# Status of Interracial Marriage in the United States: A Qualitative Analysis of Interracial Spouse Perceptions

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**Abstract**

This article investigates the major issues facing interracial marriage from the perspective of individuals currently in these unions. Differential assimilation is used as a conceptual model to focus this exploration. The research methodology employs a qualitative approach based on open-ended questions embedded in a larger survey questionnaire administered to a national non-random sample of interracially married individuals in 2007. The findings were examined for three issue areas; social acceptance of interracial marriages, negative perceptions within society of interracial unions, and perceived differential treatment of interracial marriages. Responses from individuals in black/white marriages tended to show that these unions have more difficulty in society in comparison to those without a black spouse.

**Keywords:** assimilation, culture, differential assimilation, interracial marriage, racial discrimination, racial prejudice, social acceptance

## 1. Introduction

Since 1960, the number of interracial marriages in the United States has increased dramatically. There were 157,000 interracial marriages in 1960 and by 2010 there were 2,413,000. This represents a fifteen-fold increase over a 50 year period. Despite these demographic changes, the percentage of interracial marriages in comparison to same-race marriages is relatively small. They comprised 0.4 % of all marriages in 1960 and 7 % of all marriages in 2010 (United States Bureau of the Census, 2012).

Through popular magazines and media interviews, a variety of topics related to interracial marriages are often reported and dramatized. Topical areas such as raising children, acceptance by family members, or the role race plays in spousal relationships, are typically given surface investigative treatment. Race and ethnic perceptions persist in American society and impact relationships between individuals. Therefore, those married interracially should expect to encounter barriers and impediments because of the racial composition of their marriage (Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2010).

## 2. Purpose

This research effort explores the perception of critical societal issues impacting interracial marriages in the United States. These are examined from the perspective of individuals who are currently married interracially. Through the application of differential assimilation, this research examines the impact racial composition of interracial marriages (i.e., black-white, Hispanic-white, Asian-white, etc.) has perceptions of these unions in American society. This is accomplished through exploring spouse views with respect to issues and challenges related to interracial marriages. This study suggests individuals in unions involving a black spouse perceive the social status of interracial marriages more negatively than those in interracial marriages not involving a black partner. Three specific aspects of status are explored; social acceptance, perceptions, and treatment of interracial unions.

## 3. Review of the Literature

Very little social research has been conducted on identifying important issues and problems encountered by interracial marriages. Virtually no empirical information exists from the perspective of those married

interracially. From the limited social research conducted, three broad areas were surfaced with respect to problem areas encountered by interracial couples (Yancey & Lewis, 2008).

*3.1 Issues Impacting Interracial Marriages*

One area of concern for interracially married individuals is racial discrimination. Research conducted by Lewis and Yancey (1995) and Lewis (1994) demonstrated that some individuals who are interracially married see themselves as being victims of discrimination because of their marital status. Generally, those in black/white interracial unions indicated higher occurrence of racial discrimination in comparison to those in unions without a black spouse. These findings were consistent across primary and secondary group relationships. Although perceptions of discrimination in secondary group situations (i.e., restaurant service, service at malls and shops, etc.) appear to occur more often in comparison to primary group situations, spouses in black/white marriages experience this more often (Yancey & Lewis, 2008).

A second area which lends itself to problems for individuals married interracially is differential societal acceptance of the legal union. Anti-miscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional in the *Loving v. Virginia* case in 1965. The U.S. Supreme Court found that Virginia's anti-miscegenation laws violated the right to due process and skin-color blindness on the part of the state (Moran, 2001). American society has a system that continues to use race as a key identifying factor. Even after nearly 50 years, race still plays an important role in how marital partners are chosen. Although racial segregation is illegal, there are still patterns of residential and school separation as well as economic inequality which influence spouse choice (Kalmijn, 1993). The incidence of interracial marriages reflects an interesting pattern of color grading with black/white marriages being the smallest percentage of all interracial unions (Lewis and Ford-Robertson, 2010).

