UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF RACE, STRATIFICATION, AND INTERSECTIONALITY IN CHINESE AMERICAN/WHITE EURO-AMERICAN COUPLES' RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS AND WELL-BEING: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

by

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(Under the Direction of Elizabeth Wieling & Maureen A. Flint)

ABSTRACT

The recent escalation of anti-Asian racism, combined with historical discrimination against interracial unions and stereotypes against Asians in the U.S. means that Chinese American/White Euro-American couples navigate a complex racialized context with unique stressors and resilience factors related to their racial backgrounds. The existing literature focuses on relationship formation and stability in interracial couples, and the current study expands this knowledge by employing a relational and systematic lens to investigate Chinese American/White Euro-American couples' stories regarding how they perceive the role of race, stratification in the U.S. and intersectionality in their couple relationship dynamics and well-being.

In this study, two dyadic interviews were conducted with eight interracial couples (n=16) over two months. Grounded in narrative inquiry, dyadic interviews allowed for an examination of how couples co-constructed stories and mutually negotiated meanings. This study used composite narratives to represent findings from thematic analysis and structural analysis to analyze one particular couple's communication process to enrich the understanding of the research topic. The thematic analysis is represented in three "composite narratives" to illustrate

these overarching themes. Composite 1: Sarah & James represent a couple who did not perceive race to have an important role in their relationship, nor did they think it necessary to discuss race-related topics. Composite 2: Xiu & David characterizes a couple who gradually realized the role of race and racial stratification in their relationships. Finally, Composite 3: Jessica & Rayn illustrates a couple who are quite aware of the impact of race and racial stratification on their relationships and who have developed strategies to navigate the impact as a couple. The results of structural analysis include two parts. The first part of the findings displays conflicting communication processes when talking about race-related topics to further inform couple interventions. The second part of the findings illustrates the ethical challenges of conducting research with marginalized populations and navigating couple dynamics during the dyadic interview. The theoretical, clinical and methodological implications, limitations and future directions are discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Chinese American, Couple, Interracial, Narrative, Racism, White Euro-American

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

Introduction

According to the Pew Research Center's (2017) report "*Intermarriage in the US 50 Years After Loving v. Virginia,*" nearly 29% of newlywed Asians[1] married someone of a different race or ethnicity, followed by 27% of Hispanics, 18% of Blacks, and 11% of Whites[2] (Livingston & Brown, 2017). Moreover, almost half (46%) of Asian adults cohabited with a partner of a different race or ethnicity, compared to 20% among black cohabiters, 24% among Hispanics, and 12% among Whites (Livingston, 2017). Those statistics may suggest that Asians in the United States (U.S.) are most likely to marry or cohabit with a non-Asian partner compared to other races.

In contrast to the high rate of intermarriage and intercohabitation for Asians in the U.S., there has been a surprising lack of research exploring their relationship well-being. Moreover, research regarding Asian inter-unions has mainly focused on the relationship formation process and relationship outcomes compared to same-race White couples and/or same-race Asian couples (Canlas et al., 2015; Chuang et al., 2021; Tsunokai et al., 2014; Yang & Prost, 2022). As a result, there is very limited understanding of the relationship itself among Asian and White partners, such as the unique challenges they have encountered and their stories of navigating those challenges. Answering these questions can inform specific prevention and intervention

[1] Races are all capitalized in this article based on APA 7th bias-free language recommendations.
[2] White(s) refer to White-European American.

approaches to promote culturally responsive interracial individual and couple partner well-being. For example, topics such as how interracial couples navigate historical marginalization (e.g., homogamy) and contemporary negative social discourses (e.g., racial hierarchy), have often been explored in Black-White union research (e.g., Killian, 2003, 2012; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004), but rarely explored in Asian-White couples. Findings from the research on Black/White couples has pointed out that racial privileges and colorblind perspectives derived from societal racial hierarchies can influence couples' power dynamics and general relationship well-being (Killian, 2013; Leslie & Young, 2015). Given Asian Americans' unique racialized history in the U.S. (Kim, 1999; Maeda, 2009), historical discrimination against interracial unions (Head, 2018), and contemporary racial hierarchy and increased race-based hate crimes against Asians during COVID-19 (Stop AAPI Hate Reporting Center, 2020), it is significant to situate Asian/White's experiences within the historical-social-political background. More importantly, centering interracial couples' stories and voices is a way to dismantle the ideology of the normative family (i.e., a mythical norm of the White, wealthy, patriarchal, heteronormative image) (Lorde, 1984), empower interracial couples, and avoid perpetuating marginalization.

The current study will specifically focus on investigating Asian-White couples' experiences of navigating historical marginalization and contemporary negative social discourses through a social justice lens. More specifically, this study will emphasize couple dyads and how partners co-create the stories of marginalization and make meanings together along the way. The following paragraphs will first briefly introduce Asian Americans' racialized history and the historical marginalization experienced by interracial couples' unions to provide readers with a historical background before diving into a description of the current project.

