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Beyond "Difference": Examining the Process and Flexibility of Racial Identity in Interracial Marriages

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This article examines the definitions of "race" used in discussing interracial marriage, arguing that the common framework of "cultural differences" used in existing literature insufficiently describes the range of experiences in interracial marriage. By redefining race as a process of classification that is neither about cultural nor biological "difference," we use racial formation theory to examine racial identity within interracial marriages and how racial identity might be reclassified as a function of interracial marriage status (i.e., comparing oneself to a different racial group). Finally, we discuss individual-level implications with respect to how interdependence theory affects racial identity and marital quality in interracial marriages.

What does it mean to be in an interracial marriage in the United States today? Anecdotal data suggest no simple conclusions. In 2013, for instance, a commercial advertisement for Cheerios cereal featured a biracial child, her White mother, and her Black father. Response to the YouTube video of the commercial was so vehemently opposed that the company temporarily stopped airing the ad.[1] Yet that same year, Bill DeBlasio, a White man married to a Black woman, won election as

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[1]Despite public criticism, Cheerios aired a sequel commercial with the same interracial family in 2014.

the mayor of New York City, and many observers credited his interracial marriage and biracial children as a powerful asset in convincing voters that he was not "just some boring White guy," as his daughter publicly claimed. It is not surprising that attention to interracial marriage is increasing, as its popularity is also on the rise. In 2010, approximately 15%—more than double the 1980 rate—of new marriages were interracial or interethnic (Wang, 2012). Whereas in 1980, only 3.2% of all marriages were interracial, by 2010, that figure had risen to 8.4%. Nevertheless, although intermarriage and public acceptance of it are increasing, only 43% of Americans see the trend as "good for society," and divorce rates among those who intermarry remain statistically higher than those who do not (Wang, 2012). Both qualitative and quantitative data suggest that interracial marriage remains a topic of social interest and debate. Thus, in this article, we consider the potential effects of this social scrutiny on participants in interracial marriages, who must view their relationships through a social lens not focused on same-race marriages. Specifically, we hope to further examine the changing definition of race and racial identity within interracial marriages, in light of racial formation theory and interdependence theory.

Focal points of past literature concerning interracial marriage include factors related to the increase of such marriages since the Civil Rights Movement (Quin & Lichter, 2011), discrimination experienced by couples (Dainton, 1999; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004), and marital satisfaction (Gurung & Duong, 1999; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004). Largely absent from the literature is discussion of the fluctuation of racial identities among those in interracial marriages, although such discussions are very prevalent in the literature concerning biracial children and their racial identities (for review, see Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). The scant literature that has focused on the potential impacts of interracial relationships on racial identity has considered the extent to which an *individual* is aware of or identifies with his or her race (Helms, 1990). Furthermore, this racial identification is socially constructed and thus contingent on historical, social and political forces, contexts, social interactions, and individual attributes (Hill & Thomas, 2000; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995). However, what appears to be missing from such research is how being in an interracial relationship at a certain time and a certain place can change not just one's perception of his or her racial identity, but *others'* perception of one's racial identity. This addition is imperative because, as Gergen (1991) notes, "The invitation for one construction as opposed to another is . . . issued from the social surrounds; and the fate of this construction is also determined by other persons" (p. 156). Therefore, this article aims to expand how past literature has defined race and to provide a different and perhaps more comprehensible (that is, accounting for the context, the audience, and the individual) approach to exploring race and racial identity among those involved in interracial relationships.

Defining Race

To speak meaningfully of the experience of individuals in interracial relationships, we must first define *race*. Explanations that refer to race as a shade of skin or to shared cultural practices such as music, food, or holidays invariably fail to capture variance in experiences of individuals within all races. Moreover, such definitions cannot reckon with the ever-changing reconfigurations of what is meant by terms such as "White," "Black," "Latino/a," or "Asian." To speak of interracial relationships, then, we must understand that race itself is a fluid notion with definitions and boundaries that are neither static nor stable.