The third area involves family acceptance. Previous research by Lewis and Yancey (1995) reveals that family member acceptance of the interracial marriage is problematic. Individuals in black/white marriages tended to suggest they had problems, at least initially, being fully accepted as a couple by dominant group family members. Family members of the minority group member of the interracial couple tend to be more accepting in comparison to the white spouse's family members (Root, 2001). However, recent research indicates that there is a small but consistent level of non-acceptance among minority group family members (Root, 2001; Yancey and Lewis, 2008).

*3.2 Interracial Marriage and Race Relations in the United States*

The examination of interracial relationships can be insightful for understanding race relations in general. For example, Lewis and Yancey (1995) pointed out that interracial marriages are useful indicators of the level of racial acceptance within American society. From a historical standpoint, Gordon (1964) and Porterfield (1978) posited the level of societal acceptance of interracial marriage is an important *gauge* for determining the extent of assimilation within a society. However, these studies examined the attitudes of individuals external to interracial unions. It is likely the interpersonal dynamics within interracial relationships are useful for gaining knowledge of American racial relationships as well.

Similar to other couples, interracial unions must react to external social pressures. Although interracial couples have most certainly defied the social norm of racial endogamy, it is unrealistic to believe that they are unaffected by other social mores. Moreover, it seems likely that the norms and values that control informal dominate-group/minority-group relations would also influence such interracial romantic relationships. For example, if attitudes of multiculturalism tend to dominate informal black/white relationships then one should expect to find a tendency of interracial relationships to have pluralistic qualities. An understanding of the interpersonal dynamic within interracial marriages may useful in comprehending other types of informal relationships between blacks and whites.

It should be noted that the racial culture of interracial marriages is not likely to have been shaped only by the dynamics of the married couple but also by the attitudes each individual brings into a marriage. It is plausible that individuals who have adopted a racial culture different from their own are more likely to intermarry. For instance, if a white individual has rejected cultural elements of White American culture and adopted elements of African-American culture, then he/she is likely to develop primary relationships that could lead to a black/white interracial marriage. Previous dating history then may be a partial proxy for understanding cultural orientation shifts. However, this is an incomplete measure because individuals who date interracially may do so for reasons other than an appreciation of cultural elements of other races (Yancey & Lewis, 2008). Interracial marriage as a proxy for race relations can be understood in terms of color grading. Typically, American society values lighter skinned individuals more than darker skinned individuals. The composition of the interracial marriage will impact how and to what extent the union is accepted within society. Unions involving a black spouse will be less

accepted by society, thereby experiencing more institutional and social barriers. On the other hand, marriages not involving a black spouse will be more accepted by society and will have less problematic institutional and social experiences (Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2010).

## 4. Theoretically Framing Interracial Marriage

The relations between racial groups in the United States have generally been conceptualized from two sociological perspectives: assimilation and cultural pluralism (Geschwender, 1978). Alba and Nee (2003) have attempted to merge these two perspectives through the development of what they term *new assimilation* in America. This research effort utilizes this synthesis of the traditional assimilation approach as a guide for assessing interracial marriage through a race relations model. Interracial marriage is seen as a barometer for understanding the fabric of relations between racial and ethnic groups in America.

The New Assimilation perspective attempts to show that trans-nationalism, enhanced technological communication, and changing immigration patterns have changed the prior notion of minority racial and ethnic group assimilation (Alba & Nee, 2003). Traditional ways of viewing assimilation assumed immigrant groups would follow a model of accepting and embracing a white middle-class American lifestyle. The argument is that aspects of the immigrant culture will be incorporated into American society providing more of absorption process rather than one characterized by the immigrant group giving up its cultural elements. Additionally, those groups with a culture similar to American along with comparable physical appearance will assimilate faster. Those with more divergent culture and physical appearance will assimilate more slowly.

The assimilation perspective stresses that all racial minority groups eventually become part of the dominant group through absorption (Francis, 1976). The process is dynamic and gradual as socially defined differences between the racially dominant and subordinate groups become less important. Therefore, racial discrimination and racism lessen and eventually disappear during the assimilation process (Gordon, 1991; Alba & Nee, 2003).