History of Asian/Chinese Americans' Racial Oppression and Resistance

Maeda (2009) summarized three ways that Asian ethnic groups in the U.S. became racialized, highlighting factors of exploitation, migration, and exclusion. First, Asians came to the U.S. as a result of the intersecting forces of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. For example, Chinese immigrants first came to the U.S. in the 1840s during the California Gold Rush and were exploited as a cheap labor force who could toil under dangerous and difficult conditions (Tourse et al., 2018). Second, Asians were constantly denied their naturalized citizenship or barred from migrating to the U.S. (e.g., the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, 1907 Gentleman's Agreement Act with Japan, and the 1917 Asiatic Barred Zone). These federal policies were based on the racist assumption that Asian immigration was a threat to the White racial frame and White residency well-being (Lee, 1999). As a result of these discriminatory laws, the number of Asians in the U.S. stayed relatively small until the reformation of immigration laws was passed in 1965 (Wu, 2002). Following this, Asians became the fastest-growing minority group in the U.S. (Lee, 2015). Third, these histories of discrimination mean that Asian ethnic groups continue to encounter systemic racism due to their shared phenotypic traits. This has triggered research on Asian Americans' body image, body shame and Asian men's masculinity stress, etc. (e.g., Keum & Choi, 2021). Moreover, the oppressions were perpetuated by categorizing and racializing all Asians in the U.S. as "oriental" — an "alien body and a threat to the American national family" (Lee, 1999, p. 8) with the purpose of rationalizing the power and privilege attached to whiteness (Yoo et al., 2021). Due to the unique history and the ways that Asian Americans were racialized, Kim (1999) proposed a racial triangulation framework to better understand and examine the racialization of Asian Americans.

Kim (1999) pointed out that the racial triangulation framework, which positions the racial

categories of Asian, White, and Black in opposition to each other is founded on a dilemma faced by White businesses and political elites. Specifically, they faced an urgent need for cheap labor but did not want the degraded non-Whites to populate and change the Whites' dominance. Thus, positioning Asian immigrants as superior to Blacks but permanent foreigners can fulfill the temporary economic purpose without enduring effects on White dominance. Kim (1999) described the triangulation as occurring through two simultaneous and linked processes: 1) the process of "relative valorization"—the Whites valorized Asian Americans relative to Blacks on racial and/or cultural grounds to dominate both groups, but especially Blacks; 2) the process of "civic ostracism" —Whites construct Asian Americans as immutably foreign and unassimilable with Whites on racial and/or cultural grounds to ostracize them socially and politically (Kim, 1999, p. 108. See Figure 1 Racial Triangulation). This model produces three stereotypes—Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype (Wu, 2002), Model Minority (Yoo et al., 2010), and Sexual Deviant Stereotype (Lee, 1999)— all of which have been widely employed in research to understand Asian Americans' racialized experiences. The following paragraph will explore each of these stereotypes in turn.

Specifically, the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype is a racial representation considering Asians in America as foreigners or not "true" Americans regardless of their citizenship or length of residency in the U.S. (Wu, 2002). This stereotype has been extensively adopted as an underlying reason to explain Asian Americans' "othering" experiences across education (e.g., such as reaching a "bamboo ceiling:" Asians were less likely to get promoted to a leadership position than their White counterparts) (Hyun, 2005) in mental health, and broadly in the human development field. In the human development discipline, the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype has triggered research on Asian Americans' identity development since they have been considered

foreigners on their own land. Those studies attempted to answer the fundamental question, "What does it mean to be an Asian American?" The most commonly utilized theory on this topic is the parental racial-ethnic socialization theory, referring to the transmission of information from adults to children regarding race and ethnicity (Hughes et al., 2006; Juang et al., 2017; Mistry & Kiyama, 2021). The Model Minority Myth is a racial representation of Asians in the U.S. as the more academically, economically, and socially successful group compared to other racial minority groups because of their hard work and belief in the "American dream" (Yoo et al., 2010). This representation is a myth because the White sociologist who coined the term "Model Minority" argued that Asians made it in this country through their hard work and belief in the American Dream (Peterson, 1966). Thus, the Model Minority Myth never actually celebrated the values of Asian culture (see Wu, 2002; Yoo et al., 2010 for details). In fact, "as a hegemonic device, the model minority stereotype maintains the dominance of Whites in the racial hierarchy by diverting attention from racial inequality and by setting standards for how minorities should behave" (Lee, 1996, p. 6)." The Sexual Deviant Stereotype is the racial representation of Asian American men as emasculated and unattractive and Asian American women as hypersexualized and exotic, setting up contrasting forms of gender and sexuality that diverge from the "normal" White male heteronormativity (Lee, 1999; Park, 2013). This stereotype theory has often been applied to explain the intersectional influence of racism, sexism, and heterosexism on Asian Americans' men, women, and queers' well-being (e.g., Azhar et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2016; Keum & Choi, 2021). It is crucial to remember that these three stereotypes are not mutually exclusive but work together to maintain the racial hierarchy and white privileges in the U.S. More importantly, these three stereotypes suggest that researchers look beyond the individual or interpersonal level of Asian American experiences and include

historical-social-political contexts.