Markus (2008) provides a helpful distinction between the terms "race" and "ethnicity." Neither, she insists, is merely biological nor internal to individual people. Each is "a dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices" made outside of people, in culture (Markus, 2008, p. 654). "Race" categorizes people into groups based on perceived physical appearance (e.g., skin color) that creates a dynamic of power and social status and thereby justifies oppression of those deemed less valued or privileged. "Ethnicity," meanwhile, refers to common cultural experiences, including but not limited to language, traditions, and ancestry that many—but not all—members of a group often share and from which they draw a sense of identity and pride—tools that are often valuable in resisting the oppressive categories of "race." As Smedley and Smedley (2005) point out, intermarriage is one reason that ethnicity cannot be reduced to race. Intermarriage, like immigration and transnational adoption, allows for people of various races to participate in the ethnicities of those other than the ones into which they have been born.

Although we argue that race is not solely defined based on biological difference and note the historical shift in understanding race from a biological view to a cultural view, we cannot remove the reality that physical characteristics are primarily what shape interracial interactions. If minority members are denigrated or exploited because of the shade of their skin, despite the progress in our definitions, the consequences still remain very real. Arguably, as we reflect on recent police cases in the United States, many still believe that because we look different, we should be treated differently. The sociologist W.I. Thomas famously argued that "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas & Thomas,1928, p. 571). If the consequences are based on biological differences, then it becomes part of reality. Though a stigmatized individual may not accept that race is fully encompassed by their physical appearance, society continues to promote such norms. This also highlights a critical difference in how the macro context (i.e., society) differs from the micro context (i.e., the individual) on the meaning of race and racial identity.

Historical conceptions of race in the United States assumed it was biological in origin, and assumed its stability and permanence. Antimiscegenation laws in the

United States long assumed, following popular and scientific thought, that race was a biologically distinguishable, measurable characteristic. Influenced by eugenic "science" of the time, Virginia's 1924 Racial Integrity Act, for instance, applied the infamous "one-drop rule" to describe and document "White" and "colored" people, barring them from marriage to one another; Georgia and Alabama soon passed similar laws. Yet by the late 1920s, social scientists had begun to challenge the logic of scientific racial categorization. They argued that culture, rather than biology, constituted the meaningful differences between people who had been grouped by physical characteristics. Movements of the 1950s and 1960s brought new milestones in the struggle for Civil Rights, including the landmark *Loving v. Virginia*, which invalidated state laws forbidding interracial marriage. In her study of legal cases related to miscegenation, historian Pascoe (1996) notes that in *Loving*, the "justices were no longer willing to accept the notion that race was the all-encompassing physical phenomenon nineteenth-century racialist thinkers had assumed it to be; they accepted the divisions between *culture* and biology and culture and race established by modern social scientists" (p. 67).

Outside of the courtroom, too, culture rather than biology became the key descriptor of differences between the races. The meeting of cultures is nowhere more obvious or intimate than in interracial marriage, and the growing number of interracial marriages would seem on its face to suggest that race has become a less important division since the 1967 decision. For many, love, like the law, is colorblind. Moreover, interracial marriage is changing the face of the United States as it destabilizes clearly demarcated racial and ethnic categorizations. The hybrid families that interracial marriages produce suggest to some the emergence of a new American family wherein cultural differences blend and new cultural forms emerge.

Although the shift toward cultural rather than biological difference seems on the surface to reflect progress toward racial equality, this discourse is problematic for a variety of reasons. First, it has long functioned, as perhaps most famously demonstrated in the 1965 Moynihan Report, to blame Black culture rather than White racism for inequality. Furthermore, it fails to describe the varieties of so-called "Black culture"—or, for that matter, the "culture" of any racial group. Hybridity, too, is a problematic discourse when it assumes that the two cultures being crossed, as the popular literature often suggests, are clearly defined and describable. The categories of Black and White are not monolithic; they are continually changing in time and space. Vijay Prashad (2001) describes the following questions as "the dilemmas of multiculturalism: Are cultures discrete and bounded? Do cultures have a history or are they static? Who defines the boundaries of culture or allows for change?" (p. xi). Although Prashad understands a concern for "cultural authenticity" sometimes provides an important group identity, he warns that culture is more complex and dynamic than a "hybrid" model that grafts one monolithic culture to another can describe. This model does not

adequately theorize the dynamism of culture and history—nor, as we argue below, the diversity of experiences of people within interracial marriages, separately as individuals and together as couples.