Proponents of the traditional assimilation perspective suggest there are seven phases involving dominant and subordinate group interaction that eventually results in the elimination of societal differences (Gordon, 1964). The first phase begins with cultural assimilation where the subordinate group members learn the dominant culture. The second phase is structural assimilation and entails subordinate group members being accepted into dominate group primary and secondary group structures. The next phase is known as marital assimilation characterized by an environment where there is no difference in societal acceptance levels between interracial and non-interracial marriages. The fourth phase involves identificational assimilation that involves the societal acceptance of the children of interracial marriages. The fifth phase is described as attitudinal-receptional assimilation and it is characterized by a significant decrease in racial and ethnic prejudice within society. This is followed by behavioral-receptional assimilation which signals major reduction in racial and ethnic discrimination. The final phase is identified as civic assimilation where power and value conflict between racial groups disappears.

The notion of social distance between racial groups plays an important role in the assimilation process. It has been asserted the greater the perceived social distance between groups, the greater the spatial and personal separation (Van Den Berghe, 1987). Proponents of the assimilation (both tradition and the new approach) emphasize that social distance between minority and majority racial group members decreases over time.

The social definition of skin color, the primary objectification of racial group membership plays an important role in determining the degree of assimilation allowed at both the group and individual level. Typically in the United States, benefits and social status tend to vary by race with higher societal benefits and status accorded to lighter skinned racial groups and lesser societal benefits and status given to darker skinned racial groups. Sociologists define this process as color grading (Geschwender, 1978). It follows that racism and discrimination will be more intense against those individuals who are members of darker skin color racial groups (Francis, 1976). Therefore, in the United States, African-Americans tend to encounter more racial discrimination than their Mexican-American or Asian-American counterparts despite the overall pace of assimilation.

Merton (1941) used a form of exchange theory to examine differentials within interracial marriages. His writings suggest that a hierarchy of status among different racial groups in the United States creates a racial caste system. It places individuals with darker skin color in a lower caste relative to those who are lighter. A member of a lower caste will marry a member of the higher caste if they have other assets to trade for the privilege of "marrying up." Research by Fu (2001) determined in black/white interracial marriages, white women married to black men had less educational attainment in comparison to white women married to white men. His study also discovered that black women married to black men had less education than black women married to white men.

It can be extended that members of the lower racial castes should be more accepting of interracial dating and marriage patterns and there is empirical support for this assertion. Evidence indicates that blacks had more favorable attitudes toward interracial marriages than whites (Aldridge, 1978; Sones, 1988; Spickard, 1989). Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan (1990) also found that white partners of black/white marriages tend to encounter ostracism from friends and relatives within their community more frequently than their black spouses. Yancey and Lewis (2008) found that Mexican-American/white unions experience more acceptance than black/white unions.

## 5. Differential Assimilation and Its Research Application

Herbert Ganz (1991) developed the dual hierarchy theory for understanding the dynamics of race and class in the United States. From a social stratification perspective, he posited that in the 21st Century American society would gravitate into a two-tiered hierarchal system driven mainly by racial and ethnic distinctions. White Americans and those racial and ethnic groups aligned with them will become the upper portion of the hierarchy. Conversely, Black Americans and other darker-skinned groups will comprise the lower portion.

As delineated earlier, assimilation theory does not adequately address variation in rates of absorption exhibited by different racial and ethnic minority groups. As a result of deduction from classical assimilation theory and the dual hierarchy theory a theoretical view, a differential assimilation approach can be developed. The basic assumption underlying this concept is that rates of absorption vary between racial minority groups. In fact, some groups may not realize assimilation at all. Moreover, criteria for successful assimilation into the dominant culture may change over time. Differential assimilation extends beyond issues of economic stratification and involves broader aspects of society (Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2010).

The historical classification of racial groups in the United States clarifies differential assimilation. During most of the 20th Century, groups were dichotomized into white and non-white categories. European groups, which were characterized as white, faced relatively few barriers to assimilation. Conversely, non-white groups had to navigate formidable hurdles in the process. It should be noted that African-Americans comprised the overwhelming majority of those labeled as non-white.

Much like the dual hierarchy approach, it can be argued the original racial and ethnic dichotomy from the early 20th Century has changed. The more contemporary dichotomy now entails two very different categories, black and non-black. If this is the case, there has been significant movement illustrated by ethnic and racial minorities that were previously grouped with African-Americans. They are now grouped with whites in the non-black category. Generally, individuals recognized as non-blacks should face fewer assimilation barriers. Related to the original dichotomy, African-Americans make up the vast majority of individuals identified as black and, therefore, should continue to experience significant resistance relative to the assimilation process.