It is painful to acknowledge Asian/Chinese Americans' oppressed history, but it is also important to acknowledge that Asian Americans have been fighting against oppression in coalitions across race, ethnicity, class, gender, etc. (Takaki, 1989). For example, diverse Asian ethnic groups joined together and organized some of the largest labor strikes in the 1800s to fight for equitable wages and working conditions (Takaki, 1989). Additionally, Asian Americans also protested in courts to fight for full citizenship (e.g., Wong Ark Kim case) and legal rights for Asian immigrants (e.g., Fong Yue-Ting case) (Chan, 1991). These activist protests and led to the passing of the Immigration Act of 1965, which removed the racist immigration quota system (Wu, 2002). Because of the Immigration Act, the last fifty years have seen Asian Americans' demographics drastically changed by the increased number of Asian immigrants and refugees with diverse socioeconomic, language, and cultural backgrounds (Lee, 2015). However, despite this activism, racial discrimination against Asian Americans still exists today and increased drastically after the 2020 COVID19 pandemic. For instance, currently, due to the alarming increased hate crimes against Asians, especially Chinese Americans, the AAPI Equity Alliance (AAPI Equity), Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA), and the Asian American Studies Department of San Francisco State University launched the Stop AAPI Hate coalition on March 19, 2020, as a platform to track and respond to the incidents of hate crimes in the U.S. (Stop AAPI Hate Reporting Center, 2020). The following section details more specifically the ways in which these histories influence interracial couple relationships.

Interracial Union's Marginalized History

Coupling across racial lines has been banned by law in the United States since the 17th century. Maryland has passed first law banning interracial marriage in 1664 by declaring that any

White woman who married a Black man would become a slave, and their children would also be enslaved (Head, 2018). Later, in 1691, the Commonwealth of Virginia banned interracial marriage by exiling White people who married people of color, which often resulted in death (Head, 2018). In 1883, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed that Alabama's anti-miscegenation statute was constitutional. This statue stated that anyone who cohabited or married interracially could be imprisoned in the penitentiary or sentenced to hard labor for the county for not less than two nor more than seven years (Pace v. Alabama, 1883). During 20th century, the Cable Act was issued in 1922 to deprive U.S. citizenship of the person who married a non-U.S. citizen, which primarily targeted marrying Asians (Head, 2018).

The landmark shift in this long history was the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on Loving vs. Virginia in 1967, which legalized interracial marriage (Loving vs. Virginia, 1967). Overall, the severe legal penalties of becoming involved in an interracial relationship, including slavery, exile, imprisonment, and even death, have left a long-lasting impact on public perception and feelings towards interracial coupling. For example, racial motivation theories devalue love in interracial unions by suggesting that individuals involved in interracial relations rebel against societal norms and are motivated by the desire for exoticism and sexual interests (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993). A recent experimental study shows that bias against interracial romance is associated with disgust, which could lead to dehumanizing behaviors (Skinner & Hudac, 2017). In brief, to better comprehend and investigate concurrent interracial couples' experiences in the U.S., it is vital to understand the history that interracial relationships have been situated within. In addition, as an Asian myself (i.e., Chinese international student in the U.S.) who is in a partnership with a White-European American, it is integral to reflect on my positionality and relationship to this topic.

Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

In postmodern, critical and interpretive qualitative research, the consideration of researcher positionality illuminates how a researcher's experiences and research paradigm influence the research project from conceptualization through analysis and representation of results (Holmes, 2020). One's practice of transparency through ongoing reflexivity is a critical component of the narrative methodological approach being employed in this study. My positionality is composed of three components: how I committed to social-justice work, describing my paradigm, and how I position myself in the current study.

My reflections regarding social-justice-oriented family research

My journey towards becoming a critical couple and family researcher has evolved through a process of hesitation and transformation and is a work in progress. I traveled from China to the U.S. five years ago to start my master's training in Couple and Family Therapy, and I am now working towards my doctoral degree in this field. During those first years of training, I was exposed to a social justice curriculum and encouraged to reflect on how social injustice has influenced couple and family well-being and was encouraged to integrate this concept into research and practice. However, I hesitated to integrate a social justice lens into my scholarship partly because my life experiences in China, which suggested that it might be in vain to challenge sociopolitical systems anywhere. Aligned with this thought, I questioned how much social impact I could make as an ordinary scholar and practitioner to combat huge social injustices.

