



# Clinical Suggestions for Family Therapists Based on Interviews with White Women Married to Black Men

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## Abstract

With the number of interracial marriages rising, family therapists need to know what issues these married couples and their families face. The authors analyzed qualitative interviews with 11 White women married to Black men, who were part of a larger study on interracial couples. The authors identified four themes that were relevant to the participants' experiences and could guide therapy with the family. These were: (1) racial perspective taking; (2) communication patterns; (3) microaggressions; and (4) raising children. Three sub-themes were also identified that were tied to racial perspective taking. These were: (a) White privilege; (b) safety; and (c) social justice. Clinical suggestions for family therapists working with these couples are provided.

**Keywords** Family therapy · Interracial marriage · Microaggressions · Biracial children · Inter marriage

## Introduction

Interracial and interethnic marriages have been on the rise in the United States for several decades, with younger generations more likely to be intermarried (Barroso et al., 2020). The proportion of newlywed couples who are interracial or interethnic is now one-in-six (Livingston & Brown, 2017), with interracial and interethnic marriages accounting for over 10% of all current marriages (Rico et al., 2018). Although couples and families have been focal points of research and practice, limited research has recently explored the experiences of individuals in interracial marriages in the United States (Skinner & Rae, 2019). As race is a social construction (Gallagher & Twine, 2017; Pascoe, 1991), beliefs, attitudes, and acceptance across and between races have changed across time and appear to be constantly in flux in

the United States, necessitating constantly updating knowledge related to race. For example, within the past 18 months, support for Black Lives Matter waxed then waned, according to another Pew Research Center survey (Thomas & Horowitz, 2020). Yet race remains a key topic. A poll taken by the Pew Research Center in mid-2020 revealed that 69% of people surveyed had talked to family and friends about race and racial equality (Parker et al., 2020).

In 1967, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the landmark *Loving v. Virginia* decision that state laws banning interracial marriage were unconstitutional. This verdict was an inflection point for a significant and still increasing number of people marrying interracially and contributed to a growing shift in both public perception and popular opinion. Garcia et al. (2015), analyzing the General Social Survey data from 1972 and 2002, found social acceptance of interracial marriage increased dramatically. Their one caveat was that White people, and older people of all races, were less accepting of interracial marriage than younger people and, specifically, younger people of color. Djamba and Kimuna (2014) examined the attitudes of both Black and White Americans about one of their relatives marrying outside of their race. The authors found that more than half of Black people but only one-quarter of White people would be accepting of a close relative marrying someone of a different race. Despite generally growing acceptance, societal factors—including historical racism, ongoing racial

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discrimination by individuals and systems, and cultural taboos—can take a toll and negatively impact these couples on multiple levels (e.g., Vasquez et al., 2019; Skinner & Hudac, 2017).

The importance of race in the American fabric cannot be overestimated and interracial and interethnic couples are in the crucible. Focusing specifically on Black-White marriage merits attention because of their historic significance in the United States relative to *Loving v. Virginia* and because they are two racial groups that are often at odds with each other (Stokes et al., 2021) and can garner the most negative attention (Baptist et al., 2019). Gaining an understanding of how marriages function when there is intermarriage can provide a needed lens not only on the couple but on how children, extended family, friends, and society intersect with the couple and how we co-exist as a nation. Such knowledge can assist family therapists working with these couples and their children to be attuned to the multiple intersecting issues that are raised.

In this article, we first report on an analysis of qualitative data collected from White women married to Black men as part of a larger study of interracial and interethnic marriages that we initiated in 2020, during a time of great racial self-examination. We next offer a discussion of the meanings derived from the themes and informed by feminist family therapy. We provide specific clinical suggestions that we believe will be helpful to family therapists working with interracial couples and their children should they be seeking treatment. We conclude by encouraging therapists to engage in self-examination as they work with these families.

## Literature Review

As noted, interracial couples generally may have difficulty in terms of the acceptance that they receive (Skinner & Hudac, 2017; Vasquez et al., 2019). Robinson-Wood et al. write, “The history of interracial marriage in the United States is fraught with legal, social, and cultural barriers, stigma, and tension. It must be noted that these historical contexts continue to inform the dynamics of certain interracial partnerships” (2021; p. 974). The couple, regardless of the racial or ethnic composition, can feel the strain on multiple fronts as they interact with family, friends, and strangers (e.g., Djamba & Kimuna, 2014; Shih & Chang, 2021). In one study, Black-Hispanic marriages were twice as likely to have their relationship end as were same race couples (Brown et al., 2019). Even the closest family relationships can be problematic. Greif and Saviet (2020) explored, through interviews with 13 men and women (Asians, Blacks, Latinx, and Whites) married to someone of a different race or ethnicity, their relationships with their same gender parent-in-law. While some framed the interracial intergenerational relationship as a strength, others reported the relationship was a challenge

due to racial, language, and cultural differences. With time, initial relationship struggles around difference were often overcome although a few continued to experience microaggressions, “small acts of discrimination,” (Forrest-Bank & Cuellar, 2018, p. 45) from their in-laws that were often unintended as being hurtful but were experienced as such.

## Black-White Marriage

While interracial marriages of any race may face challenges, Black-White married couples may have experiences that make their relationships more fraught due to the history of the illegality of such marriages and the residue of Jim Crow (Baptist et al., 2019; Robinson-Wood et al., 2021). Lack of acceptance from strangers is one potential and significant hurdle. In a study of college students, interracial Black-White couples prompted biased responses at a more frequent rate as compared with same-race couples (Skinner & Hudac, 2017). Further, Skinner and Rae (2019) found that Black people and White people expressed more implicit and explicit bias towards Black-White couples than they expressed toward same-race couples. As a result of bias, the stigma from being in a Black-White marriage may contribute to lower couple relationship satisfaction (Vasquez et al., 2019) as well as a loss of friends (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004).

Intrafamily dynamics have also been explored. Bell and Hastings (2015) interviewed 38 individuals who were partnered in Black-White relationships to explore the couple’s experiences, particularly pertaining to parental approval. They found that while all individuals in Black-White couples reported enduring societal disapproval, most reported parental support which was a key factor in coping with racist responses to their union. Parent-in-law support has been found to be not as forthcoming, as noted above (Greif & Saviet, 2020).

The geographic location of the couple may affect their experiences with others. Microaggressions and explicit bias appear to be felt less in more racially diverse communities, according to Osuji (2019) who interviewed Black-White couples living in Los Angeles as part of her research with 47 interracial couples in the U.S. and Brazil. Participants from Los Angeles described how their locale was more convivial for them as a couple than the mid-west and the southeast of the United States (see, also Gevrek, 2014; and Roy et al., 2020).