Differential assimilation, which takes into account the operation of social closure as a mechanism for maintaining dominant-subordinate relationships between racial groups, provides an excellent approach for examining interracial marriages. The assimilation process, whether framed from a traditional or new assimilation perspective, is problematic for African Americans. As a result of this differential process, it is posited that individuals in black/white marriages perceive encounters and experiences within society more negatively because of their union in comparison to those in interracial unions that do no involve a black spouse. Moreover, social acceptance, perceptions, and treatment within society are seen as more problematic for interracial marriages with a black spouse.

## 6. Research Methodology

### 6.1 Overall Sampling Design and Data Collection

This research utilized a convenience sampling approach with a snowball design embedded within. A national sample of interracially married individuals was identified through research advertisements placed in a number of websites and blogs dedicated to multiracial families. Respondents to the advertisement comprised the sample and they were asked to identify other interracially married individuals for possible participation in the study.

The sampling design represented a non-probability effort. This non-random approach was one of the limited ways for identifying sizeable numbers of individuals who are in interracial marriages and asking them about their perceptions with respect to a variety of issues that may impact these types of marriages. Although in a *strict* statistical sense the sample may not be random, when compared to a random sample of married individuals in the United States later in this research endeavor, the interracial sample appears to be quite similar. Therefore, the findings are representative of this unique grouping of individuals and provide valuable insight from the individuals involved in interracial marriages.

The research criterion used for determining an interracial marriage was that the spouse could not be a member of the respondent's racial or ethnic group. Therefore, no specific type of interracial marriage was excluded from investigation, thereby enhancing the scientific ability to compare a variety of experiences.

The data collection phase began in January 2006 and required nearly eighteen months to complete. Approximately 350 individuals from 25 different states comprise the sample. Individuals who participated in the study completed a 61-item questionnaire that was returned by the participant through the United States Postal Service.

*6.2 Analytical Sample Sub-Set*

At the end of the study questionnaire, respondents were queried with respect to issues facing interracial marriages. Participants were specifically asked to provide, through open-ended comments, any final thoughts about the most important issues facing interracially married individuals in the United States.

Table 1. Race and Gender Sub-Sample Distribution of Interracially Married Individuals, 2007.

| Race Gender | Percentage % |
|-------------|--------------|
| White Female | 30.8 (16) |
| White Male | 11.5 (6) |
| Black Female | 11.5 (6) |
| Black Male | 5.8 (3) |
| Latino Female | 21.2 (11) |
| Latino Male | 7.7 (4) |
| Asian Female | 5.8 (3) |
| Asian Male | 3.8 (2) |
| Arab Male | 1.9 (1) |
| **TOTAL** | **100.0 (52)** |

Fifty-two participants gave sufficient information regarding important issues facing interracially married individuals to be included in the qualitative analysis sub-sample. Of these respondents, 69% were female and 31% were male. Most of the respondents were either white or Hispanic. About 42% of those who answered the open-ended question were white and another 29% were Hispanic. Black spouses comprised 17% of the sub-sample and 11% were other (Asian American and Middle Eastern). It should be noted that when race and sex are combined, white females constituted the largest grouping (31%), followed by Hispanic females at 21% (see Table 1).

Table 2. Type of Interracial Marriage Represented by Sub-Sample Respondents, 2007.

| Type of Marriage | Number | Percentage % |
|------------------|--------|--------------|
| Black-White | 18 | 34.6 |
| Latino-White | 16 | 30.8 |
| Asian-White | 10 | 19.2 |
| Black-Latino | 5 | 9.6 |
| Other* | 3 | 5.8 |
| **TOTAL** | **52** | **100.0** |

* There was an individual in a Arab American-white marriage, one in an Arab American-black marriage, and one in a Native American-white marriage.

The distribution of respondents by type of interracial marriage is noteworthy. About 35% of the participants were in black-white unions and nearly 31% were in Hispanic-white marriages. Approximately 19% of the individuals were in Asian-white marriages (see Table 2).