My hesitation was gradually shaken by my clinical work, where I had a first-hand view of how systemic inequality can harm couples, families and entire communities. There was a time when I worked with an interracial couple. The husband (White American) mentioned that he felt

he was not important to his wife (Asian American) and stated that she did not include him much in dealing with difficult situations. As we started exploring their families of origin, the Asian partner shared how her teen peers bullied her because of her Asian phenotype, but she concealed those experiences from her hardworking immigrant parents because she did not want to add stress to their plate. As a result, she learned to depend on herself in difficult situations. It was the first time that her partner learned that she experienced this type of racism. He started to understand why she was so independent and rarely asked for help, making him feel he was unimportant to her. Moreover, he empathized with her experiences, and both reported feeling closer. These types of clinical experiences and the development of a deeper understanding of racial discrimination and injustice have slowly fueled my passion for seeking to understand how marginalization plays a role in family dynamics and the necessary to identify, understand and dismantle fundamental systemic inequalities in order to promote couple and family well-being.

However, even as I began to see the importance of centering social justice in my clinical work, my hesitation in centering my scholarship around social justice did not become solidified until the COVID-19 outbreak. During this time, race-based violence and hate crimes against Asians in the U.S. and worldwide drastically increased (Stop AAPI Hate Reporting Center, 2021). Furthermore, several of my friends reported being yelled at, “go back to your own country,” or being spit on the street. During that period of time, I found myself reflecting more deeply on my own experiences, as an Asian myself with a White partner. My partner and I began sharing our perceptions and feelings towards the racial structure in the U.S. Those conversations have brought distress but also closeness to our relationship. As a result, the necessity, urgency and sense of responsibility to center my scholarship as a family scholar, coupled with the accumulated passion for fighting for marginalized individuals, couples and families, have finally

ended my hesitation. During my doctoral studies, I was compelled to send a statement to my department, “Stop Asian Hate” as an outreach representative to raise awareness of hate crimes against Asians, and to work towards creating a united force to fight against anti-Asian racism. Also, I joined a local rally to stand in solidarity with the Asian community. Academically, I launched a project to investigate Chinese international doctoral students’ marginalized experiences in the U.S. during COVID-19 to center their voices and highlight how the negative sociopolitical climate is delivered via academic institutions and policies that often drive what appears to be individual-level stress. One of the interviewees from this past project reported that anti-Asian racism had threatened her identity in her romantic relationship since she felt she was no longer an independent person because she had to depend on her partner (a White male) to feel safe to go out (Tang & Flint, 2022). This interview has kept me wondering: how did her White partner respond to her thoughts? How do they co-create a “we” narrative to resist anti-Asian racist discourse? How did they develop their love stories, given the historical discrimination against interracial unions and long-standing racism against Asians?

At this time, I consider myself a critical couple and family researcher and practitioner, aiming to identify, understand and disrupt the dynamic processes of power, privilege, and discrimination that undermine health and well-being among individuals, couples, and families. As this is an ongoing process with collective force, I will continue allying with scholars across disciplines to engage in transformative social justice work and facilitate social changes.

My paradigm

I view the world via a postmodern paradigm. Departing from the long-standing modernist frame that assumes the “objective” researcher adopts an empirical tool to uncover “facts,” postmodernism adopts a skeptical stand towards scientific process and knowledge, embraces the

multiple narratives of reality, rejects the detached researcher position, and situates knowledge and understandings within social contexts (Derrida; 1992 Foucault, 1980; Given, 2018). Through the lenses of a postmodern paradigm, I perceive the world holistically and believe knowledge and truths are diverse, fluid, and embedded within historical and contemporary contexts. This means I see knowledge and meanings as socially and historically constructed and becoming. Moreover, I reject the dichotomy between positioning the researcher as an objective and detached "knower" and those outside the ivory tower, including participants, as "unknowers" partly because participants are usually personally familiar with their experiences that constitute the foundation of our work (Battle & Serrano, 2022; Brown, 2017). More importantly, I intend to view myself as co-constructing knowledge "with" participants instead of studying "down" to resist reproducing oppression and pathologizing participants (Bermudez et al., 2016; Schrijvers, 1991). Thus, I will reject the role of expert and take on a co-authoring role to inquire into their experiences rather than bracketing myself out (Clandinin, 2006). Specifically, I will share the writing of the results and ask participants for feedback rather than taking an expert stance to generate knowledge.