## White Women Married to Black Men

Specific to the topic of this research, the experiences of White women married to Black men may include disapproval from strangers, friends, and, occasionally, family. White women may vary in their awareness of what it means to be married to a Black man. They may be discriminated

against because of their husband's race (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004) as they struggle to understand their husband's life experiences and their own parenting situation raising biracial children. Twine (1999) interviewed 65 White birth mothers in relationships with African-Caribbean, African-American, or Black British men. While the research is more than 20 years old, the findings resonate still in relation to becoming aware of difference (e.g., Ross & Woodley, 2020). Some of the women evinced a level of "racial literacy," a term coined to indicate a degree of heightened awareness about racism in society. Racial literacy also indicates an ability of the women to monitor their own interracial and intraracial relationships and extend that awareness into their marital relationship (Twine & Steinbugler, 2006). These women were described as "insiders" who are privy to the impact of racism while still being White, with privilege, and being, at times, "outsiders" as a member of a dominant group (Twine & Steinbugler, 2006). Other women were less aware and did not view race through a lens (Twine, 1999), indicating the differences that may appear in any marriage.

The women's "awareness" affected raising their multiracial or biracial children. The women felt doubted by others about their ability to raise a child of African descent because of their experiences as a White person (Twine, 1999). The women expressed concern about discrimination their children would experience in Britain as a Black person and took specific steps to educate their children to prepare them for any racism they might encounter. They also wondered about a "racial gap" that might arise between how they would be treated as a White woman with privilege and how their child would be treated as a Black person (Twine, 1999).

Parents also have to prepare their children for navigating through the world as a biracial person. Rauktis et al. (2016) conducted focus groups with 18 White women married to Black men and learned that many of the women found themselves, similar to Twine (1999), on "the borders of both whiteness and blackness" (p. 439). They came to believe that having a biracial child made their position in society more tenuous as they questioned their initial belief in a color-blind society. With racism prevalent, holding such an initial belief was less tenable. This shift in their outlook resulted in the mothers becoming more racially aware. Robinson-Wood et al., (2021), though, posit there is limited awareness of race among White women married to Black men as some women minimize or avoid discussions of race. This colorblindness can, in turn, inhibit communication around socializing their children.

Communication is a necessary pre-condition in many interracial marriages for managing obstacles that arise as partners need to rely on each other for support (Baptist et al., 2019; Ross & Woodley, 2020). In a Qualtrics study conducted by Baptist et al. (2019) that included 93 marriages of Black men and White women, openness between the

partners was related to greater marital satisfaction for both partners. Openness was found to be particularly important for Black men if they lacked familial and social support. Dainton (2015), in an on-line survey of people in interracial marriages, also established that having a spouse who was open and acting equitably in the marriage was linked to greater marital satisfaction.

White women married to a Black man are, from a family systems perspective, influenced by their husband's position in society. Black men often live in hostile environments and have to be hyper-alert to prejudice (Aymer, 2012). One example Aymer (2012) cites of a hostile environment is random frisk-and-search practices that Black men are subjected to which can constantly keep them on guard and affect their mental health. As a result of this hostile environment, they may experience race-related stress that can, in turn, affect the couple.

Black men, contrary to some perceptions, may be as willing as Black women to seek mental health services, according to Vaterlaus et al.'s (2015) study of strong intraracial marriages. In their research with 39 African American couples, Vaterlaus et al. (2015) found that directly communicating with their partner and being a good listener were keys to resolving problems when they arose. Another key was keeping the problems within the couple and thus re-enforcing the couple's boundaries by not involving other family members. Black men might bring these skills to their interracial marriage also.

## Clinical Approaches

Couples have various ways of avoiding unwanted attention when out in public and of coping with it when they are confronted. Killian's (2003) research uncovered a range of such strategies that couples generated on their own: (1) dissociating from one another (e.g., not sitting together on public transportation); (2) restricting itineraries (e.g., avoiding travel to the deep south); (3) making a special effort (e.g., dressing nicely to give a good impression); (4) fighting fire with fire (e.g., scowling back at people who make racist remarks); (5) keeping quiet about public reactions (e.g., not sharing with their partner any racism or microaggression that was experienced that day); and (6) deprioritizing racial and ethnic differences (e.g., considering themselves like other couples).

While these are strategies the couples adopted and about which family therapists should be aware, specific clinical suggestions also emanate from the research. Getting a family history (Baptist et al., 2019; Killian, 2003; Leslie & Young, 2015) can be a vitally important starting place in understanding the background and experiences the couple and their respective extended families have had. This should include asking about discrimination (Baptist et al., 2019;

Forrest-Bank & Cuellar, 2018) and any racial trauma that has occurred (Robinson-Wood et al., 2021). Normalizing the experiences of the couple related to microaggressions and discrimination can be a part of this inquiry, so reactions to these hurts will not be pathologized (Leslie & Young, 2015). Helping to unpack the meaning and context of a microaggression, particularly from a family member or friend, can be particularly important for the couple in deciding how to respond.

Working on open communication skills between the partners can pave the way for addressing the challenges these couples may face. (Baptist et al., 2019; Dainton, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2016). Open communication can also help with the necessary racial socialization of children (Leslie & Young, 2015; Stokes et al., 2021). Open communication can further address White partners in becoming more in tune with the Black experience and being aware of their privilege (Baptist et al., 2019; Twine & Steinbugler, 2006).

Narrative therapy has been suggested as one framework for helping the couple contextualize their experience (Baptist et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2012). Given the time period in which the current research was conducted (2020; see methods), this awareness of the social context (Leslie & Young, 2015) is particularly important. Finally, training programs for therapists that are racially and culturally sensitive and require self-reflection on privilege and cultural humility are key in this work (Leslie & Young, 2015; Stokes et al., 2021).

The research literature is clear that partners in interracial marriages often experience personal and relationship-related distress, though less than their predecessors in interracial marriage. Many report they have effective coping strategies and have the support of their family and friends. Others face challenges both within the household and as they navigate the outside world as the racism they encounter impinges on their family well-being.

## Clinical Framework

The theoretical underpinnings of Feminist Family Therapy can help provide an understanding of how to approach these families should they request assistance. As Walters et al. (1988) outlined their approach more than 30 years ago, guidelines for Feminist Family Therapy include recognizing that women's access to social and economic resources is often limited and that sexist thinking may constrain women's behavior. More specifically, their guidelines include acknowledging women's caretaker role for family relationships, that women's power is often through affiliating with men, and "...no intervention is gender-free and that every intervention will have a different and special meaning for each sex" (p. 29). Power and privilege, according to Feminist

Family Therapy, need to be addressed as they pertain to the role that women and men play in their relationships.

