shut down his efforts with her family. After Claire’s father would not give Frank his blessing to marry Claire, Frank completely distanced himself from her family. He explained, “I didn’t talk to her family after that for two years, almost more…I told Claire, screw this I know how he feels about me, I said I’m not marrying them, I’m marrying you.”

Frank and Claire both described their wedding as a turning point in the relationships with her parents. Her parents got to see them in their element, living their lives with their friends and their community. It was a beginning of a new chapter and they both agreed that the relationship has been progressively better since then. A year after they married, Frank’s best friend went missing and was presumed dead from a climbing accident on Mount Hood. After spending two week searching for his best friend, he flew down to Florida for Christmas with Claire’s family. For the first time, Frank opened himself up to them as family:
When I got to Florida, everyone was at the table...So I sat down and said, you know what you guys can just for a moment, you can take this however you want to, I said, but right now this is my family, I love you guys.

Both Frank and Claire explained that her family does not say I love you or express emotions. In response to his sentiments, “the whole table was...silent.” Even with their discomfort about sharing emotions, Frank recognized that her parents had really been making an effort to accept him. Frank said,

Once I realized that they were trying, I mean...genuinely trying and it may be a little tough for them...And once I realized, you know, I need to meet them half way, too. It’s not just them. It’s me understanding okay, they’re from war time Germany so it’s probably pretty hard for them to do this so, why not meet them half way. That’s when the relationship for us, everything started to change and it’s been getting better.

Frank used color-blind logic in his reconciliation about Claire’s parents’ disapproval. He understood that their previous experiences and upbringing were influential in their judgments. And because of that, he was sympathetic about Claire’s parents’ narrow-minded view and lack of acceptance. Frank appreciated their effort to open up to him and in return, offered acceptance.

When Coraline’s parents expressed their disapproval and her mother claimed people should “stick with their own kind” both Lorenzo and Coraline were shocked and hurt. However, Lorenzo was optimistic and confidently determined. He responded, “You know what? They’ll come around. I’m not going anywhere.” After that conversation with her parents, Coraline refused to speak to them for three months. I asked her what happened during that three months and what changed that made her willing communicate with them again. Coraline explained,

I started speaking to them because of talking with him [Lorenzo] about it and him saying, you want to have a relationship with your parents you don’t want this to
go on forever and ever and ever. At some point you’re going to have to talk to them and explain to them that you’re hurt and how it makes you feel.

Coraline did start communicating with her parents more but explained that nothing really came of it because her mother was firm in her position. Instead, she and Lorenzo simply participated in the family like any other married couple. Coraline detailed:

Just the more that he was around and they saw how good we were together, and how good he treated me, and took care of me, and stuff. They just finally wore down. I don’t think there was like an epiphany moment.

Lorenzo concurred and said that he started to feel a shift that same year and could tell they were opening up to him. From the beginning he was understanding and patient with their opposition:

When I’m around her mom and dad, even back then, I just treat them with respect. They got a lot more years, a lot more years on the earth than I have, they’re entitled to their opinion and quite frankly this is their baby. They want to make sure their baby is fine with me. So as far as I’m concerned – [with] our relationship…they shouldn’t have to worry and…we’ve been together since 2000, 2001 and I figured that in the course of time they’ll see that I’m still here…They accept me now just like I’m their own. I call them mom and dad.

Each of these men used color-blind logic to navigate their relationships and manage their partner’s family’s disapproval.

The individual reactions of these partners elucidate the operation of white privileged as they defend their interracial relationships. First, the race-neutral assertions and claims of not seeing race are quintessential examples of color-blind thinking. White partners discount race in an effort to appease objections. Not having to acknowledge race is a privilege solely afforded to whites. Race neutral claims also discount what race means for their Black partner. Additionally, white women asserting their position and
taking a stand against their parents’ opposition is an operation of privilege. They are choosing the relationships by self-verifying and reinforcing the decision to be in an interracial union is most salient to them. However, in intimate interracial interaction Blacks have less ability to self-verify and self-reinforce what is most important to them and instead, are trapped by the logic of color-blindism. In order to pacify opposition and disapproval, they utilize color-blind logic. Blacks offer patience and understanding by justifying their partners’ family’s prejudicial positions as ignorance or lack of exposure. These efforts are not only the operation of color-blind logic, but also white privilege.

In the following chapter, I focus on the ways these couples negotiate their relationships and manage reactions to their interracial status in the larger social world. By detailing the lived experiences of these couples, I illustrate the operation of color-blind ideology across the life-course. I conclude my outline of the life course by demonstrating that the operation of color-blind ideology within the relationships and lives of the interracial couples facilitate the reification of white privilege and consequently, color-blind ideology racial inequality.
CHAPTER V
COLOR-BLIND NEGOTIATING

In this chapter, I continue to detail the operation of color-blind ideology within the relationships and lives of the interracial couples in this study. With regard to the life course trajectory, my discussion is centered on the couples’ current intimate relationship. Specifically, I focus on the ways these couples negotiate their relationships, deal with external reactions and endure acts of discrimination. I do so in two comprehensive ways. First, I discuss the ways in which these couples navigate parenthood and balance their personal lives with the demands of the social world. Second, I detail the couples’ individual experiences of discrimination and their approach for managing external reactions to their interracial status. Finally, I end this chapter by illustrating that the operation of color-blind ideology and color-blind logic within the relationships and lives of these interracial couples reinforces the racial status quo and strengthens white privilege. Thus, color-blind racism prevails and racial inequality persists.

Negotiating the Relationship

Intimate partners can confront various challenges to their relationship ranging from financial issues to parenting disagreements to partner infidelity (Harris and Bichler 1997; Larson and Richards 1994; Reiss 1980). In addition to those stressors, interracial unions may also face disapproval and discrimination. Couples utilize negotiation
strategies to manage relationship stressors. Within the intimate context, negotiation refers to the process through which partners solve disputes, agree upon courses of action, bargain for individual or mutual need fulfillment, and generally manage the relationship (Miller, Perlman, & Brehm 2007). In order to have a successful intimate partnership, couples need to work on their relationship and negotiate its course. These interracial partners communicate and compromise as they navigate their relationship and participate in the social world. Below I discuss some of the different ways in which these couples negotiate their relationships. To begin with, I discuss the recycled color-blind messages these couples communicate to their children in the rearing process, and then, I detail separately the ways they balance external pressures with their private lives.

“You’re not Black, white, Yellow or Purple, You’re a Person.” In the following paragraphs, I outline findings that identify the operation of color-blind ideology and color-blind logic among these couples as they negotiate parenthood and child rearing. Although some white partners express wanting their kids to be “a part of me too” and “not just Black,” overall these couples already are or intend to teach their biracial children color-blind lessons. A color-blind foundation is evident in the messages about identity, treatment of others and participation in the social world.

In the course of these interviews, couples shared their individual stories and their stories as couples. Throughout that process, occasionally couples would share information about their children or discuss hopes of having children. However, near the end of each interview, I would ask these couples to share with me their thoughts on raising children within their interracial union. I probed about how they do (or might) discuss race and their children’s mixed heritage. I also wanted to know how they might
distinguish what is taught at home (micro-level) and what their children might encounter in social and public spaces (meso and macro-level). Generally, both whites and Blacks promoted color-blind racial messages and practices rooted in diminishing racial significance. These couples expressed wanting their children to develop individuality and intended to provide as much diversity and experience as possible to facilitate the creation of unique identities.

Bo and Dee have one daughter and hope to have more children in the future. In explaining the messages they will give their daughter and future children, they both operate from a color-blind position. They agree that they want their daughter to have diverse experiences and interact with people of all races and backgrounds in an effort to teach her to see people as people, not as a color or a race. For Bo, this race-neutral perspective reflects the color-blind lessons his mother taught him about who he is. She encouraged him to believe in himself and know that even if he looked different, “you are a person, you are not Black…you are a person.” Therefore, Bo is mainly concerned with, “educating her, more like her being a person versus a person of color...and taking everyone as a person, you know, big, small, short, ugly, black, white, yellow, purple.”

Dee expressed that message about viewing people as people and treating people as equals are incredibly important lessons. In addition, she wants to be careful to caution and protect her daughter from the possibility of negative reactions by giving her tools to deal with those situations. Speaking of her daughter, Dee said, “she needs to know about the good words and the bad words that, you know, [what] she might be called…we need to teach [her].” Bo agreed that they should caution their daughter or at least share the
possibilities of negative outside sentiments but in that process remind her that “she is a person and not a person of color”.

Color-blind reasoning is operating in the messages Bo and Dee intend to convey to their children about race and being biracial. They both expressed the importance of teaching their children race-neutral lessons about their individual personhood and how they are to treat other people. As a biracial person, Bo had a unique and privileged upbringing. He grew up in an all white, insulated, and socioeconomically privileged community, which welcomed and protected him. In this environment, the whites around him were all operating in color-blind ways. However, the structural reality for biracial children is that they are often considered or viewed as Black in the larger social world. By discounting race, Bo and Dee may be inadvertently hiding the importance of how race will shape their daughter’s reality. It is clear that the color-blind racial messages they were taught during racial socialization will be repeated with their children.

Jerry and Molly have been together for a couple of years and both describe their relationship as extremely serious. They intend eventually to get married and build a life together, which includes having children. Jerry comes from a very racial mixed family and because of his upbringing he has a race-neutral position on mixed race children:

I think the whole like race, black-white thing really is irrelevant…it’s the onus of the parents to be able to, you know, to pass whatever cultures that they deem are characteristic of their race or culture on to the child.

Because of his diverse background, Jerry’s personal identity is only loosely tied to race; specifically, he centers his focus on the multi-cultural diversity within him. This inclusive non-racial approach informs his perspective that sharing diversity with his
future children will help them shape their individuality and be “who they think they should be.”

When Jerry and Molly discussed the messages they would impart to their future children, they agreed that diversity is paramount both in surroundings and experiences. Jerry explained that diversity helps mixed race children to formulate an identity:

From an interracial child’s standpoint, it’s important to… raise them in an environment where there are different kinds of people and not even like if we had kids, black people and white people but like Muslim people…I really think the most diversity possible is wonderful to raise any kid especially an interracial child, so that they can realize that they’re not a certain group or another group like they’re a person and they’re unique.

Similar to the caution messages Jerry received, he and Molly believe they should warn their children about the potential of negative public perception or treatment. However, they felt that information should be balanced by reassuring their kids they are special and loved. Jerry explained, “I think, you want the child to be aware of the situation but at the same time [teach them]…you’re an individual, unique person… people might say stuff to you but they’re just ignorant.” Molly agreed that if an issue occurred she would explain that “the public’s view” can be ignorant but then reassure them that “you love them no matter what; you love them for who they are.” In a color-blind way, Jerry and Molly intend to downplay potential discrimination by emphasizing their children’s individuality and uniqueness.

TJ and Kiki have been in a committed cohabitating relationship for a few years and clearly intend to get married and have children. However, TJ has two teenage daughters from previous relationships. Agnes, his 13 year old biracial daughter, has a close relationship with TJ and spends time with Kiki and him at their home. The basic
message TJ has always expressed to his daughter with regard to her mixed race and would share with future children demonstrates a color-blind perspective:

I believe in one race, but differences, so that is kind of my route towards it. And, their heritage is, this is your mom's family, this is my family---not black and white---its just you come from these families.

Kiki mentioned with TJ’s teenage daughter being around and sharing her experiences, she has noticed that among young people race is “not as much of an issue” and “keeps becoming less and less important.” Similar to TJ, Kiki also revealed a more race-neutral color-blind perspective about strategies in raising biracial children:

It [race] was never an issue with my parents, it was always be open-minded, but you always want to do something a little better than what your parents did and what I want to be able to instill in my children, whether we have kids together that are biracial or whether we adopt white kids or Black kids or Asian kids, is to have a fundamental understanding of every race's and every culture's struggle, because we have all had them, we have all been through it, there is no one master race, so understand all of it, so that when you look at people you are meeting them at a place of compassion, and that is my main thing.

C.E. and Martha have been married for 18 years and have two children -- Justin, a 25 year old son from C.E.’s previous marriage, and a 15 year old daughter, Mimi. During their interview, it was almost like they were speaking in unison and finishing each other’s sentences with regard to how they view race. Collectively, C.E. and Martha have a color-blind, albeit somewhat unconventional, perspective on race and identity which has influenced the way they have raised their biracial daughter. They argue that racial identification is less significant than who you think you are, “How you view yourself racially is not the most important thing…what is most important is how you view yourself.” Another factor that shapes their perception of race is they both believe in reincarnation and claim that means, “Everybody has got a chance to be everything,” so
that race is not “as big of an issue as we are making of it in this world.” They argued that because race is really not that significant, labeling race is so limiting. C.E. communicated micro-level reasoning best by arguing:

I think we need to have enough people individually thinking like that---thinking this way individually---that’s the critical mass…it is all about the critical mass…where the micro will change, the macro.14

From this perspective, both C.E. and Martha explain that they have not taught Mimi much about being biracial:

(M): We kind of let her find out on our own.

(C): Yeah, and then I talked about being black and you talked about being…

(M): Being white and she knows she is biracial.

(C): But she is kind of, I think, we kind of purposefully let her define her own identity- cause you know when you are in this situation, she’s going to be viewed as being black by the population at large, but the people closest to her will get to know her personally. Really, the way she acts and how she sees herself is going to be how they see her.

(M): Yeah, and we just wanted her to develop her own sense. I don’t think it’s fair to impose upon the kid, you are this, you are this.

The operation of color-blind ideology and logic is evident in the messages these couples teach their children. Interestingly, these couples are recycling color-blind philosophies through their children, many of which they learned from their parents. What’s more, they reveal an almost “hyper-color-blind” approach and tendency to minimize the significance of race by claiming race is irrelevant and does not define you. The diminished importance of race leads to an emphasis on a non-racial or post-racial

14 Critical mass- refers to the notion that micro-level action and change of sufficient momentum can bring about change to large, macro-level phenomena (Ball 2004).
identity-- you’re not a race, you’re a person, carve out your own place and self, be who you decide you want to be because you are loved for whoever you are. These couples are teaching micro-level, individual lessons about identity and self-worth based on post-racial beliefs or the notion of “one race.”

The respondents in the study also stress that surrounding their children with as much diversity as possible is paramount in the formation of a non-racial identity. From their perspective, a race neutral self-concept facilitates an open-minded viewpoint and helps individuals construct methods to handle possible adversity. Even though biracial children are often taught color-blind messages, their social-structural reality can be much more biased. Biracial children often face social ridicule, have trouble fitting in, and question who and what they are. They also tend to be viewed as Black and then are confronted with the same disadvantages as Blacks (Childs 2005; Collins 2000; Davis 1991).

When I probed about distinguishing between the personal messages at home and what biracial children will likely encounter in the social world, these couples acknowledged the importance of cautioning their kids and giving them information. This recognition indicates that these couples realize that race has significance in the social world. However, they still revert back to color-blind micro-reasoning when offering suggestion for navigating possible racially provoked incidents. These couples teach their children lessons about how they should view themselves and others with the expectation that those lessons will protect and insulate their children when they confront macro-level phenomena in the social world. This stance is indicative of the operation of color-blindism among these couples. These couples’ color-blind rationale generates an
inability for them to fully distinguish the connection that their interracial status and their children’s biracial status have with macro-structural realities. Instead, they assume (consciously or unconsciously) that micro-level lessons within the family will affect their children’s macro-level interactions and experiences.