My positionality in this study

My social-justice core and postmodern paradigm have inspired and informed my current study in several ways. First, an orientation to social-justice has drawn me to seek to understand and center experiences of marginalized populations (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993), including interracial couples who are historically and contemporarily marginalized and discriminated against (Head, 2018; Killian, 2012; Leslie & Young, 2015). Second, as postmodernism emphasizes contextual influences, I am drawn to the ecological model that underscores how multiple layers of systems interact with one another to shape interracial couples' experiences in

order to get a holistic understanding of those couples' unique struggles, complicity in and/ resistance of dominant negative social discourses, and how couples make sense of those experiences to move forward (Bronfenbrenner,1979; 1995; 2005). Moreover, attending to contextualization and historicity leads me to choose a critical lens (i.e., AsianCrit) (Itzigsohn & Brown, 2020; Museus & Iftikar, 2013) to identify and understand the role of Asian Americans' unique racialized history and ongoing anti-Asian racism in their romantic relationships with their White partners. Finally, my passion for social justice has drawn me to narrative inquiry, which has contributed to social changes for decades (Squire et al., 2013). Specifically, counter-narratives have been employed to empower marginalized populations by centering their voices (Milner IV & Howard, 2013), and more importantly, to challenge dominant discourses, such as racism and to dismantle them (Blaisdell, 2021). Additionally, postmodernism values multiple meanings and divergent interpretations rather than reconciling the conflicting meanings to find the truth (Derrida; 1992 Foucault, 1980; Given, 2018). This informs how I use narrative inquiry to interpret conflicting narratives between two partners, and how the various narratives across couples enrich the in-depth understanding of historically, socially, and politically constructed real-life experiences.

Project Overview

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the project aimed to investigate Chinese American/White Euro American couples' stories regarding whether and how they perceive the role of race, stratification in the U.S., and intersectionality in their couple relationship dynamics and well-being. The recent escalation of anti-Asian racism and violence in the past years (Stop AAPI Hate Reporting

Center, 2020), combined with historical discrimination against interracial unions (Head, 2018), and stereotypes against Asians in the U.S. (Kim, 1999), have increased the vulnerability of those interracial couples. Moreover, interracial relationship well-being is overall understudied and mostly centers around relationship formation (e.g., why mate outside one's race) and relationship stability (e.g., divorce rate compared to same-race Asian or White couples). (Canlas et al., 2015; Chuang et al., 2021; Tsunokai et al., 2014; Yang & Prost, 2022). Thus, this study is uniquely positioned to contribute to the field of Family Science by addressing important gaps in our understanding of contextual stressors on interracial couple dynamics. Specifically, this project explored mechanisms related to how interracial couples perceive their various social locations and the role of racial stratification in their relationship in order to inform unique stressors and resilience factors that may be incorporated into mental health and relational prevention and intervention efforts.

Informed by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of human development (Bronfenbrenner,1979; 1995; 2005), the Systemic Transactional Model (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005), and AsianCrit (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Museus & Iftikar, 2013; Yoo et al., 2021), narrative inquiry will be employed to explore one broad question: whether and how Chinese American/White Euro-American couples perceive the role of race, racial stratification and intersectionality in their couple relationship dynamics.

Reasons to focus on Chinese American/White Euro-American couples

The current study will focus on Chinese Americans partnering with White Euro-Americans for two reasons. One is that although Asian ethnic groups may share some similarities in their history of oppression in the U.S., those histories are also unique due to each group's distinct migration experiences. For example, Filipino Americans' have a distinct history with

colonization, whereas Japanese Americans' history includes incarnation experiences (Lee, 2015; Maeda, 2009). Historically, Chinese Americans are the only racial or ethnic group explicitly excluded from the U.S. by law (Tourse et al., 2018). Currently, the exacerbated anti-Asian racism has primarily targeted the Chinese. This is illustrated in the statistics on racism-related attacks on Chinese citizens and Chinese Americans in the U.S. For example, in the U.S., Chinese individuals have reported more hate incidents (43.7%) than other racial or ethnic groups, followed by Koreans (16.6%), Filipinx (8.8%), and Vietnamese (8.3%) (Stop AAPI Hate Reporting Center, 2020). Thus, the current study will explore whether and how those Chinese Americans' unique racialized history combined with contemporary anti-Chinese sentiments have influenced their romantic relationship dynamics with their White Euro-American partners.

Building from these statistics, another reason I choose to focus on Chinese American/White Euro-American pairs was to explore whether and how the racial stratification in the U.S. have played out in interracial relationships when one is a racial minority, and the other is a racial majority. It has been found that in Black-White couple relationships, the White racially constructed identity could add unique distress to an interracial relationship (e.g., receive more disapproval from families and society than same-race couples) (Bell, 2015), and trigger the power differences in the relationship due to racial privilege (Leslie & Young, 2015). For example, White partners may use their privileged racial position to dismiss a minority partner's feelings or accuse him/her of being oversensitive in certain situations (Karis, 2003). It is also possible that the White partner might be highly reactive when they experience racism or discrimination for the first time due to partnering with a racial minority, while the minority partner may perceive the same situation as microaggression at most and not respond the same way as the White partner did since the minority partner has encountered many similar situations

before (Csizmadia et al., 2015). This not-on-the-same-page scenario may create conflict and distress in the relationship (Csizmadia et al., 2015). However, being in an interracial relationship can raise the White partner's consciousness of race, racial identity, and racial issues in the U.S. (Yancey & Yancy, 2007) via increased engagement in perspective-taking, which in turn, can lead to improved closeness and commitment (Van Der Walt & Basson, 2015). Therefore, the current study aimed to explore whether and how racial privileges may influence Chinese American/White Euro-American's relationship dynamics.