**7. Research Findings**

As stated earlier, fifty-two (52) interracially married individuals gave responses to open-ended questions regarding the most important issues facing these types of marriages. Of the responses, twenty-six (50 %) were

related to perceptions of social status and provided the focus of this study. These comments were very insightful and reflective providing a unique view into how individuals interracially married perceive issues related to their unions. Responses were categorized into three thematic areas; social acceptance of interracial unions, negative perceptions of interracial marriages, and treatment of interracial unions.

*7.1 Social Acceptance of Interracial Unions*

Individuals in interracial marriages are sometimes confronted with a lack of acceptance by members of society, resulting in some degree of marginalization. It appears that social acceptance is more likely to occur in primary group situations in comparison to secondary group situations. Several comments reflected regional influences with respect to acceptance. Some respondents felt that unions not involving a black spouse may be accepted in the Western, Midwestern, and Eastern United Stated but face less acceptance in the Southern portion of the country. Black respondents stated that race was always in play with respect non-acceptance. A summary of respondent comments are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Selected Spouse Perceptions of Interracial Marriage Acceptance by Society, 2007

| Type of Marriage | Respondent | Comment |
|---|---|---|
| Black/white marriage | Black female | "My experience as well as talking with friends who are also in interracial marriages, it appears that some racial combinations appear to be more acceptable than others (with black/white combinations being less acceptable)." |
| Black/white marriage | White female | "Issues that surrounded me and my spouse were so much more complex when we were married in the 1970s. Today, interracial couples seem to be more acceptable by the general public." |
| Black/white marriage | Black female | "Race is not as big of an issue in most areas today as it may have been a few years ago. In more rural areas that are less diverse and possibly less educated, one may face problems. However, in urban or suburban areas, people don't care. In the city, money talks and nothing else." |
| Black/white marriage | White female | "I think with each generation that comes up, race becomes less and less of an issue. I find people closer to my age have less of an issue with my marriage than people of an older generation." |
| Black/Hispanic marriage | Black female | "I believe people need to stop being ignorant about any type of marriage. I believe people should be with whomever they love or feel comfortable with. No race is better than the other. It all boils down to that we all bleed red. If a person chooses to stick to their own race which is fine too, but they don't have the right to say that it is wrong. God made woman to be with a man, He didn't say we had to be together according to our race." |
| Hispanic/white marriage | Hispanic female | "I believe interracial marriages are more acceptable now than in the past. I think that children that come from interracial marriages face more issues in terms of acceptance, identity, and culture. An important issue for couples is to be solid and prepared to work with their children closely discussing who they are and how they fit it this society." |
| Hispanic/white marriage | White female | "Acceptance (is the biggest problem). We don't have children, yet, but I worry about how they will be accepted. Being married to a Latino in South Texas is much easier that other parts of the United States, which is one reason we like living in San Antonio so much. We are accepted here and do not experience much discrimination. There are also a lot of couples like us in San Antonio, which we really like." |
| Asian/white marriage | Asian female | "I think it's been easier to be interracially married because my family is pretty Americanized." |

*7.2 Perceptions of Interracial Marriages*

Perceptions of interracial marriages present a problematic view from society. A number of spouses suggested that negative perceptions and stereotyping represent major societal issues facing individuals in interracial unions.

Information in Table 4 indicates interracial marriages are unnecessarily viewed as odd or different, especially black/white unions. Negative perceptions do not seem to be quite as strongly linked to those not involving a black spouse. These comments strongly suggest that individuals interracially married are directly and indirectly confronted with the attitudinal component of racial inequality. Individuals receive looks and stares that represent negative perceptions stemming from racism. One Hispanic male indicated that prejudice is something that all interracial couples should be prepared to deal with, even from those you "least suspect." Additionally, negative perceptions were identified from both dominant group members as well as minority group members. One white female said she gets negative reactions especially from black females. It appears members of society, through their nonverbal cues, signal that some types of interracial marriage are not socially acceptable.