Thus in this article, we reject the idea that race can be described solely as biological. Rather, we view race as a process of classification in which skin color and other physiological markers (for example, shape of eye, texture of hair, and body shape) function as metonyms for power and identity, the meanings of which cannot be controlled or assigned by individuals or distinct cultural groups. In short, race is a social construction interpreted through the broad lens of culture. This view diverges from popular discussions of race, which tend to classify it as either ontological (what race "is," a determinist essentialism based on physical characteristics alone) or phenomenological (what race "does," as a set of specific learned cultural or behavioral norms—one "acts Black" or "acts White"). We, like Markus (2008), draw, rather, from the work of sociologists Omi and Winant (1994), whose racial formation theory explains the process by which racial categories are defined as well as how race is transformed and destroyed within social and historical contexts. Their approach, like ours, understands race as a dynamic concept that is made and remade in intersection with other social, historical, political, and economic categories and that does not reside in the body or actions of any individual or couple, separately or as it "crosses" in marriage.

Introduced by Omi and Winant in 1986, the landmark Racial Formation Theory altered and challenged traditional notions of race as simply a biological trait, but also additional racial theories that focused on ethnicity, nation, and class. Central to racial formation theory is the notion that race is a social concept that is shaped by internal and external social forces. Specifically, racial formation is known as a process "by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings" (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 55). Furthermore, racial formation theory approaches racial categories as unstable and often transformed over time, especially if politically contested.

Two specific dimensions of racial formation theory that are pertinent to the understanding of racial identities and interracial marriage include racialization and racial signification. Racialization occurs when racial meanings are attached to a social group that was either unclassified or is in the process of being reclassified (Omi & Winant, 1986). Such a process is sparked by changes in the social, political, and historical landscape. Thus, the racial meanings attached to what was once "Negro" and what is now "African American" have bearing on the experiences of individuals involved in Black/White interracial marriages.

Another important dimension of racial formation theory is the process by which racial identities are assigned and adopted within a given social context, known as racial signification (Omni & Winant, 1994). Within this process of racial formation is the presence of actor, audience, and context, which implies

flexibility at the micro, meso, and macro levels, respectively. Thus, the individual, members present (i.e., "the audience"), and the temporal and geographic context represent multiple levels upon which racial identity is interconnected.

Meanwhile, understanding race as a formation—that is, a classificatory process—we can examine how Black and White people in interracial marriages experience their own respective races and their identities as they defy the classifications assigned to them by their physical characteristics. Race classifies people into binaries of separation and control—exclusion and access, purity and contamination, voice and silence, us and them—that consistently protect the power and privilege of Whiteness. Although love may feel colorblind for individuals and couples in interracial marriages, they do not have the privilege of racial invisibility in their social worlds, and love does not dismantle the process of racial classification. Interracial couples challenge this system, yet they nonetheless live within it and often become more aware than others of the salience of race. Approaching the question of race through the processes of its formation elucidates and denaturalizes the questions of separation, control, borders, and crossing as phenomenological—that is, about what race does. Yet this phenomenology is not about what raced bodies and people do but rather about what these processes do to people of all skin colors and physical characteristics. As we argue below, women and men in interracial marriages are racialized in ways that they cannot control regardless of their own positive or negative identifications with their ethnicities.

As Childs (2005) has argued, however, most research into interracial marriage has treated these relationships "as an isolated phenomenon that can be explained through a study of the couples themselves" (p. 7). However, racial formation theory reminds us that it is only within the matrix of meanings that are already "polycultural," to use Prashad's (2001) term for a view that embraces the full complexity of cultural and historical change and does not privilege authenticity or racial boundedness, that interracial marriages exist. Thus we concur with Childs (2005) that the study of interracial marriage is best studied in the context of the wider communities in which these relationships both struggle and flourish. However, we also point out that an individual's racial identity and its meanings vary as he or she moves—often daily—through a variety of communities, circumstances, and settings that may shape or reshape one's relationship to his or her own race and to the interracial marriage itself.