Defining terms

According to Critical Race theory, race is a socio-political constructed concept based on perceived physical features (e.g., skin color, hair type, and facial characteristics) rather than inherent biological differences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Thus, in the current study, the term race is used to describe social identification associated with physical traits such as skin and hair color, in spite of enormous variations among people that are considered a part of a particular racial group (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). Moreover, racial inequality and power imbalance are created and maintained when racial differences are used to disempower and differentially allocate desirable societal opportunities and resources to racial groups regarded as inferior, and to promote power and privilege attached to "whiteness" through racial categorization and rankings of social groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Kottak & Kozaitis, 2007; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). Therefore, for the purpose of the current project, interracial is defined as "partners' different racial categories defined by their physical and biological characteristics" (Leslie & Young, 2015, p788). Although interracial, intercultural, and interethnic have been used interchangeably for the different purposes in research studies (Henderson, 2000; Reiter & Gee, 2008), I chose to use the term "interracial" in the current study

with the specific interest in exploring the interracial couples' experiences of historical and contemporary discrimination and marginalization due to their racial differences, when one is from racially dominant group (i.e., White), the other is from racially minority group (i.e., Asian).

The significance of the study

The current project is significant in several ways. First, the current study aimed to address the lack of interracial relationship dynamic studies in literature. Specifically, interracial relationship wellbeing is overall understudied (Atkin & Yoo, 2019; Troy at al., 2006). Asian-White interracial couple relationships, including Chinese American/White Euro-American studies, are especially limited and mostly focus on relationship formation (e.g., mate preference) (Bohm-Jordan & Yang, 2021) and relationship stability (e.g., divorce rate compared to same-race Asian or White couples) (Canlas et al., 2015). It is important to focus on relationship dynamics in order to identify interracial couples' unique challenges and resilience, in turn, can facilitate corresponding interventions and preventions.

Second, although Black-White relationship studies have documented that racial stratification can influence intimate relationships (Killian, 2003, 2012; Leslie & Letiecq, 2012), the existing Asian-White relationship studies have rarely explored this topic. Given Asians are racialized in a unique way in the U.S: being pitted against African Americans as the Modern minority to maintain racial hierarchy and being treated as perpetual foreigners (Kim, 1999), Asian-White couple dynamics can be different from Black-White dynamics. Thus, it is important to explore the uniqueness of whether and how racial stratification has influenced Asian-White to facilitate corresponding programs to promote couples' wellbeing. Moreover, despite the high intermarriage rate of Asians in the U.S. and the low rate of divorce (Livingston & Brown, 2019), previous studies have found that Asian-White relationships still reflect racial hierarchy via

intersectional effect (Lee & Kye, 2016). For example, Asian women partnered with White men have only a 4% divorce rate, while Asian men partnered with White women achieved a 59% divorce rate (Bratter & King, 2008). Thus, there is a need to specifically focus on whether and how race interacts with gender, location, education, social economic status, etc. have influenced Asian-White relationship dynamics.

Third, the study adopted the Ecological Model (EM) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005) as a systemic lens to form a holistic understanding of couple relationship dynamics. This is important because most studies regarding interracial couple dynamics only include individual factors (e.g., individuals' racial worldview) (Brooks et al., 2021) or couple-level factors (e.g., relationship stability) (Brown et al., 2019) or network factors (e.g., parental approval or disapproval) (Bell, 2015). Although several studies have found that larger contextual factors, such as historical-sociopolitical factors can also affect interracial couples' dynamics (Killian, 2003; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013), this has not been deeply explored in the literature. Thus, the current study aims to bridge this literature through addressing the multiple intertwined contextual influence of interracial couple dynamics.

Finally, methodologically, the current study adopted narrative inquiry to zoom in couple dynamics to explore couples' stories' regarding race-related topics and how they co-constructed those stories together (Chase, 2018; Freeman,2017; Riessman, 2008). A few studies have already utilized narrative inquiry to explore couples' stories of facing life-challenging situations (Bentley et al., 2021; Stewart et al., 2019). Thus, by using narrative inquiry, the current project aimed to enhance the understanding of whether and how social factors may affect intimate relationship dynamics.