"Feminist family therapists believe that their role is to bring power disparities to the surface of therapy and explore how social locations of an individual's power and privilege impact their system" (Handley et al., 2019, p. 3). This is an especially important point given the differences in power and privilege that women hold compared with Black men. As an example of how women and men are seen differently, Stillwell and Lowery (2020), in a series of experiments, found that Whites viewed White women who married interracially more negatively than White men who married interracially. Such treatment can take a toll on the women and their spouses. In another study, women in interracial marriages were found, at least initially, to struggle more with their relationship than women in same-race marriages, whereas men's level of marital satisfaction was similar across inter- and intraracial marriages (Brown et al., 2019). These differences in reactions to being married to a man of color and between men and women call for considering the gendered positionality of women in therapy.

Focusing specifically on Anglo American women, McGill and Pearce (2006) suggested that successful therapy should modify the cultural and gendered tendency of women to take ownership of interpersonal problems that emerge in the family caretaking role. Addressing these issues openly may not be easy, though. Whites, they noted, may respond to conflict by distancing and avoiding and not by actively confronting their issues.

In sum, family therapy with interracial families can be guided by an understanding of Feminist Family Therapy within a gender and racial context. The context includes an appreciation for the privilege that comes with being White, the lack of power that women traditionally hold, the reactions of women in interracial marriages compared with men, and the experiences of Black men in the United States today.

## Methods

### Data Collection

Interviews for the current study were conducted as part of a larger mixed-methods research project of interracial and interethnic couples. Along with two of the three authors, Master of Social Work students in an advanced research class, taught by the first author, in Fall 2020 surveyed and interviewed individuals in interracial or interethnic marriages. Only one member of each couple was interviewed which we believed allowed the participant to be more open without their partner present. Following HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) and CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) training, as

required by the University's Institutional Review Board, the students were instructed in administering a consent form, a survey, and in conducting a qualitative interview. Training included practicing interviews first with another student or the instructor. Following the first interview, which the student transcribed, the course instructor reviewed the transcript for fidelity to the procedure and interview protocol before subsequent interviews could be undertaken. Students reviewed research on interracial and interethnic families and discussed the meanings they were deriving from the surveys and interviews in class, which further sensitized them to the topic and honed their skills as interviewers. Students could interview people they knew, people they met through acquaintances, or people recruited from online platforms. Participants could not be related to the student. Participants could be any gender, race, or sexual orientation as long as they were married to someone who they identified as a different race or ethnicity.

Following Padgett (2017), a minimally structured interview approach was used. With this approach, "...a set of questions are developed in advance, but there is flexibility in their sequencing and whether all are used or not" (p. 115). Tips for these types of interviews include asking follow-up questions based on the participant's responses, avoiding leading the participant, and encouraging the participant to give anecdotes. Interview questions were developed following a review of the literature and our own clinical experience with this population. Questions included: "Describe in broad terms what the relationship is like with your spouse. Talk about what the reaction has been to you by family, friends, co-workers, and strangers as a couple," "Describe what impact the interracial status of your marriage has on your family (children, parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.)," and "Describe in broad terms what it is like for your child(ren) being raised in a home with two or more racial/ethnic identities." See the Appendix for the complete interview guide.

We chose this sub-set to focus on because among Black-White married couples, this gender composition is more frequent than Black women married to White men (Torche & Rich, 2017), there was more research on these couples, and because they made up the largest subset of the sample. The authors each read the interviews with all eleven participants in the sample who self-described as White and female and who were married to their spouse who they described as Black and male. In this multiple case analysis, "...the researcher takes the extra step in identifying common themes or patterns across the cases" (Padgett, 2017, p. 37). Padgett further explains that this is an iterative process wherein researchers reread to gain new insights.

Following Bradley et al.'s, (2007) approach to coding thematically, each author read the interviews and identified themes that arose. The authors then met to discuss the genesis of the themes and how what each author discovered

helped to inform the other authors. The authors then returned to the interviews and coded using the agreed upon themes. They then met again to resolve any differences in what they had individually coded as themes. The authors then agreed on how respondents would be grouped within each theme.

## Researcher Subjectivity

The authors were sensitized to the topic of interracial relationships through reviewing the literature, a process recommended by Padgett (2017), and through their own research and clinical experiences. The authors are two White men and one Black woman with close to 100 years of post-MSW experience between us. One is currently a full-time private practitioner and two are full-time faculty. The authors have been in long-term relationships and two are currently married with children. As social workers, the authors have had extensive diversity training and teach and have taught courses in which diversity is central to readings and class discussion. One took the lead on diversity-related issues at a university while assisting in educating the faculty. The authors have collectively worked with populations across the lifespan, including racially and ethnically diverse populations as well as LGBTQ+ populations. The authors continually talked to each other about the topic to ensure that there was an ongoing process of open communication seeking mutual understanding of the experiences of the participants.

## Sample

The qualitative data analyzed for this study included transcripts of structured interviews with 11 White women married to Black men. Fifty-three interviews had been completed by December, 2020 and these 11 White women, as mentioned, comprise the largest race and gender distribution in Black-White marriages (e.g., Torche & Rich, 2017). Those women ranged in age from 27 to 68, with an average age of 37.3 (SD = 12.3); their spouses had an average age of 39.9 (SD = 14.9), six were younger than their husbands, two the same age, while three were older. These women had been married between 6 months and 44 years, with an average of 9 (SD = 13.2), five had children (three had two children, two had one) while the other six (all married four years or less) had no children. Seven reported their religion as Protestant, three Agnostic or Atheist, while one endorsed being Spiritual. Seven couples were the same faith/belief system. Occupationally, there were four social workers, three teachers, one patient care worker, one bank teller, one assistant principal, and one engineer. Among their husbands were two nurses, two administrators, two information technologists, one policeman, one consultant, one apprentice, one blue collar worker, and one who was retired.



## Findings

Given the position in relation to race and gender of a White woman married to a Black man, these couples often faced challenges. These challenges, distinct from what intraracial couples face, could require a conscious race and gender-based response from as well as to each other as well as to their children, extended family, friends, and broader society. The eleven participants described experiences that we grouped into four thematic categories: (1) racial perspective taking; (2) communication patterns; (3) microaggressions from family and friends; and (4) raising children. The first theme had three subthemes that fit within the larger theme (a) White privilege; (b) safety; and (c) social justice. All the participants had experiences related to multiple themes and we recognize these themes, while offered separately, often overlapped.