Although we focus on Black and White people in this article, people of other races or combinations also are subject to the process of racial formation and reformation in their various communities and contexts. People in interracial marriages experience racial formation and reformation as they appear separately or together, with or without their children, in spaces hostile, friendly, or ambivalent to their marriages. We ask, then, what the cumulative effect of these shifting racializations might be on the individual, the couple, and the communities who interpret them. The experiences of people in interracial marriages illustrate the instability of race

as an ontological category not only in the grand arc of history but also in the minute day-to-day interactions that code them differently in different spaces and contexts. Racial formation theory reminds us of the insistence of sociohistorical, political, and economic discourses on their most everyday interactions as they are raced in ways that may or may not diverge from their personal descriptions of identity and racial meanings.

Racial Formation in Interracial Marriage Contexts

As previously mentioned, racial formation theory provides a framework to approach the topic of race, race relations, and racial identity as socially constructed entities that are vulnerable to change over time pending on the social, historical, and political landscape of a particular culture. One example of this constant flux in race is provided by Omi and Winant (1994) when they described how an individual's race can change by simply taking a vacation to Brazil. Given racial categories in Brazil are much different than those in the United States, one's race might be considered "Black" in the United States and "Pardo" in Brazil (Fish, 2012). The shifting meanings attached to racial categories impact how individuals who are believed to "belong" to respective categories are treated. Furthermore, these meanings are subject to change tremendously over time, again depending on the historical, social, and political circumstances. For example, the categories of "Jew," "Negro," and "Irish" had very different meanings attached to them in the 1940s in comparison to the meanings attached to them today.

The rapid growth of interracial relationships continues to greatly impact and change conceptualizations of race in the United States. From 1980 to 2010, interracial marriages have doubled; accounting for about 8% of the population (Heise & Hartmann, 2014). Mixed-race children (about 9 million according to the 2010 census) are the result of many of these marriages and thus have the ability to challenge and change the current racial categories (Heise & Hartmann, 2014). Beyond the growth in numbers, if the meanings attached to race at the macro level have changed over time, then certainly the cultural acceptability and/or disapproval of interracial marriages have also changed over time. As a result, the time period when individuals entered interracial marriages can influence the nature of the influence of such relationships on their interactions with others and their personal racial identity.

In addition to historical changes in race, changes in context must also be considered when investigating the implications of interracial marriages. For instance, the interracial couple's residence and community impact their own racial identity and the perception of their racial identity. For example, perhaps because of the intense and violent history surrounding segregation in the South, it is not surprising that the percentage of acceptance of interracial marriage is lower in the South than in other regions of the United States (93% in the West, 86% in the North

and Midwest, and 83% in the South) (Gallop Poll, 2013). Furthermore, the size, diversity, and history of a community must also be considered when exploring the personal impacts of an interracial marriage on one's identity. For example, Rosenblatt and colleagues (1995) provided in their research on interracial couples from Minneapolis-St. Paul that this particular "metropolitan area has a relatively large number of interracial couples and has the reputation of being a good place for an interracial couple to live" (p. 6). Therefore, when investigating the potential impacts such relationships have on one's racial identity it appears vital to not only consider when an interracial relationship exists, but also where it exists.

Investigations should also consider microlevel perspectives and include personal interactions and experiences with others. Some past literature has included microlevel analysis and has focused on the impacts interracial relationships can have on personal identity, but not necessarily on the audiences' perception of racial identity. A few examples of such research will follow to better illustrate the contribution racial formation theory can make to this body of literature.

Rosenblatt and colleagues (1995) conducted an extensive study in which 21 Black/White interracial couples were interviewed by an interracial couple. The interviews included questions concerning the couple's, the community's, society's, and families' perceptions of their relationships, as well as the impact of their relationships on their personal racial identities. The results indicated that African American individuals in interracial relationships believed their Black identities were challenged by African Americans because they were viewed as supporting (or not directly opposing) a racist society and/or not staying true to their ethnic roots (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). In addition, Whites also challenged African Americans' racial identities by frequently engaging in anti-Black conversations with those African Americans who were in interracial relationships; which ignited a stronger Black identity among those who were involved in such conversations. The results also indicated that White identity was greatly impacted by simply being in such relationships—that is, being in an interracial relationship led Whites to actually recognize the existence of their racial identity. How African Americans impacted White identity was not reported, because many Whites in interracial relationships noted having very little contact with other African Americans in their primary "all-White settings" of life (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). This finding further emphasizes the flux of racial identities based on the context or where these identities are "performed" and the audience by which they are received.