An overview of the dissertation

This chapter provided a brief introduction regarding interracial couple research and an overview of the current project with emphasis on researcher's positionality, research purpose and significance. Chapter 2 provided a brief literature review concerning interracial couple unions in the U.S. and the guiding theories. Chapter 3 provided an overview of research design including using narrative inquiry as a methodological approach, and data collection process. Chapter 4 presented results including composite narratives and structural analysis results. Finally, Chapter 5 provided a discussion of the results, including key policy and clinical implications.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the purpose of the current project is to investigate Chinese American/White Euro-American couples' experiences overtime navigating marginalization and discrimination, this review is composed of two primary areas of literature: Asian Americans' experiences of racism and an overview of how White/non-White interracial couples including Chinese American/White Euro-American couples navigate marginalization and discrimination. At the end of this chapter, research gaps will be highlighted and links to the current study.

Asian Americans' Experiences of Racism

Before reviewing White/non-White interracial couples' experiences, it might be necessary to review Asian Americans' experiences of racism and marginalization. The following paragraphs include the prevalence and types of racism that Asian Americans have experienced, as well as how research has linked these experiences to mental health consequences, coping strategies, and parental racial-ethical socialization.

Prevalence and Types of Racism

The prevalence of racial discrimination among Asians ranges from 15% to 68%, varied by different types or forms of discrimination. For example, among an Asian young adult sample, 15% of participants reported verbal or physical assaults, 68% reported that they or their family had experienced COVID-19-related racism, and 45% reported that someone had indicated that Chinese/Asian people being the source of the virus (Hahm et al., 2021). More importantly, there

has been an increase in self-reported racism across all types since COVID-19 (Lee & Waters, 2021). The general categories of racism were direct (i.e., happened to oneself) vs. vicarious (i.e., hearing or witnessing others' racialized encounters) (e.g., Tynes et al., 2010). Additionally, racism was also categorized as overt vs. covert. (e.g., Yoo et al., 2010). Noticeably, there has been a large body of research on racial microaggression against Asian Americans (e.g., Forrest-Bank et al., 2015; Keum et al., 2018; Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2017).

Mental Health Consequences of Racialized Experiences

Literature suggests racism or race-based violence against Asian Americans is a risk variable associated with various mental health consequences. Specifically, racialized experiences have been related to symptoms of depression (Chau et al., 2018), anxiety (Cheng et al., 2021), alcohol-related problems (Le & Iwamoto, 2019), increased levels of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Hahm et al., 2021), lowered self-esteem (Tawa et al., 2012), adolescences' internalizing difficulties (Cheah et al., 2021), etc. Furthermore, those who reported discrimination had 1.9 times higher probabilities of suicide ideation than those who did not (Li et al., 2018). Additionally, racism can interact with other independent variables, such as sexism, heterosexualism, and acculturation, to create intersectional effects on Asian Americans' mental health. For example, a sample of Chinese American men found that their perceived gendered racism (i.e., being an Asian and a man) was positively related to alcohol use severity and depressive symptoms (Keum & Choi, 2021). For the Asian immigrant population, acculturation stress interacting with perceived racism was associated with increased mental distress (Chung & Epstein, 2014). Additionally, at the relational level, perceived discrimination can result in negative mental health consequences via increased family conflicts (Cheng et al., 2015). For example, in a national sample of 1426 married or cohabitating Asian Americans, family conflicts

and spousal/partner strain could explain around 40% of the association between perceived discrimination and psychological stress (Kwon, 2020).

Coping Strategies

The majority of the literature is focused on coping strategies through an understanding of moderators' effects that buffer perceived racism/violence and psychological distress. The most widely studied moderator at the individual level was the role of ethnic/racial identity (Choi et al., 2017, 2020) and self-related variables (e.g., self-compassion, Liu et al., 2020; cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, Juang et al., 2016). Meanwhile, social support, including friends and family support at the relational level, was considered a significant buffer (e.g., Wei et al., 2013). A few studies have examined whether spousal support could buffer the link between one's perceived discrimination and psychological distress (Kwon, 2020; Rollock & Lui, 2016). At a broad level, immigration-related variables, such as generation status (Liu & Suyemoto, 2016), and nativity status (i.e., U.S.-born or non-U.S.-born), received the most attention (Cheon & Yip, 2019). Moreover, those moderators can interact with one another to create a complex and layered effect. For example, having a higher ethnic-racial identity can be a protective factor for non-U.S.-born Asian Americans but a risk factor for U.S.-born individuals due to their different ethnic-racial socialization environments (Cheon & Yip, 2019; Ying et al., 2000). In brief, having an accurate understanding of the buffering effect on the links between racism and mental health consequences may need to include contexts across different levels.