### Theme I: Racial Perspective Taking

This, the broadest of themes, encompasses what has happened to the participants as a result of being married to a Black man. It includes gaining a greater awareness of self as an individual, a greater awareness of self as a White woman married to a Black man, and a greater awareness of self and race in relation to the broader society. Some women had been sensitized to the experiences of different races from course work, trainings, and personal exploration but gained a more intimate and empathetic awareness of race through their own observations, comments made to them by others, and through observing how their husband was treated and how he responded. The women, as highlighted in three sub-themes, also became more aware of their privilege, of issues around personal safety, and of how the social justice protest climate of 2020 and the years immediately preceding have heightened their sensitivity. In some instances, that heightened awareness has caused a rift between them and their support systems.

For some of the women, gaining a racial perspective came as the result of feedback from a first encounter. Ms. H, a 44-year-old assistant principal, mother of two, married for 17 years to a manager six years her senior, reported:

*When we first met, I was running a prevention program, so I had seen him at a meeting. Immediately I was interested in him. We talked for two hours. When I was driving away that day, I turned back and waved and, later on, he told me that he didn't know if I dated Black men. My turning around and waving, he felt like, 'okay, I can try to take it to the next step because she's okay' which, from my perspective at that time, I didn't even think that somebody would be thinking that. But*

*he had to be more careful. What he shared with me recently is that up until he dated me, the women he had dated that weren't Black he wasn't supposed to be dating.*

Years into the marriage, her racial perspective taking included her family-of-origin.

*My parents, my brother and his wife, I sent them literature to read how to be an anti-racist. So, they're reading, they're studying, and having conversations. They've always been socially more where we are, but I think now they're processing, 'Oh, I have a son-in-law and grandchildren. They are affected by this daily and what is their reality?'*

Ms. C is a 32-year-old social worker married for four years to a 35-year-old IT specialist. She talked about what she learned since being married and the greater empathy she has gained.

*I feel like being a Black man in this country is really difficult, more so than I can ever imagine even being married to one. Sometimes he'll cross the street if he sees a White woman walking the same direction so that he's not accused of doing anything and stuff like that. It's not all the time that you have people who trust other people of other races to share that. Even in romantic relationships to fully have this conversation - so it might actually be to my benefit honestly.*

Ms. B, a 27-year-old bank teller married to a 27-year-old policeman, also described the perspective she gained from being married to a Black man.

*When you have diverse friends, while you may talk about race, you don't always get to those feelings about their experience as a person of color, whereas with a partner you spend all your time together, and see nuances and changes in their behavior based on who is around.*

Ms. A, a 36-year-old patient care advocate married to a 33-year-old nurse from (an African country), described how her perspective changed through marriage.

*He sees the world so differently than I do and I don't know how much of that is individual and how much of that is cultural, but I think that being exposed or having that as part of my world has changed me. World-view is sometimes really frustrating. But it's also good because it makes you realize you've been thinking in a little bubble your whole life and there are so many other bubbles out there. I consider myself open minded and able to imagine all of these hypotheticals, but he manages to find other things that I haven't thought about.*

Ms. E is a 25-year-old teacher who has been married for 18 months to a 25-year-old nurse. They now live in his home African country after living in the U.S. She is aware of how her background has influenced her perspective.

*There were times in the states where he felt people were looking at us, looked at us different. A lot of times people don't assume that we're married. I think they just... you know, he's a very large Black man and I'm a very small White girl. Maybe they just don't put us together in their heads. I grew up around other White people, other strict Republicans. The things that I grew up thinking have been challenged more. I didn't always realize the extent that people would profile (my husband) when he's by himself.*

### White Privilege

Ms. R, a 34-year-old social worker married to a 37-year-old administrator for one year and with one child, talked about her growing awareness of her privilege and how she and her husband are unique in their respective family contexts.

*We often discuss the privilege I experienced growing up because of being White. My spouse was very aware of being the only Black person in many of our family get-togethers. When visiting his family, I am the only White person. However, neither of our families has any issue with the relationship.*

When asked to articulate what she meant by her privilege, Ms. R responded:

*Systemic racism has impacted me much less. He's much more conscious of how he speaks and comes across so that he is seen as professional whereas that's not something I think about most of the time.*

Another social worker, Ms. D, 48-years-old and married for 16 years to a retired 68-year-old, responded about her perspective living in a northern state and visiting her family in the south. While getting her hair done, Ms. D. heard racist remarks about Hispanics and Blacks. She recounted the remarks to her husband and learned more about her privilege from his reaction.

*It was one of the few times that I saw the disgust for him, and just that moment of looking at me like, again, this is the reason that I don't come down here and that I don't leave the home [when we are here]. It gave me that ability to step back and be more understanding of where his thought process was.*

Ms. F, a 32-year-old teacher married to a 31-year-old manager with one child, talked about, as did Ms. H, the struggles in trying to educate her own family about White privilege.

*I don't think that they have a great understanding of systemic racism or how my spouse has to navigate being a Black man, who is a manager in a workplace that is not sympathetic to issues of racism or diversity. They deny that White privilege is as prevalent as it is. We have had arguments, even when my spouse has given them personal examples of times that White privilege has negatively affected him.*

### Safety

The racial perspective taking theme includes becoming more aware of personal safety not only for the respondent but for her husband, and the couple. A 36-year-old engineer, Ms. J., married for one year to a 37-year-old IT person and living in an urban center in the south, shared what she learned about the risk to her husband and hence to her own safety. When asked what has been successful in dealing with negative treatment, she said that while she had not had any negative feedback from people she was close to, they were cautious in other circles.

*You don't know when you're in public why people look at you. We don't know where is safe.. I became more aware of it when my mother visited and we went to a café an hour away. I described the drive and the catfish farms you see along the drive. My husband immediately said, 'We're not going there. That's how they used to get rid of Black people they killed, by throwing them in the catfish pond.' That was a first moment where I realized I didn't know a lot. If I suggest something he may say, 'I don't think that's a good idea' and I take his word for it. He's a lot more careful. When we drive places, he'll ask me to drive as I'm less likely to get pulled over. He has a lifetime of being aware of those things.*

Ms. H also learned to appreciate the danger her husband might face in different parts of the country.

*My husband drove to South Carolina because his dad was selling his property and so had to drive eight hours, sign paperwork, and then drive back. I'm, I don't want you to drive at night, I need you to be really careful. These are things that he always knew whereas I used to be only nervous because of the drive, not because of where you're driving or the color of your skin.*

Ms. C is quite aware of how the geographical context from one locale to the next may affect how safe she feels when dealing with negative feedback.