A similar approach to racial identity was provided by Hill and Thomas (2000) in their interviews with Black and White women who were involved in interracial relationships. Hill and Thomas utilize a social constructionist perspective, similar to racial formation theory, and note that this social constructionist lens highlights the dynamic between the individual and his or her context. However, the ultimate focus of their approach was on how women in interracial relationships utilized strategies that helped negotiate, manage, and reconstruct their personal racial

identities. For example, one of their White interviewees who used what Hill and Thomas (2000) refer to as "blocking strategies" (strategies used to block narratives others attempted to impose on them) indicated that once people find out that her husband is Black, their behavior toward her changes. Perhaps the audience behavior changes because the woman is no longer seen as a "White" person, but rather with a "White person who is in an interracial relationship," which clearly are not one in the same. Thus, not only does the audience's changed behavior potentially affect one's personal understanding of his or her own racial identity, as Hill and Thomas note, but it also suggests that the perception of one's race is also being constructed/reconstructed or formed/reformed by the audience.

What is interesting about Rosenblatt et al. (1995) and Hill and Thomas's (2000) discussion is the lack of attention to how the audience's perception of racial identity is actually changing. Rosenblatt and colleagues (1995) specifically note that some African Americans in interracial relationships were viewed as "less Black" or "not Black enough" by their African American peers, while Whites viewed Blacks in interracial relationships as "on our side," which can be translated as perhaps "more White" than other African Americans. Thus, one's race is being formed, reformed, constructed, and reconstructed in the eyes of others and may be changing as well for the participants in interracial marriages as they move between interactions with a variety of people in a variety of settings.

Implications of Racial Identity in Interracial Marriages

As racial identity for interracial marriage partners may change as a function of the contexts and cultures in which they reside, the question remains what the implications of such change might be. This process of being "raced" can have effects from both an external (i.e., as a specific time or location might view an individual as less Black or White) and internal (i.e., the degree to which the individual might acknowledge a shift in their racial identity) perspective. To focus more on the internal perspective, the following section will discuss the internal implications, specific to identity and marital satisfaction. In addition, these personal and group-based effects can differ according to the minority or majority status of the individual. Otherwise stated, White partners experience differential effects based on their race than do Black partners within interracial marriages.

Social and Racial Identity

Social Identity Theory asserts that individuals use their identities as a source for maintaining their self-esteem by engaging in favorable in-group comparisons (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The dichotomy of in-group versus out-group and subsequent comparisons become more complex in interracial relationships. If your partner is not in your in-group, does that affect the relevancy of such in-group

categorizations? As individuals may be reclassified as a function of their relationship and audience, subsequently their social identities and self-concepts would be affected, not only in strength but also in valence. Specifically, White partners in interracial marriages may be more cognizant of their race and even be classified as "less White" when seen in public forums with their Black partners. On the other hand, Black partners may be reclassified as "less Black" when with their interracial partners. In both cases, interracial partners may have inconsistencies between how they view themselves (i.e., personal identity) and how they define themselves based on society's expectations (i.e., social identity). Thus, the racial identity and social identity of interracial marriage partners would experience the same reclassification process.

Black racial identity has been linked to a number of positive and protective behaviors, including acting as a buffer to discrimination (Sellers & Shelton, 2003), better physical and mental health (Sanders Thompson, Clark, & Purnell, 2012), and increase in self-esteem (Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998). As racial identity may be challenged or context-dependent for interracial marriage partners, it may be more difficult to maintain these psychological and physical variables. The benefits of a strong affirmation of one's racial category are called into question as the audience may "rerace" interracial marriage partners. For example, in Black spouses, the degree of "Blackness" is called into question, thus making it more difficult to take pride in one's cultural group and maintain positive in-group comparisons.