*Privilege Blinders.* In the following paragraphs, I draw attention to the operation of color-blind ideology among whites and color-blind logic among Blacks as they navigate their intimate relationships. These couples use color-blind reasoning to rationalize their interracial status and participate in the social world. With the exception of dealing with family issues and negotiating decisions about how to raise their biracial children, most of the management of their relationship occurs in reaction to perceived or actual negative external responses and influences. Whites have a tendency to make race-neutral claims while negotiating their relationship. Specifically, they associate racialized matters with non-racial factors and downplay the significance of race in their experiences. Blacks use color-blind logic in an effort to validate their behavior and/or the behavior of others. They learn to employ color-blind practices to balance social situations with their personal lives. For instance, Blacks tend to placate inequities and avoid engaging in potentially volatile activities or situations. The differential operation of ideology and logic among these couples is clearly demonstrated in their shared experiences.

Susan and Marc use color-blind reasoning in their negotiations about their presence and participation in the social world. Susan described their marriage as family oriented and fairly traditional with regard to roles and household duties. She works as a teacher, and Marc, a business owner, tends to work a lot of hours outside of the home. Therefore, Susan takes care of most of the childrearing and the domestic duties, including
cooking, cleaning, and laundry. She shared that their social life as a couple is somewhat limited and that they rarely go out. Part of this pattern is explained by being busy parents to four children. However, much of their lack of social activity is based on Marc’s hesitation to do things or go places that are in predominately white environments. For example, Susan shared that even though Marc loves country music, he would not go to a country music concert. She explained that he worries about the potential problems that could arise:

Like he would be more afraid that would be a place were he would, like somebody try to start something with him or he would get into a fight. You know somebody would say something or do something and that it would just end up bad...sometimes he’s like I don’t want to go because there is different people there and I don’t want any problems or anyone to cause any problems…but its more just I guess his comfort level, at times he is not comfortable and I think he is just more aware maybe then what I am of what people would say or do or think.

Susan recalled that even though Marc has noticed “like a second glance kind of thing, like are you really together,” they have never had anyone blatantly say or do anything to them. Regardless, “He just chooses not to participate or go. We just don’t do it.” She clarified:

Nobody has just come up and said anything to us like what is that or what are you doing? Nobody ever has and sometimes he notices more than I do I guess because he tells me it’s because [he’s] black and I know, I just don’t pay attention because I really and truly don’t notice most of the time.

Susan detailed that she and Marc manage their relationship and interracial status by avoiding places where people may react negatively to them. In particular, Marc refuses to attend events where he thinks they are likely to be confronted with problems. From Susan’s description, Marc is very cautious and expects adverse reactions to their relationship. Susan is not as careful. She admits that she rarely even notices if people
look at them in a judgmental way. From a color-blind perspective, Susan is fairly oblivious to possible and even real intolerances that they encounter. The operation of color-blind logic for Marc leads him to avoid spaces and places that might be problematic. As a Black man in an interracial relationship, he interprets certain situations as needing to be evaded and makes sure that his family steers clear of those circumstances. He uses this logic to make decisions about the best ways for his family to participate in society.

Blacks are often taught to use color-blind reasoning to manage their interactions with whites. In many cases, Blacks respond to cues they receive early on about how to interact with whites and that knowledge maturates throughout their life course. When Blacks couple interracially, the operation of color-blind logic is manifest in both their macro interactions with whites and their intimate interactions with their partner. This operation affects how they negotiate their relationship in relation to the greater social world. From the time Frank recognized that differential perceptions are associated with racial distinctions, he has managed his image and his interactions with whites. During middle school, Frank began to recognize “racial undertones” in white people’s perceptions and behavioral expectations of him. He and a group of friends used to walk to school instead of riding the bus. On the route to school they had to walk through white neighborhoods and Frank remembers being called niggers. He remarked that some of those people that were calling them niggers, he knew them from football. It was then that Frank began to identify a distinctive difference:

I started to realize that there is a difference between, if you are on the field and there is a difference, you know, there’s a school Frank, there’s a football Frank, and there is normal Frank, and so that’s when you start to play these characters okay, this is what, this is who I am in school, when I am out of school I am going to be treated a certain way, you know, if people know me and they are close to me,
then okay, they know that I play football, so I am going to get treated a little differently, if they don’t know me I know I am going to be, you know, called the N word and all sorts of other things…so if I am Frank Smith that people know from football, then I am better off than if I am just a normal Black guy.

Frank explained that these cues about “playing characters” to fulfill a role and messages about “how to act” around certain groups continued to become more apparent.

He recalled one of the cheerleader’s moms saying, “He has the prettiest smile. That smile will get him anything.” Frank described that in that moment he learned how he was expected to act around whites:

So right then I knew okay, all I had to do in this group is smile, that is going to get me, you know, certain things. But it was also this thing of, this is how Black people are supposed to act around white people, you know, you are supposed to be the yes ma’am and no ma’am and kind of, kind of smile to get what you want, not really be too aggressive or forceful…I learned that.

From that point on Frank continued to “play characters” among certain groups and in certain situations. Even today, especially as the Black partner in an interracial marriage, he finds these characters recycling themselves. When he and Claire meet new people or she introduces him to people, Frank feels like he has to prove himself and debunk myths or stereotypes that they may believe about Black men:

I feel as though…it shouldn’t be “this Black guy”…I think that it should be, just Frank. I feel like, okay you like me because of--not who I am but because who you think I am--because of the job that I have or because of Claire. So it doesn’t feel like you just like me. You like me because of these other things, Frank the photographer, Frank the businessman. So I’m all of these roles…I think no one ever sees me for me. They only see that Black guy and that Black guy who becomes someone else after they have spoken to me. But, I’m always that Black guy.
Regardless, of the role he enacts or how well he plays it, Frank still assumes that at the end of the day he is always perceived as “that Black guy” and not recognized as Frank.  

Conversely, Claire believes that people always love Frank. From her perspective, “meeting Frank, that’s the transforming moment.” Even if people have preconceived notions about him based on race, they instantly are drawn to him. She explained:

> Once you meet Frank, I think suddenly he turns into the star of the relationship. For me I can’t think of an instance where it hasn’t been that--where it’s the two of us that meet someone and then usually we come out of it, they were hugging and BF’s, and everyone remembers him.

Claire feels that people are genuinely enamored by Frank and that their acceptance is indicative of the abatement of racial barriers. For Frank, this outcome is the result of years of role construction and being who he thinks people want him or need him to be. It is not illustrative of recognizing Frank, but rather his ability to be the exception to the rule.

This role playing and correlated social expectations have impacted Frank and Claire’s relationship in other ways. Frank knows that Claire genuinely sees him. However, he feels that when situations arise where he is required to play a character and manage his image, Claire does not fully understand. Frank often feels his reality is misunderstood and invalidated. In many cases, she does not view those situations as cause for Frank to manage his image or play a character. Claire’s white privilege impedes her ability to recognize his confinements. These disagreements have sparked

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15 Frank did remark that Claire is the one person for whom he does not have to manage his actions or play a part. Instead, he feels that she has “always just seen me---the good, I mean, all the different sides of me but has been able to find who Frank is and everyone else is just been like touching the surface.”
many ongoing discussions between them. Frank and Claire shared one of those instances with me.

They have two cars in their family, a Mercedes and a Honda. Typically, Frank drives the Honda and Claire drives the Mercedes. There have been various times, especially for work, when Frank has wanted to take the Mercedes instead of the Honda. Claire explained that it’s almost like he’s “proving a point by driving the Mercedes.” Then she asked, or “is it a confidence thing?” Frank clarified the motivation for this request:

This is it and it’s happened a few times, especially on the job...I pulled up in the Honda once and the person that [I] happened to do some work for wouldn’t talk to me. I pull up in the Mercedes and it’s a whole different story. It’s like ok, now “he” is somebody. It’s just little things like that, being treated differently because either what I have on, because of what I drive, that really gets old because it’s not even about the work.

It is clear that Claire feels terrible that Frank has these experiences. Claire claimed that when Frank says he wants to take the Mercedes she does not at all mind but wonders, “Why do you even feel like you have to do that?” She then responded, “But it is reality.” As our discussion progressed, we talked about other examples of prejudicial perceptions. In an effort to better understand Frank’s experiences and clarify if they are racially motivated, Claire asked:

Is it a class thing, is it a social thing, because there again, I mean, if you are going to walk in a store and you’re wearing beat up jeans and a shitty ass shirt--dress a little nicer and you’ll be treated better, or is it the race thing? Is it a color thing?

In response to Claire’s inquiry, I asked her if she had to think about what she wore going into a store. I explained that I know I do not have to think about it, especially in connection to how I will be treated. I also asked if she felt as though she would be
treated differently in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt in the same way that Frank would get treated differently in jeans and a t-shirt. To both questions Claire simply answered, “No.” We also discussed that driving the Honda has different consequences and elicits different reactions toward her than it does for Frank. It was a moment of clarity for Claire. She was able to recognize Franks’ reality in a new way.

Within their relationship, this manifestation of Frank’s image management has definitely been a stressor, but it also has opened their communication as a couple. It is clear that Frank strategically constructs and manages his image following the “logic” that will most help him participate and progress in society. For Frank, driving the Honda or the Mercedes is symbolic of the relationships between his actions and others’ perceptions. It represents the distinctive change in people’s perception of him--who he is in their eyes and what they think he has to offer. The difficulty is that Frank believes he has to continually manage his image in a way that is not required of Claire. As well, Claire does not always grasp the reality of Frank’s dilemma. She hurts for Frank and hates that he has to function and interact in this manner. In response, Claire often operates from a color-blind position by wanting to explain it away with other factors. In negotiating their relationship, they definitely have discussed these issues. They expressed to me that moving forward they will continue to communicate, but do so more openly. Frank will share his perception of social expectations and his experiences with discrimination. And, Claire has opened herself up to truly hear Frank and put herself in his shoes in an effort to understand his reality.

Of all the couples I interviewed, Davante and Tracey apply the most time and effort to discussions about race and navigating their interracial status. Similar to Frank,
Davante’s upbringing influences his interactions with whites and shapes the messages he gives Tracey about managing their racialized experiences. When it comes to racial issues Tracey claimed,

I definitely tend to defer to Davante more because I think he has a lot of wisdom. I think he has a good open mind…I look to him to help me understand--is this something that I really should, you know, this doesn’t sit right with me and this may fire me up but how--what’s the appropriate way you think we should handle this because he has more experience with it. You [Davante] have more messages from your family on how to deal with it and some situations are new to me and I’m not sure how to think about them or what to do with anything. So I definitely looked to him to help me with that.

Davante appreciates Tracey’s inexperience and willingly tries to help enhance her understanding of racialized social realities. Davante is strategic about his social and profession interactions with whites, as well as his management of racial confrontations. He recognizes that all people may face discrimination but thinks there are different ways to handle specific situations. Davante explains:

I mean you got to know how to fight the fight and still move forward. A lot of people fight the fight and they move backwards and you’ve got to understand sometimes the fight calls for…being vocal and sometimes it calls for just being calculated and that’s why you [Tracey] being a woman business owner, sometimes it calls for you being silent so you can continue to move your business forward. Sometimes it calls for you to stand up and damn it, I’m not going to take this shit anymore, f-you and then keep moving forward. So I try to help her in the way that my parents have because it allowed me to get to this point.

Davante manages his personal and professional life by utilizing color-blind logic. As a couple, he and Tracy try to balance their personal world with the pressures of the social world in that same manner. When he discussed his interracial relationships and his career he affirmed that he is cautious about revealing his status as an interracial married couple. Davante detailed:
I am sensitive toward it from the perspective that I am not one to make- I don’t want people feeling uncomfortable about us. But I want people to get to know us. I work in the banking world in a professional setting where it’s predominantly white males. So here I am [the] Black guy that they decided [they] want to let him to the club so to speak. I was very cautious in bringing Tracey around them, for the simple fact that I didn’t want them to use our situation against me from the perspective...Ok, you have a job and you work with us and now you think you are one of us because you have a white girl on your arm…but I can honestly say no one has ever treated me that way.

As Davante was explaining this balance he attempts to maintain, Tracey interjected. She remarked that she was bothered and even a bit hurt when Davante did not leave her picture on his desk at work. Davante confirmed,

"It was a sore spot with her, but I was trying to educate her in the fact, it’s not – I am fighting a battle every day. I am trying to progress forward and for me to do that I can’t just put our picture up and throw our situation in front of people. Although, I don’t see why shouldn’t be able to. But, I have to be very strategic in what I do, if I want to continue to move forward--until I get to know people and they know who I am and what I’m about. Once I establish myself, then people don’t think anything about it, but when they don’t know me and then I put our situation out there then what happens is that puts up a wall for them and then they don’t get to know who I am, they prejudge our situation. But once I’ve establish myself with people then I introduce my personal life from that perspective because I’ve never wanted that to prohibit me from moving forward. If anything I would want it to help us grow, so [we] can embrace even more people.

Instead of recognizing Davante’s strategic reasoning, Tracey took it personally that he did not keep her picture on his desk at work. For Tracey, their relationship is very special; so, having the picture excluded from his belonging at work felt personal. She did not want Davante to hide their relationship or feel like he had to do so. Tracey’s unconscious privilege is operating in her irritation about the picture. Her privilege permits her to process his decision at the micro-level as personal instead of recognizing his decision as macro-level strategic action. Davante uses color-blind logic in his professional interactions with whites by not rocking the boat. Certainly, he is not trying
to discount his wife or their relationship, but he is trying to be as successful as possible in a white profession.

As these issues come up, Davante and Tracey continue to discuss them and try to negotiate the best possible way to handle situations. Both contend that as a couple they are very open, patient and communicative with each other about these matters. Davante explains, “A lot of our challenges are just trying to find a common ground- I try to educate her on how society is and how they are going to treat me as an African-American and then how they are going to treat [her] for being with an African-American.” Davante affirmed:

So a lot of times on how we handle these situations--a lot of times…she would handle it differently than I would and that’s because she comes from an environment where she might be privileged…you can put your picture of your Black husband on your desk. Well if I want to keep my job, I am going to put a picture of Bill Clinton on my desk or George Bush…I’m not going to put my white wife’s picture on my desk. And, it’s just trying to understand…we can’t let this thing come in between us, we just have to learn how to fight them together.

As they negotiate their relationship, both Black and white partners in this study employ color-blind reasoning in their attempts to balance social world experiences with their personal life. The distinction between the operation of color-blindism as ideology and logic is clearly illustrated through these couple’s stories. White partners still tend to view the world through rose-colored glasses and prefer to remain unaware in some cases. They promote a race neutral position and discount race as a factor when confronting racial matters. Even in their relationships, they avoid or minimize racial considerations. For example, Susan was oblivious to negative public reactions to her interracial status. Black partners are very much aware of their race and their interracial status as a couple. Using color-blind logic, they strategically handle adverse situations in a specific way to
assure successful participate in society. For instance, Marc avoids public places that could potentially become volatile. Although Blacks espouse a color-blind position and whites operate from a color-blind framework, they seem to be expressing contradictory perceptions. Regardless, both positions reinforce the racial status quo and strengthen the established ideology and structure.

However, in the process of negotiating the relationship there was a shift in consciousness among these couples. The white partners began to recognize their privilege relative to their partners’ reality. During the interviews, the white respondents expressed understanding their partners’ perceptions and the impact of their interracial status in a different way. They acknowledged that they have to consciously pull off the privilege blinders and view the situations through their partner’s eyes. These couples are beginning to find a balance between color-blind operations and conscious thinking, which will help them decide how to best progress forward as an interracial couple.