Table 4. Summary of Selected Spouse Comments Regarding Negative Perceptions of Interracial Marriages, 2007

| Type of Marriage | Respondent | Comment |
|---|---|---|
| Black/white marriage | White female | "My issues are that of African American women. I get more stares, eye brows raised and uppity attitudes from black women that any other group. I don't know what they are thinking. I see this attitude a lot." |
| Black/white marriage | White female | "I have found that race does matter in the United States more so to African descent than to whites or Hispanics (I live in Texas). Both partners in a black/white marriage must be open to each other on racial lines. It appears to me most blacks will over compensate to the extremes, over-sensitive to black plight or over-looking racial inequalities." |
| Black/white marriage | Black male | "People are just stupid." |
| Black/Hispanic marriage | Hispanic female | "When we're in the public, we get these stares from people and it makes me wonder what they're thinking. Like for example, what is she doing with a black man? Or even, what is he doing with a Mexican woman? Couldn't they have stayed with their own race?" |
| Hispanic/white marriage | Hispanic male | "Be prepared to accept prejudice from those you would least suspect it from." |
| Native-American/white marriage | White female | "My husband and his siblings all looked very different from one-another. My brother-in-law looked like a typical black person (he married a white woman), my sister-in-law looked Hispanic (never married and had a child out of wedlock with a black man), and my husband looked like he was of Asian or Samoan decent. There were many times that my husband was exposed to people making disparaging remarks about African Americans They didn't recognize his ethnic background. I know this was painful and often created uncomfortable situations." |

### 7.3 Treatment of Interracial Unions

Moving beyond perceptions, spouses provided some revealing comments regarding discrimination encountered as a result of their interracial marriage (see Table 5). Within this sample, both partners in black/white marriages were more likely to perceive being treated differentially in comparison to those in other types of interracial unions. Comments from those in black/white unions certainly reveal a historical as well as a contemporary context with race continuing as a major social dimension in American society. As a result, even when in an interracial marriage, individuals with socially-defined darker skin are viewed quite differently and negatively by members of society. A white male in a black/white marriage felt that discrimination encountered stems largely the white dominant group and interracial unions need a support network for dealing with differential treatment. Two others stated that black spouses often over compensate in their behavior because of perceived racial prejudice and discrimination within society (see Table 5).

Individuals who are in unions that do not involve a black spouse tended to identify social encounters that were much less negative. These spouses perceived their public interactions regarding their marriage were not typically influenced by race. For instance, comments were provided that when each spouse had similar physical characteristics, virtually no differential treatment occurred in public interactions. Additionally, one spouse believed in some regions of the United States their union was not considered interracial. An Asian female

summarized this experience by stating she feels all interracial married couples are treated the same and indicated she had never encountered any problems within society (see Table 5).

Table 5. Summary of Selected Spouse Comments Regarding Perceptions of Treatment of Interracial Marriages, 2007

| Type of Marriage | Respondent | Comment |
|---|---|---|
| Black/white marriage | White female | "I have found that race does matter in the United States more so to African descent than to whites or Hispanics (I live in Texas). Both partners in a black/white marriage must be open to each other on racial lines. It appears to me most blacks will over compensate to the extremes, over sensitive to black plight or over- looking racial inequalities." |
| Black/white marriage | White female | "White America needs to stop viewing our black neighbors as second-class citizens. I find that I have experienced some of the discrimination that my husband has tolerated his entire life, although certainly not to the degree he has. It is shameful that race plays such a role in the worth assigned to individuals. It can be very hurtful for me to observe how my husband is treated at times, and it makes me very angry." |
| Black/white marriage | White male | "I feel that the most important issues facing interracially married couples in the United States are the lack of networking support and discrimination from the largely Caucasian majority." |
| Black/white marriage | Black female | "I think the most important issue facing interracially married individuals has to do with how well we cope with the emotional and spiritual immaturity of a great percentage of the world. While I have not experienced horrible forms of discrimination, I still notice the looks and stares when I'm out shopping with my husband." |
| Black/white marriage | White female | "I think discrimination is the most important issue for interracially marriage individuals. I know my husband feels discriminated against at times. I don't notice as much probably because I am white. I have never felt discriminated against, personally, because I am married to a black person." |
| Black/Hispanic marriage | Hispanic female | "When we're in the public, we get these stares from people and it makes me wonder what they're thinking. Like for example, what is she doing with a black man? Or even, what is he doing with a Mexican woman? Couldn't they have stayed with their own race?" |
| Hispanic/white | White female | "Having been to different areas within the U.S., I know that Texas has a very liberal view towards interracial marriage (specifically in San Antonio). Yet, other states are still as backwards as always, especially the states that are in the Southern Bible belt. My husband and I have experienced more negative treatment outside the state of Texas, specifically Tennessee and Louisiana. Until there are as many people of different races sharing neighborhoods in other states, the problem will always be there. It is an issue of separate and not equal." |
| Hispanic/white marriage | Hispanic female | "I have not had very much difficulty from a public or social standpoint but I think this is because I live in Texas. Most people find it perfectly acceptable for a white person to marry a Mexican person and would consider an educated Mexican a person who has assimilated. On the other hand, I have it easier than most ethnic people because I don't look Mexican and my husband is European who is sometimes confused for Mexican because he has a Romanian accent." |
| Hispanic/white | Hispanic male | "I don't really consider myself to be in an interracially or mixed marriage. As a Latino married to a gringa or Americana, I can honestly state that I don't ever recall any discrimination towards me or my wife. This may be due in |