*Because we live in (east coast city), a lot of couples walking around look like us. It was weird. We went*

*to Denver and I was like kind of like, 'oh yeah, it's a little bit different.' Here I don't feel that way but sometimes we get a look or treated a certain way. I ignore it, unless it would be something that threatened our safety, then we get more confrontational.*

## Social Justice

A few participants commented specifically about the racial climate in the U.S. at the time of their interview. Of particular note we the heightened feelings or awareness around race that the participants mentioned in light of the summer of 2020 racial justice marches and a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment since 2017.

Ms. H was quite shaken by George Floyd's death and a new sensitivity to what his death could mean to her family.

*I ended up with shingles a week after George Floyd passed, and I called them my White fragility shingles. I'm stressed all the time and it's because of being a mom who's up all night thinking about her children, are they going to be okay, thinking about her husband. That's a small piece into the life of what it really means to be someone of another color that's discriminated against.*

Ms. H talked about her friends' and family's reaction and how that upset her.

*When you look at our friends, it's a lot of White people. I'm learning through this latest social justice movement, the silence of many people that we thought were with us and supported us has been very powerful. Whereas my husband is like, 'I've always known they felt that way,' which is why he keeps his distance. That's been just in the last six months or so.*

A 28-year-old teacher married for 18 months to an apprentice, Ms. G came to her awareness over time and now brings that to her teaching second grade.

*I was oblivious until I was dating someone that was going through struggles like that. With everything that has happened in the past year or two, I found myself going to protests, which I wouldn't have normally felt comfortable doing, and just taking a stance. I was raised in a very non-diverse school in not a diverse town so exposing my students to more about that stuff like I wish I would have been.*

## Theme II: Communication Patterns

How couples communicate about race is related to the women's increased awareness of the meaning and context of being Black in America as gaining a racial perspective

often leads to conversations. Together the couple may have to respond when their racial partnership is "brought into the room" as they perceive others reacting to them. These couples have to make active decisions about what to do, even if it is deciding not to respond overtly.

When asked what she and her husband had done when dealing with negative feedback, Ms. B. responded, "For us, it is open communication. Even if it's not right in the moment, just breaking down feelings and discomforts. That is the biggest thing, just having strong communication with my spouse." Relatedly, Ms. H. described how she and her husband react to negativity.

*Positive exposure, which is my husband's brainchild. I'm quick to be, I don't want to be in that circle because they're judgmental, they don't feel the way I feel. He's like, 'Yeah, but one positive interaction with a family like ours, with kids like ours or with me, gives them data that is opposite maybe of what they think.'*

As Ms. D processed her experiences of being a partner in the couple, she would talk about them with her husband who offered a reframe.

*Because he was a good sounding board, I would tell him thoughts that I have that I knew were probably inappropriate but that would just pop into my head. Then I would have to discern where they were coming from. I remember one time saying to him that I felt when I would say things that it was very racist of me and he would point out that, he didn't view me as racist, he viewed it as the prejudice that I had.*

Ms. D and her husband learned to put a protective boundary around themselves as a couple. "Due to the toxic nature of my family, I have little contact with them. This has kept the negativity away from my family. My husband likewise, kept his relationship with his family separate from his relationship with me."

Sometimes the reactions from others can be positive, as we heard from Ms. J.

*Racial relationships are different in the south. There's a lot more ingrained silence about race even though you would think here would be the most vocal. We're really aware of other interracial couples that we see. It's like this club where we catch eyes across the restaurant. An example was getting our marriage license at the courthouse and there was an older White gentleman and I could feel my husband being aware of this guy watching us and preparing himself in case it was a negative encounter. When we left, the guy showed us a picture of his African American wife and welcomed us to the club. While we were bracing for something negative, it didn't happen.*



If she receives racist comments, Ms. J will follow her husband's lead and address them directly.

Ms. K, a 68-year-old social worker and her 66-year-old husband who is a construction worker, have chosen to reframe any negative responses they receive. "We just never entertain it. We just show people who we are as a couple. I think people have looked at us more from curiosity, like is this going to work? And we've shown them apparently it works."

Others told us that their larger communication issues were not about race but center on differences coming from different cultures or related to having a 20-year age difference. Sometimes a couple's struggles around communication are due to multiple reasons. Ms. C, whose in-laws live in the Caribbean, told us,

*His mom and I probably have the most contentious relationship, but that's more due to religious differences. She's a Pentecostal Christian and I'm an atheist so it's intense... There's a lot of cultural differences between how I was raised and how he was raised. My parents are very laid back. They don't mind if I drop curse words but that's really taboo to him.*

### Theme III: Microaggressions from Family and Friends

Microaggressions were reported as coming from friends as well as from family. Ms. C was surprised by what she heard from her peers.

*We're millennials so I feel our generation is pretty open to interracial relationships, although I've had a few acquaintances in the past make comments like, 'you like your coffee how you like your men.' They think it's clever but I'm like, okay, we're not really talking about how I like my coffee, we're talking about a person and a relationship.*

Ms. A, who married a man from an African country, is sometimes asked if they married so quickly (after six weeks of dating) so he could get a Green Card. She bristles at the suggestion. "You would never say that to two people who look like they came from the same racial background; you'd assume they have love or a deep connection."

Ms. H experienced a microaggression directed toward her husband from his co-workers having to do with her being White.

*Because I have an Afro-centric name, when they saw my picture they were really shocked and they'd say things like, 'I wouldn't peg you for a Black guy who'd date a White woman.' And my husband's like, 'What does that mean?' Nice microaggression there.*

Ms. J recounted her experiences with her immediate family in relation to having children and how she felt her child would be less favored.

*I have one brother who is married to a Chinese American. My mom was so vocal like 'I want Asian grandbabies. They're so cute.' I felt annoyed that I was getting 'are you sure this (marriage) is a good idea?' from my parents. My brother did not have as much scrutiny. I don't know if that's because he's a man and I'm a woman, or it's because he was marrying an Asian woman and I was marrying a Black man.*

An example of another microaggression came from extended family toward Ms. K.

*I brought my husband to my small hometown right after we were married. The things we were hearing were 'Mary brought this big Black man to town, she married this Black guy.' It wasn't super negative, but they had to say that he was a Black guy.*

### Theme IV: Raising Children

Five couples had children from their marriage; they had been married for an average of 16 years. They raised a range of issues during the interviews from their children finding their own identity to helping their children and themselves navigate family and society. For example, Ms. D reported:

*Our children have struggled to find ways to be recognized as biracial. Some family members would make inappropriate comments or would try to pass our children off as White, or not Black. My husband's parents were deceased when we met and some of his siblings struggled with the fact that I was White. However, most of them struggled more with the age difference. Having children has been beneficial for my relationship with my husband's family. They are welcoming of me and our children. My mother was the main person who commented about the difference in our races. She felt it would be challenging to bring biracial children into the world. Most of my family are extremely racist. They continue to be uninterested in me and my children.*

And, Ms. H added about the importance of neighborhood and what happens in adolescence:

*My husband and I were in the same place in terms of where to live. Our neighborhood is really diverse and I'm probably the only White person on the street with Asian and Black people. It was important to us with the kids to be exposed to lots of cultures, so they can know who they are as White and as Black children and how they choose to identify as both or a mix of both. My oldest is finding himself more as a Black man, explor-*

*ing that identity. He's seeing others maybe as they see him, and that's starting to make him question things.*

Ms. J, expecting her first child and anticipating these issues related to parenting a biracial son, described her trepidations.