**Negotiating External Pressures and Experiences**

Although there seems to be a greater level of acceptance of interracial relationships and attitudes regarding interracial coupling have become more favorable (Domokos-Cheng 1995; U.S. Census Bureau 2006), crossing racial lines in intimate relationships is still widely discouraged (Moe, Nacoste & Insko 1981; Spickard 1989). Therefore, interracial couples are susceptible to unfavorable attitudes, disapproval and acts of discrimination when they interact in the social world (Dalmage 2000; Golebiowska 2007; Killian 2001, 2002, 2003; Romano 2003; Yancey 2007). Although these couples identify that disapproval of interracial coupling exists, their accounts
indicate a variety of reactions to their interracial status. Many couples claim they have
not encountered noticeable acts of disapproval and when they have been confronted with
subtle racialized acts, they rationalize those instances as race-neutral. A number of
couples recognized race as a factor in their social interactions and shared their
experiences of discrimination. Finally, Black partners tend to suffer separate acts of
discrimination. In each case, these couples utilize color-blind ideology and color-blind
logic to negotiate their interracial status and manage their experiences.

“It Ain’t a Race Thing!” Although interracial couples recognize that racially
motivated disapproval exists, many of the couples in this study insist that race is not a
factor in their social interactions and allege that as a couple they do not experience
discrimination or noticeable acts of disapproval. In discussing whether her family faced
any obstacles related to race, Susan claimed, “No, nothing like overtly, nobody has ever
said anything…there’s never been like confrontation or anything like that. Nobody has
ever said anything…or done anything openly.” Dee and Bo both agreed that they have
not received any negative backlash to their relationship. They affirmed that no one has
ever said anything directly nor have they even sensed that someone wanted to say
something. Bo affirmed, “You know, I am sure people do…there are people out there
who don’t agree with it, but we have never…no one has ever voiced that to us.”

Priest and Cece agreed that they have not had any negative experiences with
regard to their interracial status in close interactions or society in general. They
discussed a vacation, in which they drove from the Midwest through the South and into
Florida. They were with their two young daughters and had stopped along the way to eat
in a southern diner. Two women in the diner kept looking over at them and they could
feel tensions mounting. When one of the women got up Priest thought, “here we go” because he assumed that she was going to say or do something discriminatory. The lady came to their table and said, “I just have to tell you those are the most gorgeous kids I have ever seen in my life.”

Race and color-blindism are operating in two potential ways. First, Priest shared this experience to reinforce his claim that as an interracial couple they have not faced discrimination -- even in the South where one would expect it. Another possibility is that race was a factor in their interaction with the woman in the diner, because the woman would likely have said nothing if it had been a white family, almost as though color-blind operations draw positive attention to race distinctions as a way to claim “I’m not racist.” Regardless of the woman’s actual thinking, Priest is operating from a color-blind perspective. He felt this example illustrated that they do not receive negative attention or confront blatant disapproval. He reiterated his assertion that in general he truly had not experienced any “black dude- with white chick issues, never, never.”

Another color-blind approach adopted by these couples is to rationalize inconspicuous racialized incidents as non-racial. Even when they receive “looks” in public, these couples frequently do not think those acts are a result of their interracial status and instead they blame other factors. This view of events occurred most often as couples would notice that they would “catch a look,” but argue that they cannot be sure it was racially motivated. Kelly claims they have difficulty knowing what “the look” is for if they get one:

It’s funny because I try and figure out…but it’s hard, if you do catch a look or whatever… somebody said our issue is more the height thing than the race thing, but it’s hard to know what they are really looking at.
She went on to say that she probably looks at people crazy sometimes and it is certainly not for race or interracial reasons. Therefore, she is careful to not assume that any attention she gets is racially motivated.

Jerry said that Molly and he will often notice people looking at them. However, Jerry felt that when “catching a look” he does not take for granted that those looks could be related to various factors and not be about their interracial status. He commented that you just cannot be sure why someone is looking at you:

I think with us, like we’ll catch looks but we’re big people. So I think a lot of like the looks that we might catch, where I’m like, [I] kind of wonder why they’re looking at us like that…it could be a fact that we are larger than average people. I think with “the look” thing somebody would have to say something because you don’t know what the hell they are looking at you for.

Jerry minimized external reactions to their relationship as based on him and Molly being “big people.” Molly seemed to defer to Jerry’s assessment of the incidents. As a couple, they are mitigating possible adversity by emphasizing their non-racial distinctiveness.

Eddie, a 36 year old chef, has been married to Mary for ten years. He expressed color-blind sentiments about every facet of his life from upbringing to the people he engages with personally and professionally. With regard to disapproval of interracial relationships, he argues that he knows racism and race judgments are out there, but there is really nothing he (or anyone) can do. However, from his own experiences he insists:

I have never heard or had an issue with it. Even being with her [Mary], being out in public, I don’t recall ever getting a weird look from anyone…the only weird looks I get now has nothing to do with the fact that I’m with a white woman…everyone swears up and down that I look like Kobe Bryant so…there’s usually not one day that goes by that I don’t have someone making a reference. So, I never get the weird looks, I’ve never seen it. And I’m always paying attention to people around me.
Mary agreed that outside of her family’s initial disapproval, she had never experienced any unfavorable reactions to her relationships with Eddie. She also reiterated that if they do catch a look, it’s because they think he is Kobe Bryant; “We get it everywhere we go, everywhere we go. We had people chasing us in Vegas.”

Within these relationships, color-blind reasoning is utilized as these couples engage and participate in the social world. Some interracial couples do not see race issues as a part of their lives and will adopt color-blind approaches to negotiate their status as an interracial pair (Childs 2002, 2005; O’Brien and Korgen 2007)\(^{16}\). It is common for couples to emphasize their “sameness” in an effort to minimize their racial distinctiveness (Childs 2005). It is not surprising then that many of these couples claim that they have not experienced adverse reactions to their interracial status, and when potentially racially driven incidents arise, they attribute those to non-racial motivations. These couples use color-blind reasoning and interpretation to manage their interaction with the social world. Instead of focusing on non-racial similarities as many interracial couples do, these couples attempt to explain possible adversity by focusing on their non-racial distinctiveness.

“It Sure Is a Race Thing!” Some couples not only identify that disapproval of interracial coupling exists, but also recognize that race is a factor in their social interactions. Some of the couples in this study shared their experiences of discrimination or noticeable acts of opposition. Interestingly, many of the shared experiences were perpetrated by Black women. Moreover, many of the instances that were shared focused on receiving a “look” or “second glance” from Black women. In those cases, neither

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\(^{16}\) Certainly, some couples experienced incidents where “race” was obviously a part of there lives. Many of those examples will be shared in the remainder of this section.
partner suggested that those looks were based on anything other than race. Among the couples’ narratives, the existence of Black women’s disapproval emerged in other ways. For instance, white women expressed clearly sensing Black women co-workers’ disapproval without having a specific confrontation.

Recall, Black women communicate the greatest opposition to interracial coupling, especially unions between Black men and white women. In most cases, Black women have trouble supporting interracial unions (Childs 2005; Collins 2000; Rosenblatt et al 1995; Spickard 1989). Much of their opposition is rooted in the history of slavery and the residual negative effects on the Black community. Black women tend to view interracial coupling and marriage as a rejection of Blackness and an internalization of white racial ideology (Childs 2005; Collins 2000; Rosenblatt et al 1995). Also, Black women feel that white women are taking the small number of available, suitable Black men, and consequently, reducing the dating and marriage pool of quality Black partners (Lichter et al 1992; Ross 1997; Rosenblatt et al 1995).

White and Black partners described experiences of Black women’s disapproval to their relationships. In many cases, this opposition came in the form of looks or stares in public places. Lorenzo recalled that when he and Coraline would go places as a couple in the beginning their relationship, he noticed that people would look at them and he sensed their disapproval. Lorenzo claimed, “I’d see more black people than white people [looking] at us.” In fact, Lorenzo felt that it was Black women in particular that would give looks:

Mainly, I remember…mostly the black women, they’ll walk by and they may smile, and then they’ll look at her they’ll frown, then they’ll smile at me. “You
need to get with your own” basically, is what I’m thinking they’re thinking, but I
don’t really know because I haven’t heard them.

Coraline said she is not sure she specifically remembers those instances or really even
ever noticed. However, both Lorenzo and Coraline claim they have almost no recent
negative experiences.

As a couple, Davante and Tracey tend to be very aware of their interracial status
and their interactions with others. In our discussion about experiences of discrimination,
they had many stories to share. These instances varied from more subtle and convert
expressions, to much more blatant occurrences and they encountered disapproval from
both Blacks and whites. As they began to detail their experiences, one of the first things
they shared was instances of “catching a second look”. Davante and Tracey both claimed
that they always catch looks. Davante explained, “We will get looks. We get looks all
the time.” They went to share that those looks are most often from Black women.

TJ and Kiki shared similar experiences. However, they both said that in reaction
to oppositional public perception they just laugh it off. They claimed they handle almost
all negative responses with humor instead of letting it get the best of them. They
expressed:

(T): We notice whenever we are at a mall or something, Black women definitely
give us a double look and it's not like the happy look.

(K): Yeah it happens daily when we are together and it's all about how you deal
with it. I mean we probably miss 70% of it, because we are just so ignorant to
it…

(T): When somebody goes out of their way to try and show it, then we---that is
our laugh for the day or, I will be like I can't hold your hand like, we will be
walking, it could be a pack of Black chicks down the street, and I will just pull my
hand away.
(K): Act like he is not with me.

In many ways, TJ’s and Kiki’s relationship is carefree and fun-loving. They spend very little time dwelling or focusing on other people’s opposition. From their perspective, all difficulties in life are easier to get though when you communicate about them and manage them with a healthy sense of humor.

Eddie described a more direct experience of opposition from Black women. During most of the interview, Eddie expressed a color-blind perspective about the social world and his experiences in it. He affirmed that he does not associate with people that have a problem with interracial relationships, and he also claimed he has experienced very little discrimination. Nevertheless, Eddie did recall one specific incident in which Black women expressed disapproval about his interracial relationship. From his perspective, the first and only time a comment was made publicly about him being with someone of a different race was when he dated his first girlfriend. He explained:

We were at this restaurant and we’re sitting down and there was two black ladies sitting behind us, in a booth behind us…so we’re sitting and eating and I’m totally oblivious to everything around me and then we were leaving--I heard one girl made the comment [something about jungle fever] and she started singing the song “I got jungle fever”.

I asked Eddie if he and his girlfriend discussed the experience, and if so, what the discussion was like. He said no. He claimed that he really did not think she heard the comment and he did not want to dignify it with a conversation. Eddie reiterated that he does not experience discrimination and affirmed that in his entire relationship with Mary they have never experienced any negative reactions.

All of these examples indicate negative treatment and reactions from Black women toward interracial unions. In each case, these couples believe the responses from
Black women are based on race and their interracial status. As well, these couples assumed they were getting looks of disapproval and opposition to their relationships. When these couples shared stories about a similar experience as described in the previous section, they claimed they could not be sure the looks were race based. But, when the perpetrators are Black women, the racial nature is explicit and unchallenged. In part, this contradiction might be perception-based and these couples might evaluate each situation differently. However, it is more likely that it is rooted in the notion that Black women disapprove of interracial relationships. Therefore, when the persons exhibiting the bias are Black women, the couples view that action as race based.

Both Tracey and Kiki also described oppositional situations with Black women co-workers focused on their interracial relationships. Each of them explained that the negative treatment from Black women was somewhat expected. Tracey claimed she recognizes that interracial coupling is a sensitive subject for Black women. However, she was still bothered when a Black female co-worker asked her about other Black women’s reaction to her relationship with Davante. She recalled, “She did make a comment to me, of…and it came out- it was smug, it was a smug comment.” Tracey explained the interaction with her co-worker: asked:

[Co-worker] “So Tracey, sisters ever give you any problems over Davante?”

[Tracey] No, should they?

[Co-worker] “I was just curious.”

[Tracey] I said that’s kind of an odd question, Maggie. [Co-worker] “I was curious.” But she said it like I should be getting it. Like she almost wanted me to and I know that’s a very touchy subject for many Black women, but I just felt it was inappropriate and it had no, it was like totally, we were not even talking about relationships of that sort or anything of race. It was just a left field comment.
Kiki also recalled that early in her career, when she was dating a previous boyfriend, she sensed tension with Black women co-workers about her relationship. Kiki was friends with a few Black women but remembered feeling as though some of the other Black women had issues with her dating a Black man. She explained that her workplace at the time was fairly diverse, lots of young single people, and everyone was sort of in each other’s “business.” Kiki described her experience:

When I was younger there were a lot of black women who had a problem with it…It was never anything in my face, but there were a lot of conversations that happened behind my back that they didn’t know, they thought I didn’t know about.

Kiki mentioned that although their disapproval was not surprising to her, she did not appreciate their subtle execution. She felt as though they should just be upfront and direct with her or simply stay out of her love life.

Both of these women anticipated that Black women may have issues with their relationships, but felt a bit uncomfortable with the reality of their disapproval. Tracey took it personally and felt that her co-worker Maggie was out of line. She claimed she knows it’s a “touchy subject” for Black women, but still found the comments offensive. For Kiki, she just did not appreciate the “behind her back” nature of the concerns. In both cases, these women describe the oppositional treatment as personal without offering any real appreciation about the bigger picture for Black women. Color-blindism is operating in the irritation with their co-workers. The viewpoint illustrates white privilege and the belief that color does not matter in love, which is essential to color-blind ideology.

In addition to negative treatment from Black women, Davante and Tracey also shared experiences of white perpetrated discrimination directed toward them as a couple. It is important to note, with the exception of some family disapproval, most of these
interracial couples felt as though they did not suffered from acts of opposition or discrimination on the part of whites. Davante and Tracey were the only couple who shared accounts of this kind. Of those examples, I will detail their experiences of one overt case of bigotry and an interesting covert, backdoor example of color-blind discrimination.

Tracey explained their overt experience. She and Davante were at a restaurant of which they used to be frequent customers. “We were in there constantly, the staff they loved us- they all knew us.” As they were waiting for a take-out order in the bar, they noticed an old white woman who was eyeing them in disgust. Tracey shared:

She looks him up and down, and up and down, and then she looks at me with disgust and I said, I am sorry, is there something that I can help you with? Because she just wouldn’t stop staring and she said, “Why are you with the likes of that?” And I said, well honey isn’t it obvious, he’s great looking, look at him, and he’s a nice person…she just rolled her eyes and did this disgusted face.

Tracey laughed slightly as she told the story and said, “So Davante just reached over and said, ‘God loves you too, ma’am.’” After that exchange, Tracey recalled that the manager of the restaurant, a white guy probably in his early 30’s, had overheard the women and immediately defended them. Tracey claimed that he affirmed, “You ever say anything to one of my customers like that again and I will personally escort you out of this restaurant.” Tracey commented that she felt as though the manager would have spoken up even if he did not know them. Both Tracey and Davante commented how wonderful it was of him to take that stand.

This is an example of overt opposition. Similar to many of the other couples, this incident began with a mere look that suggested disapproval. Tracey could have very well just ignored the woman and potentially nothing would have come of the judgmental
glares. Instead, Tracey confronted the woman’s contentious attitude and brought attention to her disapproving looks. In that moment, the woman’s blatant opposition was revealed. The fact that the white manager stepped in to defend Davante and Tracey demonstrates another layer of color-blind racialized interaction. Certainly, it was a supportive gesture and was accepted in that spirit. However, we cannot know the intention underlying his behavior and should not assume he operates from a racially conscious perspective.