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|---|---|---|
| | | part to the large number of Latinos in Texas, thus, people may view our type of marriage to be a common one or perhaps due to the fact that we've always lived in suburbia, we may have not experienced discrimination. If we lived in the barrio or the hood, then maybe my experiences and for that matter, people's reactions toward our marriage, may have been different. Our level of education might also have something to do with this. I believe that Americans tent to have more issues with black/white marriages, but I could be wrong." |
| Asian/white marriage | White female | "I believe that if these couples live on the mainland (not in Hawaii), they probably have more difficulty than we did. However, during our various times in Phoenix, AZ, Columbia, MO, and Buffalo, NY, we did not really experience difficulties other than stares. Of course, every time we visited Canada, the United States customs officials seemed to think I was trying to smuggle in an illegal alien. In Hawaii there are so many interracial marriages that is no big thing." |
| Asian/white marriage | Asian female | "I think that all interracially married couple are treated the same. Being part of an Asian/White mix, I haven't encountered any problems. With our child also, it's not very apparent that he's of mixed heritage (he looks more white). It will probably be easier for him." |
| Asian/white marriage | Asian male | "This country is obsessed with race. Very few institutions see people as individuals with the media being the worst. Interracial marriages have a high probability of success if public institutions (government, law enforcement, etc.) treat such couples no different than other couples." |

The data certainly illustrate interesting perceptions across three thematic areas. It is apparent from this sub-sample that individual perceptions of differential treatment and perceived acceptance or non-acceptance within society are tempered by marriage racial composition.

## 8. Discussion and Conclusions

The study findings provide invaluable information regarding major issues facing interracial marriages in the United States. Although the findings are not generalizable, the data offer critical insight into how individuals who are interracially married perceive their unions in American society. Differential treatment, negative perceptions from the public, and the lack of social acceptance were seen as three major issues facing interracial marriages. As a result, a number of interracial spouses saw their unions as marginalized by some segments of society.

The overall research hypothesis was supported as a result of the analysis of the respondent information. Differential assimilation is reflected in the research findings. Information suggested that racial composition of interracial unions influences what are perceived as major issues confronting them. Individuals in interracial marriages with a black spouse identified issues that were more negative and related to racial stereotyping. Individuals in unions without a black spouse gave descriptions and responses that were not as negative and rarely related to stereotyping.

Similar findings are reported Root (2001) in her qualitative analysis of interracial marriages and societal acceptance. She found that interracial couples with a black spouse encountered more discrimination in comparison to those unions without a black spouse. This was exhibited in primary group situations with family members and close friends as well as in situations with the community at large.

Candid responses from participants demonstrate that perceived racial differences continue to have a profound impact on society. Individuals in black/white marriages, especially white females, indicated that their unions receive more negative and condescending reactions in public. These reactions come from both white as well as racial minority members of society. Yancey (2004) discovered very similar perceptions in his recent investigation of interracial marriages.

The dramatic differences in perceptions between interracially married individuals regarding the major issues and challenges facing these unions and related influence of marriage type certainly supports differential assimilation.

Although it represents the least common of interracial marriages, black/white unions appear to encounter much more discrimination, negative reaction, as well as face more formidable obstacles.

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