Although much of the previous literature has focused on the protective features of racial identity, it is also possible that the flexibility might have benefits as well. Perhaps, there are ways in which an interracial marriage confers status in some contexts. How do the changing meanings of race affect individuals in interracial marriages who are received, for example, as "cool" or "inspiring"? We might consider the cultural capital that members of interracial relationships gain and lose in various contexts and how these shifting affiliations and identifications might affect an array of individuals' political, religious, intimate, or social behaviors. In the aforementioned example of New York City mayor Bill DeBlasio, his status as a partner of an interracial marriage likely brought political capital by expanding the margins of his in-group and potential voters. Specific to White partners, the process of reclassification and less emphasis on their "Whiteness" might lead to an acknowledgement of their White privilege and resistance to racial prejudice. For Black partners, the changing nature of their racial identification might lead them to be seen as individuals rather than as representatives of their race. Doering (2014) mentions that Blacks historically have associated interracial marriage with a hopeful sign for the future—an end to racism. In this vein, the status of an interracial marriage may be viewed as a character strength for both Black and White interracial partners. We are not arguing that the flexibility of racial identity

necessarily leads to positive or negative outcomes but rather as an added layer or dimension to such interracial marriages.

Interdependence Theory and Marital Satisfaction

Interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) offers a theoretical explanation of how interracial relationship partners might affect each other's racial identity as well as marital satisfaction. A greater degree of dependence, according to interdependence theory, will lead to partners making decisions based on each other's interests. Rusbult and Van Lange (2003) argue that the dynamic between the couple can be understood by examining the product of the each person (A & B) in the relationship and the specific social situation (S), otherwise stated as $I = f(S, A, B)$. Each partner's needs, thoughts, and motives are subject to the social context. The emphasis on the social context is especially important for interracial relationships, as we have argued, because the couple may be recategorized and subject to different social forces. Thus, as partners negotiate and sacrifice in a relationship, they would also take into consideration the social and historical context. For example, if an interracial couple is trying to decide where to spend the holidays, each partner might consider not only their own preference (i.e., rewards) but also their degree of acceptance, comfort, and safety (i.e., costs) in each location before making a decision. Again, the exchange of rewards and costs would be different in interracial marriages than in intraracial marriages given the social forces present.

Power and dependence are also difficult to discuss separate from each other. If one partner is more dependent, then the opposing partner holds more power. As discussed previously, race represents power; the question remains if the partner in the minority group is more dependent on the partner in majority group and what effect that might have on their racial identity. Otherwise stated, is it more likely for the Black minority partner to have greater sacrifices in the relationships and flexibility in their racial identity as they are constantly being judged by White majority norms. In this issue, Leslie and Young (2015) discussed the role White privilege plays in interracial couples in their parenting decisions and communication and ultimately counseling outcomes. Interdependence theory sheds light on how race and power might predict the degree of mutual dependence a couple exchanges.

Rusbult and Van Lange (2003) argued further that we can understand the role of dependence by a transformational process which shifts the individual's interest from themselves to concern for their partners (i.e., from what's it in for me to what's in it for us?). Predictors of this transformational process include interpersonal dispositions, relationship specific motives, and social norms (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Racial identity can be categorized as an individual difference or interpersonal disposition, and thus a potential motivator to partner's transformative dependence and concern for each other. Furthermore, most racial identity models

consider individuals who have a strong sense of who they are racially as a more mature stage of development but are also more accepting of people of different racial groups (for review, see Gaines & Reed, 1994). Thus, the degree to which interracial partners are strong in their racial identification (though that might differ from reclassifications in a macro context), the easier it may be to put their partner's need before their own when conflicts arise.