Davante and Tracey live in a suburban, predominately white community. Before, they were married Davante lived in their home by himself. He explained that they have white neighbors, a young married couple, which he has always gotten along with quite well. Tracey mentioned that when she met them before she moved in they seemed nice and she was looking forward to having a young couple as neighbors. However, ever since they married and Tracey moved in, those neighbors are still extraordinarily friendly with Davante but they barely even acknowledge Tracey. Tracy expressed:

They do not like me... And I speak to, I am just the total extravert, I talk to everybody. They work in the garden, in the yard, the side yard and they will say--she will say hello, she will smile and wave, she will not start conversation with me, she will not engage me in conversation. If I engage her, she will--she’ll talk to me and she’s friendly but she doesn’t keep the conversation going. I’ll go up to the swimming pool, she will be sitting by herself, she’ll wave, but will never invite me to sit down with her. But Davante, oh my God, they fall -- it’s like -- it’s hysterical to watch this. They fall all over themselves to talk to him.

Tracey explained their distant behavior to Davante and initially he thought maybe she was just being sensitive. Then one day Davante saw firsthand what Tracey was experiencing. Tracey detailed:

He [Davante] opens our door right here to go outside. They were out in the drive way, I mean there’s no way that, they can barely see him. So my joke is that he
stepped one toe on that step and I could hear that husband yell, “Hey Davante how’s going man?” And Davante looked back at me and I said, I told you so. I said watch, so I went to my car, I opened the trunk- so I am in the garage much more visible then where he was when they yelled at him and the guy is standing against his car and I looked up and he goes [made like a head-up nodding motion], he is very condescending to me.

Tracey explained another incident with the neighbors. One afternoon she was outside working in the yard without Davante and the neighbors were working in their yard, too. Tracey was weeding and she kept carrying bucket after bucket full of weeds to the back field behind their homes. At no point did the neighbors offer any help or even really pay any attention to Tracey beyond exchanging hellos. After the couple had gone inside, Davante came out to help. Tracey shared:

He is out there like 15 minutes, they leave and drive passed him, they come back around the block, pull up and say, “Hey man, do you want to use our wheelbarrow?” Never offered it to me, saw me carrying buckets after buckets--I think you [Davante] carried one bucket back there, but they pulled around the block to offer him their wheelbarrow.

Another time, Davante and Tracey were eating at a restaurant up the street from their home and were sitting in a booth right against the entrance windows. Their white neighbors arrived. As they walked up to the restaurant, they saw Davante and Tracey in the window and when inside, they walked right past their table to be seated. They did not acknowledge Tracey and Davante at all. When the couple left the restaurant, Tracey explained that they “walked all the way out and around another whole set of tables in the outdoor [seating] instead of the shortest route [by us].” Davante reflected:

We talk about it a lot. Because this situation, we deal with quite a bit because they’re our neighbors. I try to get my brain around it and part of me thinks that they are accepting of me because I am Black. But part of me thinks they’re not accepting of her because I am Black. And I know, I know this may sound crazy but I think they hold it against her because I am Black. But, they would never ever mistreat me because I am Black because it feeds into the same thing of, well
we are nice to our Black neighbor but they are not nice to their black neighbor’s white wife.

Davante’s perception offers interesting insight into the operation of color-blind ideology among his white neighbors. Interestingly, they seem to adore Davante and go out of their way to be neighborly toward him. Whereas with Tracey, the neighbors treat her poorly and make every effort to avoid her. As Davante suggested, their neighbors likely do not condone or are uncomfortable with interracial marriages so they are nasty to Tracey. But, they obey the “color-blind” rule by being extra friendly and neighborly with Davante. Their neighbor’s behavior demonstrates color-blind reasoning because they abide by the politically correct expectations of welcoming interracial interaction, but probably harbor negative feelings about crossing racial lines intimately, which is manifest in their treatment of Tracey.

“Toeing the Line.” In addition to being discriminated against as a result of their interracial couplehood, Black partners also separately experience subtle and blatant discrimination. These separate acts are typically perpetrated by whites and influence their interaction with their white intimate partner. Specifically, Blacks’ mainstream racialized practices and processes in their social, educational and professional interactions with whites illustrate the tenets of color-blind ideology. In an effort to manage those interactions, Blacks use color-blind justifications to rationalize their behavior and/or the behavior of others. In the following paragraphs, I draw attention to the operation of color-blind logic among Blacks exemplified by rationalizing mistreatment or discrimination with passive acceptance. I explain the ways in which Blacks "toe the line"—conform to a rule or a standard—in an effort to best navigate and
participate in society. Blacks utilize color-blind rationale to minimize oppressive actions
and to justify racialized conduct. In their interactions with whites, they employ color-
blind practices with the purpose of advancing their social and professional lives. Some
Blacks even absorb stereotypes, internalize white ideology, and claim their interactions
with whites are non-racial. Below I detail specific examples of discriminatory action and
illustrate that Blacks respond to mistreatment by complying with color-blind expectations.

At one time, Davante was the only Black commercial banker in his city of
residence working for his bank. As a Black man in a predominately white profession, he
has endured many incidents of subtle discrimination. Davante explained that when
confronted with racism and discrimination, he must always operate strategically. In those
instances, he responds by using color-blind logic to minimize the incident and facilitate
his forward progress.

Davante experienced subtle discrimination when he tried to get a VP promotion at
his job. He explained that promotion to VP was more a formality because it does not
increase one’s pay. Basically, the promotion is a title change as recognition for a job well
done. Davante declared, “That’s the running joke about it---you don’t get any extra
money.” When he asked for the promotion his superiors responded, “Well, write 10
reasons why you feel you should be a VP.” They expected Davante to fulfill different
requirements than his white counterparts who received similar promotions to VP.
Davante was frustrated and discouraged. He explained his thinking, “Well shit, no one
else has done that. Let me see someone else’s 10 items of why they should have been
promoted to VP. It’s bullshit.” Nonetheless, he used color-blind logic and strategically
responded to the conditions of promotion:
And you know what though, even then we [Black people] have to sit there and say okay, then how do you fight this…do I sit there and call a sit-in and I call them out on the carpet to say, its racism. Then I have to find and get an attorney into all this shit. No, [instead] you write the 10 excuses. You work twice as hard and you get your VP and then when you get in a position to where you can make change--then you make change and you never forget about those who are behind you. That’s what you do.

Davante also recalled ongoing subtle targeting by one of his superiors at a previous bank. The man would continually make inappropriate and harassing comments during meetings and professional outings. For instance, he would jokingly imply that Davante was gay, “on the down-low” and should worry about contracting AIDS.

Davante explained that this man’s behavior created an unpleasant work environment even though it was obvious that his actions were an outcome of his insecurity. Davante detailed:

And what’s so funny is, it just shows you how shallow and how insecure males are and my dad would always tell me…white guys, you will face it from white guys because they are insecure and if you are smart and your educated, they’re going to come at you even harder because they’ll feel threatened and intimidated by who you are.

Tracey wanted him to file charges but Davante did not think that was the right course of action. Instead, he went HR to report the incidents. Davante told HR that he did not want any action to be taken but simply wanted documentation as a protective measure if anything happened. For Davante, this dilemma was difficult to manage. It was also hard for him to help Tracey understand why he did not just file a law suit. Davante explained:

The thing that’s challenging is because I understand that these things are going to happen…and I just understand that that’s the norm. That’s what’s going to happen. Now you have to pick and choose your battles and at that point it wasn’t worth me losing my job because I still even felt that they would have protected him. And she [Tracey] talks about [me] being uptight, but when you are the only African American male in that environment…one, you’re trying to prove yourself, that you should be there and then second of all, once you have done that there is a
Davante also shared his experience when the “gas” guys came to fix a leak. He explained that the men’s mannerisms and demeanor changed when they realized Davante’s wife was white. Davante affirmed, “Whatever their perception was…I mean it just, you could just tell our situation did not sit right with them.” They proceeded to spend three hours on a job that should have been completed in an hour. Then the one guy claimed he had to come back the following day to finish a different job. In that visit he charged an additional flat rate for a job he could have done in 30 min. Davante struggled with what to do, arguing that racism is so “covert” now; it’s next to impossible to expose. He asked what was he to do, “call his manager, say well you have a racist technician. How do you prove it?” Davante clarified that he did not call to complain because:

I have never been one to play the race card because you know why--my parents never ever raised me to use it as an excuse, never ever. And I’ll be damned if I am going to be the one who is going to even throw that out there because I have gotten this far without it. So I’m not going to perpetuate that, but you know I know your [the gas guy] game.

Each of these examples illustrates the elusive nature of contemporary discrimination. Davante’s course of action in response to the discriminatory experiences demonstrates color-blind reasoning. Instead of rocking the boat, he pacified the apparently discriminatory actions of his white superiors. Davante opted to comply with their requests and tolerate their inappropriate behavior. In the case of the gas company employees, he also tactically avoided causing any disturbance even though he clearly recognized their behavior as racially biased. His actions reflected the information he was
taught during socialization about how to manage interactions with whites. Davante used this knowledge to decide the best way to react to white oppression in order to assimilate and advance in a white world. Color-blind logic is operating subtly because Davante recognizes that the mistreatment he endures is racially motivated. However, he reacts by “toeing the line” and enacting color-blind practices.

Similar to Davante, Eddie also responded to prejudicial attitudes and behaviors in the work place by using color-blind logic. Eddie is a sous chef at a high-end restaurant and he claims that he has never experienced discrimination from a professional standpoint. He did acknowledge that “my profession and my title [sous chef], they are generally--predominantly held by white males…a lot of the cooks may be Black or Mexican or whatever, but most chefs are white.” Nevertheless, Eddie insisted his work environment is non-racial. He affirmed:

One of the things that you learn about people that are in the restaurant business is that racism---there is not much racism in the restaurant business because you do work with all different types of people.

Eddie followed that race neutral observation with the recognition that racial stereotypes do exist in the restaurant industry. However, he maintained that those negative generalizations are directed at Black customers. Eddie explained:

Maybe, [no] there is definitely stereotyping but most of that stems off your guests, your customers. No one wants to wait on a Black person, because we don’t know how to tip. That’s just a fact17.

17 In response to that statement, I cautioned him that the assumption that “Black people do not know how to tip” is not factual. He defended his position insisting: Maybe not a fact, but when you’re working at a high end restaurant…where the average person [dining] there will spend $80 on their dinner, it becomes stereotypical as opposed to going to Denny’s. You don’t expect a 25% tip working at Denny’s but when you’re working at a place like Ruth Chris or something like that, you expect that.
Eddie demonstrates color-blind logic concerning his work environment and the stereotypes associated with Black customers. In his professional location, Eddie views his work environment as race-neutral, espouses a color-blind position, and absorbs white stereotypes about Black customers. From Eddie’s perspective, by working in the restaurant industry he is sheltered from workplace racism. He acknowledges the operation of racial generalizations in the industry, but claims these target customers, not employees. It is evident that Eddie has internalized white stereotypes about Black customers and rationalizes those assumptions as factual, and therefore, acceptable. This rationalization justifies the racialized conduct as a product of restaurant culture, not a result of workplace racism. Eddie’s color-blind practices illustrate the power of the dominate ideology and racial stereotyping.

Among the Black partners’ narratives, the experience of discrimination was revealed in another way. During the interview process a reoccurring theme emerged concerning the construction of intelligence and perceptions about intellectual ability. In effect, the notion that white is synonymous with intelligence was evident in their accounts. Research indicates that whites create and reinforce negative stereotypes about Blacks, which result in damaging suppositions about their behavior, capabilities and personality traits (Allport 1958; Drake; 1987; Golebiowska 2007; Katz & Braly 1933; Lee, Jussim & Mccaley 1995). Many of these negative assumptions focus on Blacks’ low levels of intelligence and lack of discipline (Golebiowska 2007; Peffley, Hurwitz & Sniderman 1997; Sniderman & Piazza 1993). As a result, many whites still underestimate the intellectual capacity and academic achievement potential of Blacks. In the following paragraphs, this message regarding intelligence is explained in two
comprehensive ways. First, I detail the existence of lower expectations by whites, characterized by the underestimation of Blacks’ intellectual abilities and achievements. Second, Blacks internalize white stereotypes and buy into the notion that white is synonymous with intelligence and therefore believe that being Black is not. The power of ideology and the impact of racial stereotyping is manifest in these men’s lived experiences.

Frank’s recognition about racial distinctions and the associated perceptions began to solidify in middle school. Recall, it was at this time that his best friend obeyed his parents and ended his friendship with Frank because he is Black. It was also when Frank started to differentiate that he was expected to play various characters in his interactions with whites. With regard to discrimination, Frank identified another experience that shaped his understanding about racial distinctions. He remembered that every morning the school principle, whom he “just loved to death,” allowed a student to say the pledge of allegiance and read the daily news over the intercom to the entire school. One day Frank was chosen to read and after he was finished the principle remarked, “You know, for a black kid…not only can you play football, but you can also read.” Frank shared his reaction:

At that time I thought…that is kind of weird; I mean yeah we can all read…what’s the deal? And it was like later on that I realized that what [he] said…that was kind of a jab. At that time I just thought…but loved him to death, but just thought, that was kind of strange to say, of course I can read, you know, I am intelligent I can read--what the hell? But it was probably then that I kind of started seeing things.

Priest had a similar experience in high school concerning the opportunity to go to college. Although not everyone in his family was fortunate enough to get a college
education, his father’s side of the family was pretty well educated. According to Priest’s family, going to college was not an option but rather an expectation. He affirmed, “You go to college -- there are no ifs, ands or buts about it.” Priest recalled that even though he was a good student and participated in many school activities, he was never approached by the school, his teachers, or the guidance counselors about the prospect of college. He explained, “I was always on the honor role, high honor role and I had to go tell them I wanted to go to college…it’s like, ‘I want to go to college.’” In reflection Priest remarked:

I think it was race specific, because most of---I had lots of white friends---that were [also] middle-class or whatever and they were all going to college…when I got better grades probably than all of them and I was never approached about going to college.

Even after he approached the school and said that he wanted to go to college, Priest remembers that he was offered very little information about college selection. He claimed:

There was no help like…where do you want to go, your grades are like this, so you should look at these schools… and I said one school, which is [local state college] right here only because I knew it.

Frank and Priest both shared experiences indicating that whites have low expectations of Blacks’ intellectual aptitude and educational ability. In Frank’s case, the school principle that he loved and looked up to blatantly assaulted his intellectual capacity. Frank recalled that he was confused by the comment, but later realized that his principle’s remark was prejudicial. In reflection, Frank mentioned that the most disturbing aspect for him was that he thinks the man thought he was giving Frank a complement. Priest’s experience was less blatant but still very apparent to him. It was
clear that being the consummate student and earning good grades did not his race. Even after he inquired about college, he received very little support for his future academic endeavor.

Jerry also expressed the feeling that whites have preconceived notions and low expectations of Blacks. For Jerry this preconception has been especially apparent in his interactions with the white families of women he has dated. He explained:

I have kind of noticed, I think like as I have dated white women, interacting with their parents I think…there is always a stigma going into the initial meeting, but I feel like people always expect me to be less eloquent or less educated than I am. Jerry has confronted this perceived stigma on many occasions because he usually dates white women. He mentioned that he could sense relief from white parents after they would meet him because he would not fulfill their preconceived notions. Jerry clarified:

So, I think I would always get like oh, he is so well--I would always like hear behind the scenes--oh, he is so well spoken…So, I think that would, you know, put parents at ease per say, but kind of always bothered me. Like well, what did you expect me to be…some gangster rapper type or whatever.