*I'm pregnant and just found out we're having a boy. I'm a little anxious about raising a Black son for obvious reasons. One thing we're doing is finding a predominantly Black church. We currently attend a predominantly White church and integrated churches just don't exist here.*

Ms. J is also the step-mother to a biracial child from her husband and his first wife who was White. She quoted her step-son on what it is like navigating his identity.

*He was talking about how he talks differently when he's around Black people or White people, like changing his tone of voice. He talked about watching his dad do that – change his tone of voice based on who he was talking about. When he was younger he was called racial slurs. Where he lives there are more racist attitudes towards Black mixed people. So we get it from multiple angles. When I give birth, I wonder how our child will be perceived. I depend on my husband because our child will face experiences that my husband has had that I haven't.*

Ms. R, with one young daughter, told us that friends and family have been accepting of their marriage after she and her husband dated for ten years. This level of support may make it easier for her in raising their child. “I tend to ignore all of society’s feedback about basically everything, so that helps.” She brings a straightforward approach to how she raises their daughter. “We talk about different skin colors. I’m pink, daddy is dark brown, she is light brown.” While Ms. F thinks her child is too young to talk to about race, she and her husband have had extensive conversations about how they will talk about it in the future. “I want her to feel confident and strong, especially as a Black woman. I don’t want to tell her what her racial identity should mean to her. I want her to develop that herself and express that however she chooses.”

## Discussion and Suggestions for Family Therapists

The themes emerging from these interviews support the existing research and offer further considerations for researchers and family therapists. The experiences of these 11 participants varied greatly from one woman to the next based on her own history with race prior to and during her marriage, her interactions with her husband and children,

and her spouse’s perspective and approach to dealing with racialized incidents. The women’s racial perspective taking emerged as a major theme as they learned what it meant for their husband to be Black, and a Black man in the U.S. This is consistent with Twine and Steinbugler’s (2006) description of racial literacy, having a critical awareness of how racism operates.

### Racial Perspective Taking

Related to racial perspective taking, Roy et al. (2020), in discussing the transition to parenthood, wrote that an individual’s social position, influenced by race, affects how they react across contexts. “Among interracial couples, these race-related experiences are based on racial privileges present in our society that are not shared; thus, one partner in the relationship can have a much different reality across this life transition than, say, that person’s racially privileged counterpart” (p. 41). The privilege of the White women may have shielded them from what their husband experienced; the women had not had to contend with a racial identity until married (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004; Twine & Steinbugler, 2006). For example, Ms. H’s husband had to be careful when they first met about approaching her after they had a work-related conversation; he did not know if she dated Black men. He waited for a sign from her of interest in him and she learned of a racial dynamic of which she was not aware. Ms. R became racially literate (Twine & Steinbugler, 2006) about the extent to which systemic racism affected her husband when he described being aware of how he speaks and comes across. Ms. C learned that her husband, for his own safety, sometimes crossed the street to avoid a White woman. By marrying a Black man, these women had glimpses of what it is like to be a person of color, and, over time, they may have assumed a new identity as a person by association and as a member of a couple.

The women’s awareness of difference was heightened by race being a prominent topic of conversation in 2020 in the context of a renewed social justice movement (Parker et al., 2020). As Leslie and Young (2015) wrote, “...an interracial couple’s current social context is relevant as a contemporary source of stimuli impacting the partners both as individuals and as a unit” (p. 793). Ms. H’s comment that she developed White fragility shingles (e.g., Robinson-Wood et al., 2021) serves as one example of the stress that was felt.

With this theme of racial perspective taking, family therapists must be attentive to the dynamics of the couple in relation to their gender, race, and the larger social context. The women’s awareness of their own identity and of their husband’s identity, leads to her racial perspective taking. This constantly shapes and reshapes the marriage, how children are viewed and raised around their racial identity, and how the family members will prepare for bias (e.g., Rauktis

et al., 2016). For the women, talking about their journey to racial literacy or their need to take such a journey can lead to insight for both partners. Some have had issues around race on their radar much of their life and possibly had it reinforced by their career (four were social workers). Others may have come to racial awareness more recently. Relatedly, their racial perspective taking may also affect the power dynamics in the relationship. If the women were not aware of the tenuousness with which their husbands may have been navigating the broader community, such information can now affect any caretaker role they were consciously or unconsciously fulfilling as shaped by gender expectations (e.g., Walters et al., 1988). They need to walk a fine line between racial perspective taking with an increased awareness of the risks that their husband and children, and they may face in terms of safety, and their own responsibility for fulfilling a traditional caretaker role.

### Communication Patterns

Communication patterns (the second theme) are constantly tested as interracial couples seek to find agreement on what is important in the relationship and how to approach the outside world (Killian, 2003). Such testing is heightened when race relations are in the news. How couples communicate is often driven by family history (e.g., Bowen, 1985, and his Family Projection Process) as well as the intersection of race and gender (Leslie & Young, 2015). Dainton (2015) described couples' relationship maintenance communication as including assurances to the partner about the commitment to the relationship, optimistic messages about the relationship, openness with private thoughts and feelings, and sharing friends and family networks. In exploring communication in her own research sample, Dainton found supportive social networks and relationship maintenance communication key to relationship quality (see, also Vaterlaus et al., 2015; Baptist et al., 2019). In our data, Ms. B described open communication with her husband as did Ms. D who considered her husband "a good sounding board."

Women in our sample reported working together with their husbands. Ms. H described her husband bringing a positive approach forward to others and Ms. K talked about putting a positive face on what they encountered. Communicating about protecting themselves from negativity was discussed by Ms. D and Ms. C.

Notably, in regard to communication as well as racial perspective taking, the women did not mention what their husband learned about being Black or White from the marriage. The learning reported was in one direction. This may be because we did not ask specifically what the husband had learned. It also could be that interracial learning in marriage is more common from the perspective of the majority member. In a racist society, it is often of survival importance

for people in historically discriminated groups to be able to understand the dominant culture (Coates, 2015). The person with privilege does not usually concern themselves with understanding the less dominant culture to the same extent.