Evidence of the potential benefits of racial identity in interracial marital satisfaction was offered by Leslie and Letiecq (2004). They examined the effects of racial identity, experience of discrimination, and social support in the marital quality of Black–White interracial couples. Just as race can be redefined based on micro- and macro contexts, Leslie and Letiecq (2004) argued that racial identity was a micro context in which daily issues of race and racial differences affected marital quality. They found that racial identity, as measured by the Helms and Carter (1991) Racial Identity Attitude Scale, was more predictive of marital satisfaction than social support and perceived discrimination. In particular, this pattern was stronger for African American partners than it was for Caucasian partners. African American men who had higher internalization of their racial identity were more likely to report love and less likely to report ambivalence in their relationships (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004).

It should not be surprising that the impact of racial identity is stronger for Black partners than for White partners in interracial marriages, as seen in Killian (2001) and Leslie and Letiecq (2004). With respect to the measurement of racial identity, the literature has primarily focused on Black racial identity (for review, see: Harvey, Blue, & Tennial, 2012). Very few models for White racial identity exist. The most commonly cited is Helms and Carter (1991); however, critics argue that the scale is confounded with out-group attitudes (i.e., prejudice) as opposed to salience and development of one's White racial identity (Blue, 2007). One consequence of White privilege as described by McIntosh (2004) is the obliviousness of our "Whiteness" or lack of identification to one's race. As seen in the aforementioned studies, racial identity (and its flexibility) plays a critical role in interracial marriages.

At the family unit, most of the literature has focused on the children of an interracial marriage and their biracial identity development (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). However, when examining narratives of Black–White interracial marriages specific to the couple, Killian (2001) found that partners negotiated race and ethnic differences by deemphasizing their racial differences, values, and histories while focusing on a common shared couple identity. Furthermore, Black spouses were more likely than White spouses to report increased awareness of resistance to the interracial marriage and pressure to forgo their racial heritage for the sake of the relationship. Killian's (2001) study is limited in that it did not collect any quantitative data on specifically the impact of racial identity on the

couples. Though qualitative in nature, this study would suggest that racial identity was decentralized as a function of surrounding contexts.

Conclusion

As we have argued in this article, racial formation theory (Omi & Winant, 1994) and interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) attempt to explain the flexibility in racial identity in interracial marriages, both from an external and internal perspective, respectively. However, the argument is theoretical and future research is needed. Future studies should explore the relationship between both White and Black racial identity. Racial identity may be more salient for White partners in interracial relationships than in intraracial relationships. Questions on how variables such as the strength, continuity, and salience of racial identity, level of sacrifice, and contextual factors might influence evaluations of the self and of the marriage remain. Furthermore, how does one partner's racial identity affect the other's identity with respect to the role of interdependence? To date, there is only one study (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004) we found that examined the impact of racial identity on the quality of the relationship. Specifically, Leslie and Letiecq (2004) found racial identity was positively related to marital satisfaction, however statistically interracial marriages are at greater risk of divorce than intraracial marriages. Further study is required to examine these unique social pressures, both within the micro and macro contexts.

This also lends to further conversation on the purpose of such racial classification. Whites generally report less consciousness with respect to their racial identification, whereas Blacks consider it a common core of belongingness to a group based on shared heritage (Helms, 1990). As we think about the purpose of self-identifying our race on job applications or the census, these finite categories are not representative of the shifting racial identities within interracial marriages.

Race and racial identity are fluid constructs that change as a function of social, temporal, and social contexts. The effects of interracial marriage cannot simply be understood by their difference, but rather the interactional effects their racial status plays into their categorization and personal identities. Partners within interracial relationships are being "raced" in varying contexts and audience evaluations of the partner's racial group. Whites may experience full White privilege before people are aware of an interracial marriage status, whereas after status is known, reactions/evaluations change. Likewise, Blacks may be viewed as "less Black" after their interracial relationships are salient. The measure of feeling "more" or "less" one's race is, however, only one way in which racial identity may change. Perhaps there are ways in which White partners feel "more White" for being aware of their racial privilege even if society reads them as "less White." Perhaps

Black partners feel their own Blackness more acutely in contrast with a White partner's inexperience with racism or Black traditions. It is more than possible to imagine, given the constancy of racial formation and reformation, that all of the above possibilities may be true for interracial spouses at various times and places in their lifetimes. The cumulative effects of these shifting identities are relevant at the personal and group level, including self-evaluations, marital quality, and well being.

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