Similar to Frank and Priest, Jerry was bothered by the perception that somehow being Black meant a lack of intelligence or eloquence. It was offensive to him that his white girlfriend’s parents would underestimate him based on his race and that after meeting him their concerns would be mitigated.

The palpable message revealed through these men’s experiences is that whites underestimate Black achievement and do not view Blacks as intellectually able. Despite the effort to reinforce the “white is synonymous with intelligence” notion, each of these men were able to move past the negative pressures of whites’ low expectations. They have earned college educations, work in professions that they love, and by no means
underestimated their own potential. However, the message that whites have a monopoly on intelligence does permeate the Black community and influence their perceived identity.

Within the Black community, the belief that intelligence is linked to whiteness is embedded in Black identity. The Black men in this study indicated that educational success was not emphasized or prioritized. In many cases, they would be ridiculed for an interest in learning and achieving educational success. They argued that they had a lack of young Black role models that concentrated on academic efforts and any indication of being smart often resulted in the accusation that they were trying to be white. Overall, the lived experiences of these men demonstrate the impact of stereotyping on the construction of intelligence and perceptions about intellectual ability among Blacks.

Derek grew up in a predominately Black neighborhood in the Midwest, but as a result of desegregation, he was bused to predominately white public schools. From Derek’s perspective there was a general consensus about white culture within the Black community, which related notions of intelligence to inferiority and superiority. These perceptions influenced Black kids’ identity construction. Derek elaborated:

In my neighborhood and our culture, the way we viewed whites is--it was pretty much understood or we pretty much, everyone...thought the same about the white culture...and I think its similar across America and mostly in predominantly Black neighborhoods that the thoughts and the stereotypes are pretty much all the same.

I guess the thought for the majority of us and probably to this day...when going into school systems, most Black kids think that they’re inferior to white kids or the white kids...always will assume that they’re smarter than the Black kids...and then I think it still goes on today, that if you are Black and smart and getting good grades and stuff, then you are trying to be white.

During the interview, I asked Derek to clarify if he thought that he internalized whites’ perception that Blacks are inferior, and therefore he felt inferior. Or, whether he felt
inferior to whites and that feeling was reinforced by their perception of him. He answered:

Coming from my neighborhood going to those schools...you rarely saw any of the Black kids being like a President or winning these awards or getting straight A’s and stuff like that...and I didn’t do it but and I think that some Black kids that probably could have gotten straight A’s were maybe a little afraid...like well, I don’t want get good grades because it may seem like I’m trying be- I want to fit in-I don’t want to seem like I’m intelligent...When it came to myself personally, I was just, I would say...I looked at it as wanting to prove that I was just as smart as the next person.

Davante grew up in a blue-collar, predominantly white town and attended public school. Similar to Derek, Davante mentioned that he did not see a lot of his Black peers actively participating or being very successful in academic ventures. He also recalls being teased and called Mr. Professor by other Black kids. When Davante went to college he lived on an all-Black floor as part of the African-American Living and Learning Center program at his school. This program was an inspiring and validating experience for him. He went from a less-than-ideal educational environment to a college setting where he was surrounded by people who looked like him and were also ambitious and smart. He remembered thinking:

This is cool, there are people that looked like me...it was different for me because I came to college and we were all smart, all educated...versus where I came from where there were a handful of us that were going to college that were African-American...and focused and driven... [Now] I’m in this floor with all Blacks who are smart, educated and were trying to be something and you know reaching for higher aspirations.

At the age of ten, TJ moved out of the predominately white, affluent community where he had grown up to a predominately Black, poor community. As a result, TJ observed distinct differences with regard to intellectual support and academic expectations. The public school he attended in the white community promoted learning
and academic excellence. Educational success was extremely important and children were pushed to be their best. In the poorer neighborhood TJ felt that school did not matter and no one seemed to care about intellectual growth. As well, he was mocked and called white boy for being smart and liking to read. TJ recalled his frustration:

It just kind of made me mad…being called a white boy that didn’t, it never bothered me I didn’t care, what I cared about was I get to school and they are teaching me stuff I learned in first grade, that was the part that bothered me…so I just didn’t do the work. I’m like, I am not going to do this again.

TJ quickly realized the educational system and the teachers assumed he was just another kid who either did not want to do the work or does not know how to do it. Regardless, TJ felt it did not matter. He claimed:

They just lumped you in, like if you didn’t do the work you are just dumb and they just kind of discarded you. But even with the kids that were doing the work, they didn’t even push them. So it's like, you see, if I don’t do the work I am here. Even if I do, I am still not going to be pushed because even if I did the work I am just dumbing myself down anyway…so, what do you do, if you do nothing you get to same result as if you bust your ass and you are a kid, what are you going to do?

TJ’s experience exemplifies the reoccurring theme that white is synonymous with intelligence and that Black kids are not smart. Consequently, it seems that a “dumbing down” occurred within the Black-poor school system he attended. From TJ’s perspective, the socio-economic discrepancy between the two neighborhoods resulted in decreased importance of academic and educational endeavors.

Compared to the other men, Lorenzo exhibited less awareness about the construction of intelligence in the Black community. He expressed an unconscious acceptance of the relationship between intelligence and whiteness, but did not articulate
the same clarify about the consequences of this belief. The idea is clearly expressed in his sentiments about his best friend:

My best friend, Scott is black but he seemed like he’s white. I don’t know if it’s his intelligence level, he was more like a big brother, he always taught me…he was always there to offer his wisdom; he’s very an intelligent man. We were opposites because he was not athletic at all…I was very athletic and we just clicked.

Lorenzo recalled that he and his other friends often called Scott “white boy.” He explained, “We were always teasing him, ‘You sound like a white guy. You sound like a white kid.’” Lorenzo claimed that Scott’s persona was more white than Black and he associated that distinction with his intelligence. He maintained, “Yeah, he didn’t have the cool pimp walk, like ‘Yeah man.’ He was cool but he just wasn’t, he’s Black but he seemed like he was white.”

Both Blacks and whites internalize the notion that intelligence is synonymous with whiteness. The penetration of this association among Blacks indicates the strength of social messages and stereotypes. Those negative images pervade Black cultural expectations and influence their understandings and distinctions about whites. The associations pervasiveness reinforces the greater stereotypes associated with Blackness and also helps to perpetuate white privilege and racial inequality.

Reifying White Privilege

Color-blind ideology minimizes race and ethnic distinctions and maintains that racial differences should be ignored. Color-blind principles excuse whites’ disregard for the operation of race in social life. The lack of acknowledgement of race as a social fact facilitates the persistence of white dominance and works to perpetuate white privilege.
Color-blind racism perpetuates white privilege because its practices are subtle, institutional, and apparently non-racial (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Doane 2003; Lewis 2003; O’Brien 2007). Through social interaction whites maintain (consciously or unconsciously) the racial order and preserve their privilege. Therefore, white privilege is embedded in the operation of color-blind ideology.

As a result of color-blindism among these couples, white privilege is operating across the life course from socialization through to their current relationships. Even after these couples negotiate their interracial status and white families give acceptance to the relationship, white privilege is maintained. Below I discuss some of the different ways in which color-blindism and white privilege operate in their relationships. To begin with, I discuss the notion of close interracial contact in the context of white family acceptance, and then, I separately discuss the preservation of race through the emergence of prejudicial thinking among whites.

“It’s the Ignorance of Not Knowing.” The contact hypothesis purports that close interaction among people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds will lead to less prejudice and improve race relations (Allport 1958). It follows then that close interracial contact—as a result of crossing racial lines in families—would decrease prejudicial ideologies and minimize the operation of color-blind racism. Among the couples in this study and their families, the operation of color-blind ideology occurs simultaneously with close interracial contact. In fact, their shared experiences demonstrate the operation of color-blind ideology among whites and color-blind logic among Blacks across the life course. In accordance with the findings of O’Brien and Korgen (2007), color-blindism limits the explanatory power of contact theory on race relations progress. Specifically,
the prevalence of color-blind racism has limited the effect of close interracial interaction on the racial consciousness of whites and therefore, has reinforced the operation of white privilege.

Initially, many of the white families of white partners in this study did not approve of interracial coupling and were not supportive of their daughters’ interracial relationships. White parents expressed various reasons for their disapproval, ranging from race-specific concerns like external discrimination to seemingly race-neutral issues like socio-economic stability. In some cases, whites maintained their opposition even into their daughter’s marriage to their Black partner. However, according to these couples, disapproval has evolved into acceptance over time. Even the most oppositional parents now treat their Black sons-in-law like family. Some family members not only welcome the Black partner as family, but also are more interactive and receptive to other Black people in the workplace and the community. Still, this change of heart does not supersede the operation of color-blind ideology and white privilege among white families.

Tracey was taught from an early age that her family disapproved of interracial relationships. She explained that the message was very clear, “You don’t date outside of your race.” When Tracey began dating Black men after she divorced her first husband, her mother was particularly critical of that decision. Even after Tracey and Davante were married, her mother maintained her opposition. However, Tracey claims that gradually she has seen great change within her mother regarding her relationship with Davante and racial issues in general. Tracey explained:

My mother has definitely [evolved], she has since developed a very close relationship with a Black woman she works with, who I really like--she’s a great influence on my mom--she’s gone to her home to have dinner several times.
They go out to dinner together--so they are definitely friends. [Where she lives now] she has several Black couples that live around there.

Davante agreed that her mother has grown a great deal since they married and he attributes that growth to her more recent experiences. One change is that her mother moved into a predominately minority neighborhood and that she has several Black neighbors that she interacts with. He elaborated:

I think her life experiences are allowing her to open up and I think she’s more open now because of our relationship. I think that it had a positive influence in the way that I have treated her and she’s like, there’s no difference here and I think it’s allowed her to kind of broaden her perspective on things.

Tracey agreed with Davante’s assessment and explained:

I have seen her, she reaches out now…so I see these changes in her behavior and her attitude I believe because she got her friend who is just a wonderful woman and treats her with so much kindness. Her neighbors, she extends herself to them, too.

Tracey also has noticed a difference in her mother’s interaction with Davante’s family. His father threw a wedding reception for Davante and Tracey a few months after they got married in Vegas. Tracey explained that she saw a real difference in her mother’s interactions and level of comfort at the reception compared to her previous interactions with Davante’s family. Tracey detailed:

I think there were seven white people and probably seventy Black people and my mother got up--she is a real introvert, I am a total extrovert--she got up and danced with me. She was perfectly comfortable. She mingled, she talked…Davante’s dad had called and really kept her on loop on everything he was doing, so she felt really respected.

My mother really, I think has been very relieved at how kind his [Davante’s] mother is and how inclusive his father is of her because she didn’t have that treatment by my former in-laws.
Tracey expressed that she really feels like her mother is opening herself up to new experiences and different people. Both she and Davante claimed their relationship and her interactions with his family have helped shape these changes within her. Tracey said, “So it’s, I think its life changing. She voted, she doesn’t vote, she voted this year. She voted for Barack Obama, I couldn’t believe it…she really is trying to expand her world.”

Overtime, Tracey’s mother has come to accept and think of Davante as family. She has even warmed up to his extended family and that relationship continues to prosper. Davante and Tracey recognize that her mother is more interactive and receptive to other Black people in general. She has opened herself up and formed relationships with Black co-workers and people in her neighborhood. These changes are indicative of meso-level shifts in Tracey’s mother’s ideological construction and interaction. That is, she is receptive to Davante and his family on an individual, micro-level, but also has made herself accessible to Black friends and neighbors at the meso-level.

However, it is clear that white privilege is still operating in micro and meso interactions with Blacks. During the interview Davante reminded Tracey about a recent incident when her mother got locked out of her house and a Black male neighbor offered to help her. Tracey immediately recalled the situation and explained that as her mother’s neighbor was trying to assist, her mother said to the man, “If you can’t get the door open just break the windows.” The Black neighbor replied, “No, I’m not breaking into a white woman’s window.” This exchange between Tracey’s white mother and the helpful Black neighbor illustrates the operation of color-blindism and white privilege. When she told him to “break the window” she overlooked the potential racially stereotypical assumptions that operate for Black men with regard to crime. Her mother was
completely unaware of the impact of her neighbor’s race in that interaction. This incident demonstrates that even with positive contact and a decline in prejudice suppositions, white privilege is still pervasive.

For many of the other couples, the white families’ acceptance has increased familial interaction among the Black partner and the family, as well as solidified the Black partner’s comfort as a part of the family. Growing up, Dee was told she was not allowed to date Black men because her extended family, especially her grandparents, did not agree with interracial coupling. Dee remarked that her younger brother was a bit of a trailblazer in their family when it came to interracial coupling. He began dating outside of his race in high school and he fell in love with a Black girl. Her brother was adamant about continuing his interracial relationship, so he decided to confront their grandparents. Dee explained:

He went with my mom and sat down with my grandma and grandpa and said, look this is way that it is--I mean, you know, I’m in love with this girl [and] she is black--and they basically said if you are happy we are happy, we are not crazy about it, but we are not going to by any means disown you.

Dee explained that from that point on, “everything turned around.” Her family was accepting of her brother’s girlfriend and became more welcoming to the notion of interracial coupling. Therefore, when her relationship with Bo became serious she was not nervous to bring him home and did not feel like she had to hide the relationship. As Dee reflected on her family’s transition, she expressed the obvious love and acceptance they have always offered Bo. Dee started to cry as she explained, “They loved him right away. Yeah, I mean my dad treats him like he is his son…my mom absolutely adores
him.” Bo agreed that her parents are wonderful to him and explained that from her grandparents and extended family, “I haven’t experienced anything [negative].”

Cece also expressed her parents’ shift from disapproving of interracial coupling to adoration for Priest. During childhood and adolescence, Cece’s family did not openly discuss race. She did recall subtle racial messages from her father that resonated with her and indicated that her parents might not approve of interracial relationships. When Cece finally told her parents that Priest was Black, it became apparent that her hesitation was warranted. Priest recalled that the first time her parents came to visit, Cece’s mom did not want to interact with him. Priest explained:

I’m thinking about the time when they came, but your mother didn’t want to see my ass...my Black ass! Her parents came...We bought this brand new home and it was extremely nice and her mom was like, “I want to see where you live, but I don’t want to see his Black ass”...She didn’t want to see me.

Cece confirmed that her mother was not interested in seeing Priest. However, she made her position clear, “without saying, I don’t want to see his Black ass.” Cece clarified that her mother said, “I would like to come and see where you are living, but I don’t want to meet or talk to or see him.” Cece also remarked that even though her father was not completely supportive of the union, he was less oppositional about her relationship with Priest than her mother. Cece claimed, “He was much more accepting and had less of a problem with our marriage than my mother did.”

Even though both of Cece’s parents were initially hesitant about the relationship, Priest was confident that they would both come around. Cece claimed that is exactly what happened. After her mother decided to move past her resistance to Priest, she instantly fell in love with him:
I have to say, after she [her mother] finally met him and was around him, she said to my dad, “I can’t find anything wrong with him at all. He is just the nicest, most perfect--and blah, blah, blah--just like he walked on water.