For family therapists, and consistent with the Feminist Family Therapy model, issues that arise in the relationship need to be addressed (Handley et al., 2019) in an open communication style that has been found related to healthier functioning couples (Vaterlaus et al., 2015). With White women having more power in certain arenas due to their race and having less power in other arenas due to their gender, navigating the marital relationship for our sample can be tricky. Different opportunities should be recognized for intervention than in marriages in which gender is the only differential in the power imbalance. With heterosexual interracial marriages, both partners have the opportunity to see how the power differential may be experienced. In addition to open communication, keeping a boundary around the couple, a successful strategy that Vaterlaus et al. (2015) found in strong African American marriages, can also be suggested to couples who are struggling with family members who may be impeding the couple's well-being.

### Microaggressions

Microaggressions, the third theme, can vary on a continuum from the overt, intentional and explicit, to the unintentional and implicit (Sue et al., 2019). These couples have to be prepared to react individually or together to microaggressions from friends, family (e.g., Greif & Saviet, 2020), as well as strangers (e.g., Skinner & Rae, 2019), and to devise strategies for communicating about them with each other when they arise. The women reported being challenged by friends (Ms. C referencing a coffee comment) and from family in relation to their children's race. These women also were upset to not receive support from friends during the 2020 protests when they felt vulnerable. The silence of friends and family, as noted by Ms. H, was disappointing. Ms. J was upset that her parents were less supportive of her marriage than those of her brother who was married to an Asian woman. The intersectionality of race and gender may have played a part in the way Ms. J was treated by her parents. In addition, these experiences are also consistent with other research on interracial couples, e.g., Leslie and Young (2015) who pointed out that the number of microaggressions experienced will be greater for the person of color. For example, Ms. H's husband said he had "always known they felt that way," in relation to friends.

Family therapists can ask the husband to share how he approaches microaggressions with his wife for whom they may be a new experience. This should be approached without putting the burden solely on the husband as a guide. Family therapists also need to recognize the systemic nature

of their interventions and that women's knowledge about how to approach racial matters can also be of value and provide balance in a marital relationship.

Building a strong racial identity for the individuals and the couple is key. It can mediate the effects of microaggressions (Forrest-Bank & Cuellar, 2018) just as racial pride and the ability to accept others can enhance marital quality (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004). Open and ongoing communication about these issues enable the couple to forge a shared identity as Ms. K did when working as a team with her husband.

Acknowledging the pain and threat inherent in microaggressions (Sue et al., 2019) can be beneficial in joining with and normalizing the couple's experience (Leslie & Young, 2015). Arming the recipients of microaggressions with a panoply of potential responses is another way to prepare the couple to defend themselves if needed and potentially reduce the deleterious impact on their well-being (Sue et al., 2019). For example, Sue et al. (2019) suggested educating the microaggressor about the impact of saying something that may have a good intent but was hurtful. This requires the family therapist to be responsive to the couple's understanding of the context in which a microaggression occurred, whether by a family member, a friend, or by a stranger.

## Raising Children

Challenges raising children was the final theme. Not only might White mothers raising biracial children struggle to build a family identity, they may also struggle with helping their children navigate developing a racial identity and being biracial in society (Stone & Dolbin-MacNab, 2017). Ms. H hoped to achieve this by living in a multi-racial neighborhood where they could be exposed to different people, which would help the children develop their identities and build racial pride. Parents with two or more children may struggle harder to develop a unified family identity. She noted that her two sons deal with the issue of race differently, one more clearly identifying as Black than the other does.

Ms. J learned from her step-son about code switching as a means of survival ("...he talks differently when he's around Black people or White people...") something her step-son observed in his father. Code switching refers to having different modes of communication based on the environment, e.g., talking one way at school or at work and another way at home (Hall et al., 2012). Ms. J considered her husband as a role model in this area and depended on him for life lessons for the children. Twine (1999) wrote of the dilemma of the White mothers being concerned about a racial gap between themselves and their children. White parents with biracial children need to be aware, as Ms. J was, of the world in which their children are being raised and, with their spouse, prepare them for bias.

Raising interracial children for a White woman means, in some contexts and geographic locations, losing some of her privilege when with her children (Leslie & Young, 2015). Ms. D lost the support of her family, who she described as racist and became closer to her husband's family. However, not all women struggled. Ms. R, for whom raising a biracial child does not seem to be a challenge, found support from friends and family. She raises her young daughter with clear communication around racial identity, pointing out differences in skin color.

Family therapists may need to help the mothers and fathers discuss how raising children can be a shared venture; it is not women's work based on societal expectations (Walters et al., 1988) nor should it be left to the parent, often the father in these couples, with whom the children may identify racially. The conversation may need to be sensitive to how two, possibly mono-racial, parents help build the identity of a biracial child who looks different from them both. In addition, it should be appreciated that the age of the child may affect not only the child's awareness of racial identity in broader society but also the extent to which one parent is involved at various developmental stages. For example, some fathers traditionally become more involved with sons as they age, and as less hands-on childcare is needed. In interracial families it may be particularly to the benefit of the children for both parents to be actively engaged in parenting across developmental stages given the early stages at which racial awareness may occur. Family therapy models have traditionally advocated increasing father involvement in cases of an "over-involved" mother (Walters et al., 1988). Such gender-based practices may be appropriate for these families in some cases, but they should be talked about openly and the mother's role not diminished in the process.

Finally, the women often expressed increased awareness and concern about raising a Black child in light of the summer of 2020. Ms. J, expecting her first child, a son, alluded to this. The themes of safety and social justice are intertwined not only in racial perspective taking but in child rearing as that is where they often become manifest. A Feminist perspective speaks to safety and social justice as gender issues for women. Being attuned to it and naming it is important for the therapist and the family (Knudson-Martin et al., 2019). How family therapists speak to these issues in relation to the intersections of race, power, privilege, and gender can be a role model for how the couple can address what is happening with them as a couple and with the couple in relation to their family, friends, and the larger society.

Speaking to these issues is not easy. No matter the identity of the family therapist, the therapist will be different in at least one way from one or both members of the couple. Doucet et al. (2019) wrote of the importance of families getting "comfortable with the uncomfortable," that biracial children, for example, may be in situations where there are

no other children who look like them. This is sage advice for the therapist too who will need to get comfortable with the uncomfortable when working with the family members who may also not look like the therapist. Killian (2003) described the importance of the therapist having an awareness of their own racial identity. This awareness can be enhanced through training that can start in graduate school or earlier (Stokes et al., 2021) and that needs to be on-going as the therapist and the social context change. Knudson-Martin et al. (2019) wrote about socioculturally attuned practice that is cognizant of the societal context, power, and culture in families.