Her father has also formed a close friendship with Priest over their many years together and he truly considers Priest family. Cece shared, “He made the statement that he liked Priest so much--he said even if your marriage doesn’t work out, I still want to be friends with him.”

Claire’s family also has released their opposition and has accepted Frank as family. For many years, Claire and Frank experienced a great deal of disapproval from Claire’s family, which resulted in anger on the part of both Claire and Frank. In the course of their courtship, Claire struggled with her parents’ opposition and their lack of support. Frank was so upset by their lack of support that he did not speak to her parents for over two years. The weekend of their wedding was a defining moment for their relationship with Claire’s parents. Claire explained that her parents asked if they could do something to show their support, so the day after the wedding her parents threw a brunch for about twenty-five of the wedding guests. During that celebration her father made a toast:

He stood up and I’m like, oh no, what is he going to say? And he was like, “I want to thank everyone for being here and thank you everyone for being part of this weekend. It’s always difficult for a father, a father [simply] wants what’s best for his daughter and I’m so proud of everyone who was here today and happy for Frank and Claire.”

Claire remembered that her best friend looked at her and said, “Wow.” For Claire and Frank this was a turning point because in that moment her father publicly expressed his acceptance. Claire shared:
I mean just to say I acknowledge this, I accept this and I’m happy for you guys. And I think it was that weekend that really changed things for them to see, this is how we lived. This is who we are. And this is our life.

Both Claire and Frank agreed that things have just progressed from that point and continue to improve. Frank confirmed that his relationship with her parents has definitely been getting better and that he feels more like they are his family now. He commented, “Yeah it has been progressively...getting better. This past year was the first year that I called him [her father--by his first name]. He was mad at me because I didn’t [before now].”

It is evident that among these couples, interaction contributed to the white family’s acceptance of the relationships and the Black partner. In each case, the families initially or overtime grew to love their daughters’ Black partner and welcomed them as part of the family. Although the interracial contact increased positive associations among these families, there is not necessarily a lessening of prejudicial ideologies or a change in position with regard to race mixing. At the micro-level, these families have noticeably transformed their individual perceptions of their daughters Black partner. However, this shift is not indicative of a more open-minded racial ideology or an increase in acceptance of interracial coupling. These families still operate from a color-blind perspective and benefit from white privilege in their interactions with the interracial couple.

Mary and Eddie’s relationship with her parents has completely changed as a result of having children. Mary and Eddie faced a great deal of opposition from Mary’s parents when they announced they were getting married. They claimed that prior to the marriage announcement her parents were somewhat supportive of the relationships, but after they decided to get married her parents were firmly against the marriage. In retrospect, they
both agreed that her parents’ initial support was contrived because they did not believe

Mary and Eddie’s relationship would last. Eddie recalled:

> When she told them that I proposed to her and we’re going to get married, they
didn’t take to it at all…Her mom accused me of brainwashing her, and her dad, he
was more polite about it but he definitely let me know that he didn’t agree with it.

Mary explained that they were resolute in their opposition:

> I was told by my parents, you are not to invite any one in this family, we are not
coming, no one is coming, you pay for everything by yourself and if you do it,
you do it and that’s it. We’re done, that’s it.

During the interview I asked Mary if she and her parents ever resolved the issues.

Mary explained that after that confrontation she had almost no communication with her
parents until she became pregnant with her first daughter. As soon as her pregnancy was
confirmed, Mary immediately called her mother:

> She’s the first person I called. She’s absolutely the first person I called. I called
her and I said you missed all the important things in my life…everything that I’m
so happy about. And I just want to let you know, even if you don’t want to know,
I swore to myself that you’d be the first person that I ever called and told that I
was pregnant with my first baby. I called her and told her and she just started to
cry.

That phone call opened the door for communication. Mary’s parents were excited
about having the second grandchild in the family and wanted Eddie and her to move
closer. Mary explained, “They begged and begged and begged. When I was in the
hospital and my mom was calling me everyday, I want the grandkids closer to me. I want
you guys to be closer.” After their first daughter was born, Eddie felt a real shift in her
parents’ interaction with him. He shared, “It really was at that point when [they] started
kind of changing, to where they were accepting of me and understanding…once we
moved down here it was really okay, things really became a lot closer.”
I asked Eddie if he felt that her parents began to open up to him simply because they wanted to be close to the grandchildren. Or, if he felt they made an actual effort and extended themselves to get to know him. He responded:

Honestly, I don’t think they initially made an effort to try to get to know me. I think they were just trying to be around the girls--at least at the time it was just [our first daughter]-as much as possible. So of course wherever she was, I was right there. So it was like the two for one type deal. But initially, I don’t think that was their mindset at all. I think they were just trying to see their grandchild.

However, Mary and Eddie agreed that the relationship between Eddie and her parents went through a huge transformation when they moved back to Mary’s hometown. Now he is exceptionally close with both of her parents and it has been that way since about a year after they moved. Mary elaborated:

Right now honestly, Eddie is my mom’s favorite person. She only talks to him in the whole family. They are like best friends. They cook together, they do everything like and how he even, I mean…I mean…If my mom has every needed anything, he’s the first person who’d jump and go do it for her.

It’s funny my mom so intrigued by him, like he doesn’t raise his voice, he never argues, he’s very calm…She’s very intrigued by him like she can’t believe that he’s never smoked, he has never drank in his life, he doesn’t yell, he doesn’t argue, he works like 60 hours a week, like he doesn’t do anything wrong. She was like, “lighten up a little bit, like live your life” and she’s been trying to get to him to like I don’t know like she’s been intrigued by him. She truly is…I don’t know because she can’t stand anyone else in the family and she truly is intrigued by him.

Mary also claimed that Eddie and her father are very close and are always making an effort to help each other out around the house. Eddie laughed a bit--which seems to be a reflection on the incongruity of it all--and claimed that he really feels very close to both of them.

For Mary and Eddie, the birth of their first daughter facilitated interaction with Mary’s family. Eddie admitted that even after her birth, he did not feel as though his in-
laws interaction with him was based on wanting to get to know him as much as wanting contact with their grandchild. Similar to the other couples, increased interracial contact improved Mary’s parent’s perception of Eddie and respect for their union, but did not necessarily transform their racialized ideologies. Also, Mary’s mother’s exaggerated fascination with Eddie is indicative of color-blindism. Her ability to pick and choose between acceptance and disapproval, fascination and disinterest, also illustrates her privilege.

Coraline’s parents have also become more welcoming of Lorenzo and accepting of their relationship. Coraline claimed that she was taught to treat all people equally and assumed that lesson applied to all races of people. When she and Lorenzo announced their plans to marry, her parents expressed great opposition. For the first time in her life, they expressed blatant prejudicial ideas about racial matters. Her mother argued that people should “stick with their own kind.” Lorenzo and Coraline were shocked and devastated by her parents’ reaction. Still, Lorenzo remained optimistic that her parents would come around and encouraged Coraline to mend her relationships with them. Coraline did start communicating with her parents and gradually she and Lorenzo participated in family affairs without addressing her parents’ disapproval. Over time, things just seemed to shift and fall into place. Lorenzo affirmed, “They accept me now just like I’m their own. I call them mom and dad.”

I asked Lorenzo how it came to be that he calls them mom and dad. He was not exactly sure how it came about, because he has been doing it for as long as he can remember. Lorenzo elaborated:
I just always have, for as long as I remember…He’ll call, she’ll call…Hey, this is mom…How are you mom? And then her dad, hey, this is dad. He always says it. I can’t really pinpoint when, because I’ve been doing it for so long. I think it’s more out of respect because calling her mom [by her first name] or calling her dad [by his first name] it’s like a stranger. Calling them mom and dad is just who they are, I know I’m not theirs but I’m in the family…It’s just that I feel more comfortable.

Coraline agreed that they just sort of felt into it and she did not remember when Lorenzo did not call them mom and dad. Both Coraline and Lorenzo feel like his relationship with her parents is strong and in a good place. Nonetheless, Coraline admits that she is not convinced her mother feels any differently about race mixing. With full conviction Coraline asserted:

I guarantee you if you ask her, she would still say the same thing. I still don’t believe you should mix races. Even though we’re good together, she would still say it. And I really don’t know where it stems from because I don’t even remember my grandma—her mom and dad—ever expressing any racism of any kind.

Coraline has been married to Lorenzo for 10 years and her family has had increasing contact with him in that time. Coraline’s perception that her mother still maintains her position that people “stick with their own kind” illustrates that the operation of color-blind ideology occurs simultaneously with close interracial contact. Specifically, white families can be accepting of their daughter’s Black intimate partners, but that does not indicate a decrease in prejudicial attitudes and beliefs. Coraline explained that over time her parents simply wore down and as a result were more welcoming to Lorenzo. It seems as though her mother’s acceptance of Lorenzo, occurring simultaneously with her maintenance of a cultural preservation perspective, is contrary to color-blind thinking, but it is not. In fact, it is indicative of the operation of color-blind ideology. In order uphold the racial status quo, her mother does not want to
blatantly condemn her daughter or discriminate against Lorenzo, yet she is not any more supportive of race mixing than she was before.

Among these couples and their families, there is evidence supporting the contact hypothesis at micro and meso-levels. In those interactions, perception and behavior have shifted to more acceptances of interracial coupling and Black partners within their family structure. In the case of Tracey’s mother, she is beginning to enact meso-level changes by expanding her emerging openness to Davante’s family and Black people in her community. These couples’ lived experiences identify that close interracial contact helps improve attitudes and reactions on more intimate levels, but does not indicate more macro-level shifts. These families seem completely happy and functioning without representing broader support for interracial relationships. These couples’ experiences across their life course point out that in a very structural way, their families may still oppose interracial coupling and espouse color-blind prejudicial thoughts about Blacks. Therefore, both the operation of color-blind ideology and white privilege are reinforced through increased interracial contact and acceptance among white families.

“I’ve Never Been Prejudiced in My Life!” In the following paragraphs, I draw attention to the operation of color-blind ideology and reification of white privilege among whites. The operation of color-blindism is conveyed by the emergence of prejudicial thoughts and sentiments. Some white partners and family members have noticed that racist feelings have materialized after interracial contact. In each case, the individual struggles with these emotions and claim they have never been prejudiced. They have difficulty coming to terms with this manifestation of bigotry, because they feel as though they do not harbor prejudicial ideologies. These narratives indicate the operation of
color-blind reasoning and white privilege within both whites’ ideological formation and their interracial interaction. Essentially, even after close interracial contact the notion of race is maintained.

When Molly first started dating Jerry she felt apprehensive, nervous, and even questioned things about Jerry. She explained that her apprehension was potentially associated with his race and the subconscious influence of negative stereotypes about Black men as violent or cheating players. She struggled with her concerns and trepidation because she always considered herself unbiased:

I have always considered myself a very open-minded person but I think when I met Jerry, subconsciously like because I am white, I think automatically the expectations that I had and how he would be and I didn’t even realize it until I was faced with it. For instance I always felt like, “Oh gosh, like is he going to be violent?” Or I always felt like I don’t know if I can trust him…I don’t know if he’s going to be faithful to me and I think that that was kind of coupled with the stereotypes of like you know…

And I think, I didn’t realize that I, you know, I had those within me and it was like almost disturbing for me. But I think because I’m white, I was like “Oh my gosh,” like that is in my head…I guess when I started dating him it was like this whole realizing…you have this thought come across, you know, you realize and you’re like, “Whoa, ok let’s redo that thought because that’s not even what it is, it’s not reality.

Molly was troubled by these thoughts, and even more, by the realization that she had these anxieties within her. She attributed her emerging insularity to being white, almost as though that explained away her emerging stereotypical judgments about Black men. Inadvertently, Molly both acknowledged her white privilege and used it to excuse her prejudicial thoughts. In order to work through these feelings and to re-frame her thinking, she reached out to one of her close bi-racial girlfriends who helped her rationally discredit her concerns. Still, there is a fascinating interplay between Molly’s color-blind
convictions and her negative, stereotypical characterization of Black men. This inconsistency is exaggerated later in her relationship when she defends her interracial union to her mother, arguing, “He’s not a black man…he’s a great guy that I love and I care about.”

Martha shared that she has recently noticed prejudicial thoughts materializing within her toward some Black nurses that she works with. She claimed these specific nurses do not do all of the work to fulfill the requirements of their job. From her perspective, they slack on their responsibilities because they are unionized and will not get fired. She details this situation and her perception best in the following explanation:

I think I find myself more prejudice against Black people, now than I have ever had been in my whole life and isn’t that a weird thing to say. [At work] we’re kind of involved in a situation now where some of the people that we work with, we have a union at [the hospital] which is not doing anybody any favors, because it kind of promotes inappropriate work habits, shall we say--they don’t do the work, but they don’t get fired sort of thing. And we have three people probably in that category, who happen to be African-American women, who happen to have mega attitudes half the time and don’t do their work. So, I find myself feeling prejudicial or negative feelings toward them as African-Americans--which is ridiculous at this point in our existence--because of their work habits and their attitudes.

Martha carefully mentions that they “happen to be African American women,” alluding to the assumption that those who take advantage of unionization are not necessarily Black. However, she follows that supposition with claims that she is finding herself “feeling prejudicial or negative feelings toward them as African-Americans.” This contradiction is especially curious because Martha maintained throughout the interview that she does not evaluate people or situations in race-specific terms. She continued her explanation by comparing these nurses’ work ethic to other employees. Martha affirmed:
The white people in their group don’t do that. But then we have Black nurses in the operating room and Black techs, and they don’t do that kind of stuff [either]…they are just regular people. But it’s weird, it’s kind of come-up and now I feel like I’m negative towards them and it’s just weird. It’s like the first time in my life that I feel like I have these prejudicial negative feelings against somebody who is Black because of their behavior. It’s very uncomfortable for me because I feel like I’m doing something wrong. I’m using the label. And I’m like horrified because I do feel that way and I never felt like that.

Martha is clearly struggling with these emerging feelings and with her realization that she associates her negative sentiments about these women’s work habits to their race. She acknowledges that her prejudicial ideas are specific to them as Black women. Although, she also claims that whites and other Black workers do not act that way and are “just regular people.” Martha is expressing color-blind rationale in both her struggle over these emerging prejudicial thoughts and by qualifying that the other workers are not acting inappropriately.

Martha and her husband C.E. work together at the hospital. As she shared her concerns with me, he expressed that Martha was not the only one with concerns. He claimed that those women’s deficient work ethic bother him, too. C.E. articulated his frustration:

I don’t care what color they are, what bothers me is that they don’t do the work that they are supposed to and that they have bad attitudes. It’s not about being Black, it’s not about being a woman; it’s about being lazy and being nasty.

C.E. articulated color-blind logic by claiming his frustration is non-racial, yet he also unconsciously reinforced racial stereotypes. He maintained that his aggravation was specific to the nurses’ behavior and not their gender or their race\(^\text{18}\). In particular, he

\(^\text{18}\) During the interview C.E. expressed negative sentiments and perceptions about Black women’s attitudes and behaviors especially in interactions with Black men:
referred them as lazy and nasty. Research indicates that many of the damaging suppositions that emerge from negative racial stereotyping focus on Blacks’ work ethic and attitudes (Drake; 1987; Golebiowska 2007; Lee, Jussim & McCauley 1995). As a result, many whites still characterize Blacks as lazy, irresponsible, aggressive and loud (Golebiowska 2007; Peffley, Hurwitz & Sniderman 1997; Sniderman & Piazza 1993).

Even though C.E. maintains his concerns are race-neutral by describing the Black nurses’ behavior as lazy and nasty, C.E. has inadvertently strengthened negative stereotypes about Blacks.

Bo shared a similar experience about his father-in-law’s confession about his recent prejudicial thoughts. Bo’s father-in-law has rental properties and they are in a predominately low income area that is 99 percent Black. Bo and Dee usually go to her parents’ house on Sunday to hangout and have dinner. On a recent Sunday, Bo recalled that Dee’s father pulled him aside and asked to talk to him. He explained to Bo that recently he had been having some serious trouble with some Black tenants. They had been destroying their apartments, trashing the exterior surrounding area, and one Black teenaged son cussed out Dee’s father. He expressed that he had been truly struggling with prejudicial feelings. Bo explained what his father-in-law shared:

I don’t know how to say this without sounding insulting, but I think there is a characteristic that a lot of African American woman have when they are dealing with Black men, I call it the “sapphire complex” where they kind of get sassy and stuff like that. I have very little tolerance for that, you can yell at me, you can, you know, say what you want to say, but don’t give me that sapphire stuff.

But it does seem like a lot of Black women just have a very disrespectful way of dealing with other people, kind of generally, but Black men kind of more specifically, and I don’t know if that’s, you know, a response life experiences or if they kind of learned it socially.
He looked at me and he goes, “Man I got to tell you something, I never ever thought I would ever ask you this or talk about this, but I don’t know, I’m beside myself right now…I have never been prejudiced in my life”---her dad told me this---“I have never been prejudiced, but I have seen myself becoming prejudiced…I want you to understand that I am not saying that I am prejudiced and I will never be prejudiced towards you.

Bo admitted that it was clear his father-in-law was worried and needed to talk with him to reassure himself as well as Bo that he is not prejudiced. Bo responded to his father-in-law, “That is your own battle.” And then Bo affirmed, “I mean basically you know, I know that he is not prejudiced towards me, or most African-American people, it's just the people that he deals with on a daily basis.”

Dee’s father was clearly troubled by his emerging prejudicial feelings. He wanted affirmation that Bo understood that he did not have negative feelings toward him or Black people in general. Bo’s father-in-law recognizes that he is forming prejudicial ideas based on the actions of these Black tenants and he struggles with the possibility that he is associating the emerging thoughts to more macro-level issues of prejudice toward Black people. Dee’s father demonstrates the operation of color-blind ideology through his insistence that he has never been prejudiced before but simply, “fucking hates these tenants.” Bo also expresses the operation of color-blind thinking in his reaction to his father-in-law’s dilemma. Bo asserts it is his father-in-law’s battle and maintains that he knows his father-in-law is not prejudiced against him. Bo commented that for Dee’s father it is not necessarily “color” or “type” specific. Instead, his distain is for whoever the people are that occupy his properties and disrespect him--that is who he has a problem with.
Each of these whites felt that they were non-racist color-blind people who did not judge or qualify based on race. However, when a situation came up that involved Black people, negative race-specific sentiments surfaced. If Molly’s new boyfriend or the nurses frustrating Martha were white and if Bo’s father-in-law had white tenants acting up, the issue of race would neither need to be considered nor would they have to discount it. As a function of white privilege, when whites encounter situations with other whites -- positive or negative -- they typically do not acknowledge or think about race. Even when they do consider race it is specific to those individual whites and not an entire group. For instance, Dee made the comment that if her father’s tenants had been white, “He would be prejudiced against them too; he would call them white trash.” That comparison discounts the power of negative racial sentiments and does not acknowledge the structural disadvantage experienced by Blacks.

Moreover, these whites used micro-level color-blind justifications to minimize or discount their emerging macro-level prejudicial ideas. They each argued they had never been prejudiced before and assumed themselves to be color-blind. Nevertheless, they attributed a racial label to the Black person they encountered and associated that label with negative characteristics. This labeling demonstrates the prevalence and the significance of race and illustrates the (re)construction of racial distinctions. All three struggled with what that association meant in relation to being prejudice or racially insensitive. This operation of color-blindism among whites facilitates the perpetuation of non-racial affirmations and claims of not being prejudice. Consequently, white privilege is reified.
CHAPTER VI
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, I set out to explore the operation of color-blind ideology among interracial couples. Specifically, my research considers how a typically macro-level concept, color-blind ideology, shapes micro-level interaction in the form of Black-white intimate relationships. I employed feminist qualitative methodology to conduct semi-structured interviews and examine the ways in which these couples navigate and manage their relationships in a color-blind racist world. I uncover the influence and operation of race in their relationships and discover how these couples handle racialized matters. In doing so, I intended to garner a deeper understanding of contemporary race relations and the interpersonal intimacy of couplehood. My goal is to offer new insight into the interplay of structure (intimate interracial contact) and ideology (color-blindism/anti-racism) and its impact on the perpetuation of racial privilege and the permanence of racial inequality.

Although it is widely accepted that the blatant racism of the past has been eradicated, research confirms that covert racial issues persist as a result of color-blind racism. Contemporary racism is rooted in the operations of the dominant racial ideology-color-blind ideology. At the same time that color-blindism prevails, crossing racial lines in families and intimate relationships is becoming more common and even accepted in the U.S. (Domokos-Cheng 1995; U.S. Census Bureau (see e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003;
Bonilla-Silva & Lewis 1999; Lewis 2003). The simultaneous nature of the perpetration of racism and the increase in interracial relationships is the reason I chose to explore the operation of color-blind ideology in interracial intimacy. I wanted to understand the role that race and racialized practices play in the lives of Black-white couples. In this chapter, I will review my research goals, summarize my findings, discuss limitations, and offer suggestions for future research in this area.

Goals and Findings

The primary goals of this study were: 1) To examine the current lived experiences of interracial couples in order gain a detailed subjective understanding of how race influences and operates in their relationships; 2) To reveal if color-blind ideology or anti-racist ideology operates in their intimate relationships, as well as their familial and social relationships; and 3) To discover how these couples confront racialized practices, manage their interracial status, and discuss race issues as a couple. In the following section, I discuss my findings as they emerge across the life course in relation to the goals of this study.

The Pervasiveness of Color-Blindism. My research confirms that color-blind ideology pervades the thoughts and interactions of both whites and Blacks involved in interracial relationships. The pervasiveness of color-blindism is unequivocal among the couples in this study. Across the life course, color-blind ideology is prevalent in their upbringing, interaction as a couple, and in their familial and social interactions. Within the intimate interracial context, both groups espouse color-blind principles and these couples often use color-blind practices to manage their interracial status. However,
As the prevailing racial ideology constructed and advocated by the dominant group, color-blind ideology operates among whites. It promotes a post-racial discourse which allows whites to discount race in their daily interactions. The white partners and families in this study engage color-blind ideology when confronting racial matters. Unlike whites, Blacks are aware of race in every facet of their lives and therefore, cannot fully adopt white thought and assume a race-neutral ideology. However, Blacks are required to espouse a color-blind position in order to fully participate in society. Therefore, color-blind logic--situational reasoning and rational judgment--operates among Blacks. Black partners and families in this study employ color-blind logic in racialized practices and interactions. The use of both color-blind ideology and color-blind logic reinforces the established structure and ideology and therefore, serves to strengthen white privilege (Doane 2003; Lewis 2003; O’Brien 2001).

During socialization, both Blacks and whites were given color-blind racial messages from their families with regard to treatment of others and interracial contact. As we would expect, they were taught that all people are equal and should be treated fairly. Among whites, these color-blind messages were implied through non-racial generalizations. Despite the race-neutral delivery, each woman understood these lessons to mean equal treatment of all people, regardless of race. The non-racial execution of the messages on the part of white families, as well as these white women’s assumption that
they apply to racialized issues illustrates the operation of color-blind ideology in the racial socialization of whites.

Among Blacks, these color-blind lessons were voiced directly in terms of race and typically were taught concurrently with cautionary information. Blacks are taught to be respectful and fair to all people but were warned that because of their race they may not be treated with the same courtesy and respect. Blacks are also cautioned that they have to “work twice as hard” and “be twice as good” as their white counterparts. These warning signs are indicative of the operation of color-blind logic. Different than the operation of white color-blind ideology, whereby whites can ignore race, Blacks must always think about their interactions in terms of race—i.e., their Blackness relative to whiteness.

Color-blindism also operates among the families of the couples in this study. As described by the couples, white and Black families tend to react differently to their interracial relationships. Generally, white families were supportive of friendship interactions with Blacks, but were apprehensive about interracial intimacy. Most of these families’ were not supportive of their daughters’ interracial relationship and maintained their opposition for an extended period of time. Nonetheless, white families demonstrated color-blind ideology by scape-goating race to justify their disapproval in three specific ways. First, white parents justified their opposition by deferring to extended family disapproval or fears of external discrimination. Second, they framed their lack of support in non-racial concerns. In order to negate “race” as an aspect of their disapproval, parents emphasized other seemingly race-neutral objections. Finally, white families rationalized their resistance through concern for the welfare of biracial children and the problems they may encounter in the larger social world.
According to the couples in this study, Black families were mostly accepting and supportive of their interracial relationships. Unlike whites, Black families’ opposition was typically race-specific (e.g., TJ’s sister would prefer he not date white women) and short-lived. Even when they were initially apprehensive, Black families confronted their hesitation and quickly became supportive of the union. It appears that Black internalize color-blind expectations and utilize color-blind logic to overcome their own concerns about interracial intimacy. In keeping with a color-blind framework, Black families assume the notion that “race does not matter” and comply with the racial status quo. The operation of color-blind logic is revealed as Black families accept the interracial relationship and welcome white partners to the family despite their initial discomfort and disagreement.

In their efforts to counter family resistance and disapproval, both white and Black partners use color-blind reasoning. Color-blindism operates through individual partner’s claims of not “seeing color” or distinguishing race within the intimate interracial context. In order to defend and manage their interracial status, whites emphasize their partner’s positive traits and question why race and color matter. As well, many women in this study claim they do not even “see” their partner as Black. Their tendency to discount race and reinforce the notion that “color does not matter” exemplifies the operation of color-blind ideology. These race-neutral declarations ignore the importance of race to their partner’s identity and the centrality of race in shaping their partner’s experiences. These women’s non-racial classifications seem to endorse families overlooking their partner’s Blackness in order to accept the interracial relationship, which is indicative of color-blind expectations.
Color-blindism operates differently among Black partners. Color-blind logic is embedded in the decisions these men make about the women with whom they become intimately involved not in the way they “see” their partner. Blacks argue that race is not a factor in partner selection and that they simply rely on other criteria like common interests and value compatibility. By diminishing the significance of race as criteria for choosing intimate partners, these men advance color-blind reasoning. Nevertheless, Blacks do not deny that race is a component of their relationship. Although these men employ color-blind logic in mate selection, they are still aware of their partner’s race and their interracial status as a couple.

The operation of color-blind ideology and color-blind logic is evident among these couples as they negotiate their relationships and manage external pressures. Most of the management of their relationship occurs in parenthood and child rearing negotiations and through the rationalization of their interracial status in the social world. Overall, these couples are recycling the color-blind philosophies which they learned from their parents within the messages they teach their biracial children about social interaction. These couples tend to minimize the significance of race in identity construction and stress the need for exposure to diversity to foster the formation of a non-racial identity. It is clear that a color-blind foundation is rooted in the lessons these couples give or intend to impart on their children about identity, treatment of others, and participation in the social world.

As these couples negotiate their relationship, both white and Black partners employ color-blind reasoning to rationalize their interracial status and balance their personal and social lives. Whites maintain race-neutral perspectives and downplay the
significance of race in their experiences by associating racial issues with non-racial factors. For example, Tracey took it personally that Davante did not keep her picture on his desk at work. Blacks use color-blind logic in an attempt to justify their behavior and/or the behavior of others and they utilize color-blind practices to balance social situations with their personal lives. For instance, Davante is strategic and cautious about revealing his status as an interracial married couple in his predominately white male work environment.

These couples also utilized color-blind reasoning as they engage and participate in the social world. Although they recognize that race is a factor in their social interactions and shared experiences of discrimination\(^{19}\), many of the couples in this study insist that they do not experience noticeable acts of racially motivated disapproval. Often, these couples rationalize inconspicuous racialized incidents like “catching a look” as non-racial. Even when they notice “looks” in public, these couples maintain that they cannot be sure the incident is racially motivated so they blame other non-racial factors as cause for the attention. These couples use color-blind reasoning and interpretation to manage their interaction with the social world. Instead of focusing on non-racial similarities as many interracial couples do (Childs 2005; O’Brien and Korgen 2007), these couples attempt to explain away possible negative attention by concentrating on their non-racial distinctiveness.

\textit{The Permanence of Inequality.} Color-blind ideology is a pervasive belief system which rationalizes and strengthens the existing racialized social structure (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2001, 2003). The pervasiveness of color-blindism was illustrated by the lived

\(^{19}\) Many of the shared experiences of noticeable disapproval were perpetrated by Black women.
experiences of the interracial couples in this study. The operation of color-blind thinking among these couples aids the reinforcement of the structure of racial positioning. The central outcome of the racialized structure is the perpetuation of white privilege, preservation of white dominance and reproduction of inequality. Thus, racial inequality persists.

The operation of color-blind ideology among white families and color-blind logic among Black families (micro-level interaction) in this study reifies the functioning of color-blindism at the macro-level, wherein societal institutions reproduce inequality by ignoring the unique history and resource deprivation experienced by racial and ethnic minorities. In other words, there is reciprocity between micro-level and macro-level influences and operations of color-blind reasoning. Specifically, micro-level color-blind lessons are passed on through families, influence interactions with others, and are a reflection of the dominant, macro-level view of race. Blacks are trapped by the logic of color-blindness. The pervasiveness of color-blindism ensures that Blacks, as the subordinate group, will espouse color-blind logic and act according to color-blind expectations. In effect, the operation of color-blind logic among Blacks contributes to the reification of the system which reproduces inequality. In a truly post-racial world, society would be comfortable acknowledging race is the true sense of pluralism rather than diminishing its significance in an effort to minimize and hide the structural disadvantages experienced by racial groups. Clearly, color-blind racial messages are working at the macro level to influence color-blind rationales among whites and Blacks.

The individual reactions of both white and Black partners indicate that white privileged is embedded in color-blind principles. As white partners defend their
interracial relationships they discount race in an effort to appease objections. These race-neutral affirmations and claims of not seeing race are prototypical of color-blind tenets and the essence of white privilege. Not having to acknowledge race in defense of a racial mixed relationship is a privilege solely afforded to whites. White women are also enacting their privilege by standing up to their parents’ opposition and making the decision to continue the relationships based on what they have self-verified and reinforced is most salient to them. Whites’ race-neutral claims discount what race means for their Black partner and limits their ability to assert a color-conscious position. In the intimate interracial context, Black partners have much less freedom to make choices about and defend challenges to their relationships. Rather, they are trapped by the logic of color-blindism. In order to defend their relationships and placate opposition, they required to utilize color-blind logic. Therefore, Black partners exercise patience and understanding and attribute their partners’ family’s prejudicial positions to inexperience and ignorance.

The lived experiences of these couples illustrate that the dominant structure advances an ideology-- color-blind ideology--and that ideology influences and operates on the part of whites as well as Blacks. The operation of color-blindism among these couples exemplifies the mutual interplay between structure and ideology, which strengthens the social-structural positioning of racial groups and reinforces the disproportionate opportunity structure. This reflexive relationship represents the dominant group construction, as well as the social practices of both the dominant and subordinate groups. The operation of color-blind ideology and color-blind logic reifies the racialized social system and advances the structure of racial positioning. Specifically,
the relationship between the racialized social system (structure of society) and color-blind racism (the predominant ideology) works cooperatively to stimulate and reproduce inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Lewis 1999; Carr 1997; Lewis 2006; Oliver and Shapiro 1995).