Interventions are most effective when the therapist is willing to do this personal work. Walters et al. (1988) wrote, “The essence of feminist clinical work lies in the therapist’s attitudes toward gender and her or his sensitivity to the differential impact of all interventions” (p. 29–30). The family therapist’s awareness of feelings and thoughts about both race and gender requires ongoing work to avoid falling into societal tropes that could impinge on therapy. In Feminist Therapy, this translates into acting with the clients, not on the clients or on behalf of the clients, as power within the couple is also addressed (Handley et al., 2019).

Narratives about interracial families need to be included in this contextual work. Narrative therapists call on family therapists to be open to the experiences of others and to respond sensitively with questions (Baptist et al., 2019). How the couple communicates with each other about race is key and the family therapist should foster the exploration of the meaning of race for the couple, the children, and other family members (Brooks & Lynch, 2019). This exploration includes each of the partners’ racialized histories (Leslie & Young, 2015), any trauma that has been experienced (Robinson-Wood et al., 2021), and how those histories are manifested in the couple’s relationship. These histories are present and may be reshaped by the immediate social context, as reflected in the social movements of 2020.

### Specific Suggestions

From the findings and the discussion, a review of interventions to be considered, all to be tailored to the individual nature of the couple, include, with *racial perspective taking*: (a) asking for both partners’ history with an emphasis on race to make therapy a shared experience; (b) being sensitive when any trauma history in relation to race is discussed; (c) talking to the couple about White privilege and its intersection with gender (Feminist Family Therapy approach); (d) being cognizant and open to the unique position of Black men in society and bringing that topic into the treatment room; and (e) placing the unique position of Black men in a social context that is current at the time of treatment (Narrative Therapy).

Interventions to be used in relation to *communication patterns* include: (a) exploring having an open communication style with the couple; (b) teaching communication skills consistent with their goals in treatment; (c) helping the couple talk about what presentation they want to make as a couple to their family, friends, and strangers; and (d) helping them build a boundary around their relationship that is culturally appropriate.

Interventions to be considered in relation to *microaggressions from family and friends* include: (a) helping the couple to consider how they might respond to microaggressions individually or as a couple and what the context (family, friend, stranger) would be that would generate a response; (b) acknowledging that the husband would be more likely to experience a microaggression and that he might have a long history of experiencing them whereas, for the wife, it would be a more recent, and less frequent occurrence; (c) joining with the couple around the pain and potential threat to them and their children of hearing a microaggression; and (d) building a racial identity as a couple that might prepare them for how to respond.

Interventions to be considered in relation to *raising biracial children* include: (a) giving voice to the differences between each parent and their children’s racial identity; (b) asking the parents how or if they want to prepare their children for potential bias at the hands of family, friends, and society; (c) helping both parents see that raising children, historically a mother’s job, is one that is to be shared; and (d) talking about the impact that seminal events, like the summer of 2020 protests, may have on their perspective.

### Study Limitations

Limitations of this study include the use of a convenience sample gathered at one point in time and from interviewing only one member of each couple. We analyzed every case that met the inclusion criteria but with a larger sample of respondents, we may have shifted our findings or discovered new experiences. Thus, we are not sure the topic was saturated. Couple and family relationships can be highly dynamic (Connidis & McMullin, 2002), and an interview at another time could have produced different results. As such, and because four of the participants were social workers, the results are not generalizable. Almost half of the participants knew the student interviewers and thus the participants’ responses may have been shaped by this acquaintanceship and the desire to give more contextually desirable responses. Therefore, conflict in the marriage may have been consciously or unconsciously downplayed. At the same time, students interviewing people they knew may have resulted in participants feeling more comfortable and more open; students may have navigated away from interviewing people



whose marriage might be more problematic as a way to protect the subject as well as themselves.

As different interviewers conducted the interviews, there may have been variability in how the questions were asked and how responses were pursued based on conscious or unconscious bias. Further, as the interviewers attended an urban Middle-Atlantic university, many of the participants could have lived in a region of the country that was more racially diverse and where an interracial couple was less likely to be unique in their community. Certain regions of the country, and even neighborhoods, may be more accepting of interracial couples, which could result in greater ease in navigating their relationship (Killian, 2003). Finally, our own biases may account for misinterpretation of the data.

## Conclusion

White women married to Black men sit at intersections of multiple identities as a couple. Family therapists, with a keen eye toward the social context and a commitment to social justice, can assist couples with their relationships and their children by advancing their collaborative parenting, as they navigate systems, large and small, that may be perpetrating stereotypes about race, gender, family, and privilege. It is not only the voices of these families that need to be heard; the voices of family therapists must also be heard in supporting diverse families as well as combatting injustice they may confront.

## Appendix

### Qualitative Question Guide

1. Describe in broad terms what the relationship is like with your spouse. Talk about what the reaction has been to you by family, friends, co-workers, and strangers as a couple.
2. Has there been a great deal of negotiating around the issues of interracial identity for you as a couple? Can you describe a situation where you and your spouse talked about race? We are interested in learning about any compromises or struggles as well as any benefits or strengths you can describe.
3. Describe in broad terms what impact the interracial status of your marriage has on your family (children, parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.).
4. Describe in broad terms what impact the interracial status of your marriage has on you and your spouse's friends.

5. Describe in broad terms what impact the interracial status of your marriage has on your in-law relationships and your spouse's relationships with your parents. How well did you know them before the marriage? What was the transition to getting to know them like?
6. Have these relationships (family, friends, in-laws) changed over time (for example, over the last few years where there has been more attention paid to race) and, if so, how so?
7. Have the relationships with your spouse, families, and friends turned out to be different or similar to what you thought they would be? If yes, how?
8. If you have children, has that had an impact on your relationship with your family or your spouse's family?
9. Describe in broad terms what it is like for your child(ren) being raised in a home with two or more racial/ethnic identities. Has that changed over the past few years?
10. Are there other interracial marriages in either your family or your spouse's? If yes, describe the marriages, the family reactions to them, and if yours was the first.
11. What have you found that is successful in dealing with any negative feedback or treatment from society, your family, or friends because you are in an interracial family?
12. If not answered in #3, please describe any benefits or strengths you see from being in an interracial family.

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**Code Availability** DNA.

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**Conflict of interest** The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

**Ethical Approval** The research is IRB approved.

**Consent to Participate** An IRB approved consent form was used.

**Consent for Publication** Permission was given in the consent form.

**Informed Consent** The participants in the research received the required informed consent before participating in the research as mandated by the authors' university's Institutional Review Board.

**Research involving Human Participants** The authors have permission from their university's Institutional Review Board.



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