Limitations

All research has limitations and this study is no exception. I initially planned to have both Black men-white women and Black women-white men heterosexual couples in my sample. However, my final sample consisted of only Black men and white women. All respondents are either married or in a long-term committed relationship, they range in age from 25 to 60, all middle to upper-class, and have earned above-average education attainment. Although I garner detailed information about the operation of color-blind ideology among relatively affluent, well educated couples, which consist of Black men-white women, the findings presented here are not generalizable to the larger population of Black-white couples. For that reason, a more diverse sample would be desirable. I achieved my sample through convenience and snowball sampling. Reflecting back on my recruitment, I could have implemented strategies to broaden my sample. To enhance the diversity, I could have expanded my recruitment efforts to advertisement, interracial internet sites, and even been more assertive when crossing paths with interracial couples in public spaces.

Even with the issue of sampling, my sample is relevant to the research in this area because among Black-white unions, couples consisting of Black men-white women are the most common (Gaines & Leaver 2002; Kalmijn 1993; Root 2001; U.S. Census
Therefore, my findings offer information about the majority Black-white experience.

This research also provides insight into some interesting gender operations. Among these couples, some traditional gender roles played out with regard to family reactions. Traditionally, women tend to seek the approval from family, especially for their intimate relationships. The women in my study were incredibly concerned with gaining their parents approval and acceptance. I cannot definitely assume that this traditional gender operation is emerging, however, because white families were generally less supportive of interracial coupling than Black families.

Another gender dynamic that has materialized from these narratives is these couples claim that among Blacks, they experience the most resistance (all except for Davante’s father) from Black women (i.e., mothers, sisters, aunts and even strangers). As well, both white and Black partners perceived Black women as oppositional and disapproving. In Chapter V, I discussed examples of couples “catching a look” in public places. When the perpetrators were Black women the racial nature is explicit and the couples assumed the looks were of disapproval and opposition to their relationships based on their interracial status. Conversely, when these couples shared stories about a similar experience and the perpetrator was not a Black woman they claimed they could not be sure the looks were race-specific. More diversity in my sample with regard to the sex, race and socio-economic status may reveal broader range of experiences and offer more insight on the emerging gendered operations.
Future Research

This dissertation was an exploratory study of Black-white interracial couples’ lived experiences. It explores the operation of color-blind ideology among one group of Black-white interracial couples. While this research has provided important insights into the influences and operation of race among Black-white interracial couples, there is still much work to be done. The main goal for this study and all research endeavors is to move the research in this area forward. In that spirit, the findings of this dissertation and the unanswered questions suggest several directions for future research.

As I stated above, one limitation of this research is the homogeneity of my sample. While this study revealed a detailed account of the influence and operation of race among affluent, highly educated Black men and white women in long-term committed interracial relationships, a more diverse and varied sample might refine my findings. Future research should further explore the operation of race and color-blind ideology among different categories of Black-white interracial couples. For instance, Black women-white men, couples of lower socio-economic standing, and college students involved in intimate relationships.

A comparison of couples comprised of Black women-white men might refine my understanding of the interracial experience. Certainly, it would be fruitful to observe if similar trend emerged with regard to social interaction and negotiating their interracial status. Also, many of the women in this study were partnered with the first Black person they had ever been intimately involved. Because of the pervasiveness of color-blindism these women were often confronting race and racial prejudice for the first time. In those cases, it seemed that they had difficulty with familial disapproval and managing their
interracial status. Black women are less likely to couple interracially and are less supportive of interracial relationships than Black men. Therefore, these women may also be engaging in their first interracial relationship and a comparison of those experiences would be significant. Including Black women and white men in the sample of partners in an interracial couple might reveal different analysis with regard to gender in the intimate relationships as well as familial interactions. It would be fascinating to uncover if Black women experience more opposition than their male counterparts and if white men experience less opposition than their female counterparts.

Similarly, diversity in the socio-economic standing among interracial couples might help distinguish social standing and class position as a buffer to discrimination and disapproval for interracial couples. In this study, a few of the couples (those with the highest reported SES) alluded to their socio-economic privilege and acknowledged that they perceive their social position buffers them from to negative external experiences. However, the couple in my sample with the lowest socio-economic status also seems to benefit from their economic position. Meaning, it might be that class position is an equalizer but operates on among those who are both socio-economically privileged and those on the lower end of the social ladder. Therefore, a sample with lower or more varied socio-economic status might clarify the role of class in interracial couplehood. Additionally, the inclusion of varied social standing and gendered couple compositions might lend itself to further exploration of the intersectionality of race, class and gender in the operation of color-blind reasoning.

College students involved in interracial relationships might provide interesting insight into intimate negotiations and interpersonal interactions of Black-white couples.
My sample ranged in ages from 25 to 60 and all participants were professionals or in long-term careers. Nine of the couples in my study were married and the other two were in serious, committed, what they defined as “pre-marital” relationships. The traditional college student is between the ages of 18 and 24, often has left home for the first time, and may be dating without the interference or involvement of family. College students are free to explore a variety of new things and when involved in sexually intimate relationships they can immerse themselves in that connection. The intellectual and social college culture coupled with the alleged notion of a post-racial social climate may facilitate interesting findings with regard to the role of race and the operation of color-blindism among young interracial couples. Young dating couples may also refine my findings on couples’ management of their interracial status relative to their personal, familial and social interactions.

Another consideration for future research is to gather longitudinal data on the couples in this study. A longitudinal analysis could help ferret out patterns of the operation of race as well as interpersonal interaction among interracial couples and could refine findings across time. A longitudinal study would be especially beneficial with regard to process. It would allow for a deeper look into the operation of race and color-blind racism among these couples across time as their connection grows and their relationship matures. Specifically, I would like to explore the notion of idea of anti-racism and racial consciousness among the couples and their families with regard to continued contact over time.

In this study, many of the white families initially did not approve of their daughter’s interracial relationship. According to these couples, across time whites’
disapproval has developed into acceptance. Clearly, continual interaction contributed to white families’ acceptance of both the relationships and the Black partner. Although the interracial contact increased positive associations among these families, there is no indication of a decrease in prejudicial ideologies or an increase in acceptance of interracial coupling. A longitudinal analysis might expose the nature if interracial contact and its impact on racial attitudes of whites. As I observe among these couples it might be that it’s simply a family affair and acceptance is offered because they are family. However, it might be that increased contact beings to break down prejudicial thinking, reforms racial ideology and modifies racialized practices.

Finally, future research should seek to understand the families of these couples. In effort to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and their position relative to their children’s interracial relationships, I would love to interview the parents of the couples I studied in this project. A large portion of the information I gathered about the operation of color-blindism among interracial couples revolved around their families’ reactions to the couples’ relationship and interracial status, as well as their interactions with the couples. Moreover, I think it would be fascinating to give a voice to the people who shaped the partners in these couples. Regardless, the voice of the families would refine my findings and the understanding of the operation of race and color-blindism among interracial couples.

Conclusion

Over the last 50 years, we have witnessed important advancements in race relations (Bonilla Silva 1997, 2001, 2003; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Wilson 1978, 1987,
1996), including the passage of federal laws designed to ensure equal educational and occupational opportunity, the legalization of interracial marriages, and the election of our first Black President. Along with the notable race progress, interracial relationships have become more prevalent and even accepted in the US (Domokos-Cheng 1995; U.S. Census Bureau). For the majority of American adults, a primary goal of the life course is to develop and sustain lasting, intimate relationships. Recent scholarship in this area focuses on the changing social attitudes, personal choices, and family life associated with romantic couplehood (Mcloyd et al 2000; Sweeney 2002; Teachman et al 2000; Waite 1995). While researchers have started investigate mechanisms that encourage and inhibit coupling, few focus on race as a consideration in coupling insofar as the norm of homogamy still predominates (Killian 2001, 2002, 2003). Therefore, in order to understand how race influences and operates in romantic relationships, I explore how race differences and contemporary racial ideology affect interracial couplehood. Specifically, my research considered how color-blind ideology, a typically macro and/or group-level concept, shapes heterosexual Black-white intimate relationships.

This research contributes to three different sociological literatures in important ways. First, this study adds to the literature on family and romantic coupling by exploring the operation of race among interracial couples and their families. My research provides an in-depth understanding of intimate interpersonal interaction and relationship negotiation. Specifically, the ways in which they manage their interracial status as they navigate family life and function in the social world. As well, this study clarifies the connectivity between the family of origin and the family of procreation within relationship functioning. Although all couples experienced some level of family
disapproval, across time they seemed to find common ground and garner social support from even the most disapproving of parents. This transition indicates that familial obligation and duty may supersede ideological disagreement in the context of interracial families.

This study also contributes to the social psychological literature on interpersonal social interaction. In this study white privilege protected the process of self-verification and self-reinforcement for whites more than Blacks. White women often defended both their fascination with diversity and decision to date interracially by arguing that it was most salient with their self-concept. They argued that continuing those relationships against the wishes of their family corresponded with who they saw themselves to be. This process of self-verification and self-reinforcement for whites manifest across their life course. Black men’s self process was stifled by the pressure of surviving in a white world. From an early age, Blacks are armored with “cautions” about their interaction with whites and the operation of the social world. These cautions facilitated conscious impression management by Blacks, which was revealed through “playing characters” and “toeing the line” in accordance with color-blind expectations.

Finally, this research adds to the race literature by exploring the macro-level notion of color-blind ideology at the micro-level. Throughout the life course and the interracial relationships of these couples color-blindism is pervasive. Color-blind reasoning pervades the thoughts and interactions of both whites and Blacks. It operates in their socialization, formation of the self, interpersonal intimacy, relationship negotiation and family interaction. The pervasiveness of color-blind ideology at the micro-level reifies the operation of color-blind racism at the macro-level, such that, both
micro-level and macro-level operations of color-blindism are structured by the racailized social system and reinforce the mutual interplay of the dominant ideology and structure.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

PRE-INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHICS SURVEY

Please answer all of the following completely.

Name: ________________________________________________________________________

Preferred pseudonym: ________________________________________________________________________

Partner’s name: ________________________________________________________________________

Age: ________________________________________________________________________

Your race: ________________________________________________________________________

Race of your partner (if applicable): ________________________________________________________________________

Relationship status (single, dating, coupled, married, divorced- if multiple apply please indicate): ________________________________________________________________________

Income bracket (check one that applies):

_____ $75,000 or more

_____ $60,000 - $74,999

_____ $45,000 - $59,999

_____ $30,000 - $44,999

_____ $15,000 - $29,999

_____ Less than $15,000

Please specify current occupation: ________________________________________________________________________

Educational attainment (check one that applies):

_____ Post graduate or professional degree

_____ College degree

_____ Some College

_____ High school diploma

_____ Less than high school

Please specify degree(s) earned: ________________________________________________________________________

Do you have children?

If so, names and ages of all: ________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. First let me start with learning a little about each of your backgrounds:

**Family dynamics:**
Could you both tell me about your family history and background, more specifically about your childhood and adolescence?

What was your relationship like with your parents and how is that relationship currently?

Do you have siblings? If you have siblings, what was your relationship like with them growing up and how is your relationship currently?

Did your family talk about race? What were those discussions like- what were you taught about race?

**Neighborhood and community dynamics:**
Where did you grow up?

What was your neighborhood like? Was your neighborhood and community diverse-racially and ethnically mixed, social class- rich, middle class, working class?

What about your school? Did you go to public or private schools? Were your schools diverse-racially and ethnically mixed, social class- rich, middle class, working class?

2. In this part of the interview I’m going to ask you about your relationship history including past relationships in order to understand the specifics of those relationships:

**Dating history:**
When did each of you begin dating? Tell me about your dating-relationships history prior to this relationship?

Have you always dated interracially? Have you been involved in same race relationships? Prior to your current relationship, how many interracial relationships have you been involved? Can you tell me a bit about those experiences?
Experiences with previous interracial and same-race dating:
Some research suggests that there might be differences in same race and different race relationships, tell me about your experiences. Have your experiences varied across the types of relationships you have had, for instance long-term, committed, or simple dating relationships- both of same race and different race?

Why did your other/previous long-term, committed relationships end? How were those relationships similar to each other and your current relationship? How were those relationships different from each other and your current relationship?

3. Now I would like to ask you for more specifics about your current relationship:
How did you meet?
How did you begin dating?
So, tell me about your courtship/initial dating?
How long have you been together?
Are you married?
Do you have children or plan on having children?
How would you describe your relationship (seriousness and stability)?

If they have not explained living arrangements then ask: do you live together? If yes, how long have you cohabitated and where do you live? If they do not live together: are there plans for you to move into together?

Tell me about how you interact at home in your day to day life? There are lots of different kinds of relationships and the ways that roles in those relationships are arranged. For instance, there are more traditional arrangements often characterized by women doing most of the house and domestic work and in other home things are arranged and done differently, how would you describe your roles in the home and in your interaction? Do you interact differently in public than you do at home?

4. The following question will be more race-specific and potentially sensitive questions in regard to your relationship:
Family:
Please explain your familial relationships specifically, would you describe yourselves as close?
How involved are you in each other’s families?
Do you visit relatives together?
Do you spend holidays and special occasions with each other’s families?
Do you have family over at your home? If so, who comes over and how frequently?

Some sociological research has found that couples in interracial relationships might experience a lack of acceptance by family and friends.
What has your experiences been?
How do/have your families reacted to your relationship?

**Friends:**
What about your friends and acquaintances- How do/have your friends reacted to your relationship?
What is your social life like with friends?
Do you have the same friends you had before your relationships?
What are those relationships like now?
Do you and your partner have the same or share friends?
How do you interact with friends- do you visit your friends and do they come over to your house?

**Prejudice and discrimination:**
Some sociological research also suggests that interracial couples might face discrimination, for example in hiring for jobs or housing or prejudice like unfavorable attitudes… What have your experiences been?
Do you discuss or have conversations about the experiences you just described to me?
If so, what are those conversations like- do you both notice and react to those experiences?

As well, sometimes interracial couples have different experiences in public spaces- what have your experiences been?

What do you think an interracial couple should tell their children about race?
How should an interracial couple handle the discussion about their race?
What about the public perception of their mixed heritage?
APPENDIX C
POST-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I would just like to get some of your closing thoughts about race and contemporary race issues (please provide as detailed of a written answer as possible).

1) Some people say they are “color-blind” when it comes to race and other people say they are not “color-blind”. People may mean different things when they talk about “color blindness” and race. Can you explain what the term “color blindness” means to you?
   (Carr 1996, Follow-up study)

2) Can you explain why you are either color-blind or not color-blind when it comes to race? Or why you don’t know?
   (Carr 1996, Follow-up study)

3) a) As you may know there is public debate surrounding race: one side feels that the civil rights movement solved and fixed race problems, and others feel that laws/policies of the civil rights movement did not eradicate racism and end racial inequality. What is your opinion or position on this debate?

b) More specifically, before the civil rights movement Blacks and whites had separate public facilities, Blacks and whites were not allowed to marry, and there was direct and overt racist treatment of Blacks. Contemporarily, research has shown that there is still similar negative treatment but that it is enacted and experienced in more covert and unnoticeable ways…what do you think about this?