The specific strategies that Asian Americans have adopted to handle the experiences of racism include both proactive and reactive strategies (Ahn et al., 2021; Sanchez et al., 2018; Seery & Quinton, 2015; Tawa et al., 2012; Tsai & Wei, 2018). For example, in a qualitative study, among 12 second-generation Asian American women, many of them were told by their

families and peers to be silent, ignore, or accept the gendered racial discrimination as a survival tool (Ahn et al., 2021). In contrast, several parents explicitly told their daughters to fight against discrimination and actively resist harmful social messages (Ahn et al., 2021). Another study about racial microaggressions found Asian American young adults using both coping strategies: engagement coping strategies (e.g., problem-solving, cognitive restructuring, expression of emotion, and social support) and disengagement coping strategies (e.g., problem avoidance, wishful thinking, and social with-drawl) in the face of racialized encounters. However, only engagement coping was found to be negatively associated with psychological distress (Sanchez et al., 2018). Overall, the coping strategies were mainly centered at the individual level.

Parental Racial-Ethnic Socialization Among Asian American Families

The literature regarding racism against Asian Americans usually targets individual experiences, including the detrimental effect and how they respond to those racialized experiences, as summarized above, except for parental racial-ethical socialization studies. This racial-ethical socialization literature has focused on the process regarding how Asian parents transmit family values and how their children receive racial-ethnic information and integrate that information into shaping their racial-ethical identity as Asian Americans in the U.S. (e.g., Atkin & Yoo, 2021; Juang et al., 2016, 2018; Woo et al., 2020). However, those studies were criticized for focusing heavily on *ethnic* socialization (i.e., the preservation and transmission of Asian cultural values, practices, traditions, language, and history) and lacking research on *racial* socialization (i.e., how parents teach their children about the meaning being of an Asian in the U.S.) (Juang et al., 2017). Additionally, this line of studies usually centers around Asian partners and their children's interactions. In other words, couple dyads, especially interracial couple dyads, are missing from those studies. Exploring parental racial-ethical socialization without

thoroughly understanding how parents themselves navigate racial stratification may compromise understanding how they engage in the racial socialization process with their children. Moreover, racial socialization is not a minority family thing (Juang et al., 2017). All parents in an ethically and racially diverse society like the U.S. may need to go through the process, including White parents and their children (Juang et al., 2017). Thus, it is valuable to add missing pieces of how couples, including interracial couples, navigate marginalization and discrimination as a couple to parental racial-ethnic socialization literature.

Overview of Interracial Couples Perceived Marginalization, Responses, and Relationship Outcomes

As the focus of the current study is to explore how interracial couples navigate marginalization when one with one partner is from a racially dominant group (i.e., White-European) and the other is from a racially minority group (i.e., Asian [Chinese American]), the following literature review specifically covers the couple relationship dynamics with White/non-White pairing and also highlights the trends of Asian-White union studies.

Unique Challenges

Interracial couples not only experience common couple issues such as communication, finances, and intimate issues, but often also deal with unique issues, such as navigating social network disapproval of their union, handling discrimination from the outside, and negotiating racial privileges within their relationship (Leslie & Young, 2015). Those unique issues reflect the lingering effects of historical taboos and marginalization against interracial unions described in the previous sections. Specifically, marginalization simultaneously targets both the interracial union (e.g., the negative or hostile attitudes towards the union) as well as the individual within

the union (i.e., stereotype/discriminate against either or both partners). Furthermore, marginalization can come from both proximal sources such as disapproval from one's social network (Bell & Hastings, 2015) as well as distal sources, such as unwanted public attention (Killian, 2012). In terms of proximal sources, family and social network disapproval can manifest in various forms. These include alienation, such as excluding interracial couples from family events, as well as explicit or implicit discriminatory/stereotyping comments towards the partner of color (e.g., a Latino husband was told by his White father-in-law that he could trust he could take care of his daughter because he is well-educated) (Wieling, 2003), or towards the White partner (e.g., White woman's father expressed feeling being betrayed when his daughter chose a black partner) (Van Der Walt & Basson, 2015). Finally, interracial couples face pressure of when and how to disclose their relationship to their parents when expecting opposition due to racial differences (Ngcongo, 2021). Fortunately, many interracial couples reported being accepted by their family and social network after a period of time (Inman et al., 2011; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). Concerning perceived marginalization from distal sources, studies have examined interracial couples' perceived marginalized experiences or public reactions toward interracial unions. Perceived marginalization from the public ranges from subtle (e.g., "if the slightest thing goes wrong in the relationship, people are quick to blame it on our differences" (Wieling, 2003, p49) to blatant (e.g., interracial couples report often being stared at in the shopping mall, restaurants, etc.) (Brooks et al., 2021; Greif & Saviet, 2020; Killian, 2003, 2012). Skinner and Rae's (2019) study used both self-reported measures and an experimental design and found robust implicit biases (i.e., automatically activated preferences for same-race coupling in an experiment condition) and explicit biases (i.e., self-reported negative public reaction) against Black/White interracial unions. In summary, interracial couples face various

challenges inside and outside their social networks related to their racial differences.

Relationship Outcome Studies

Research regarding interracial couple relationships yields both negative and positive outcomes due to the unique challenges addressed above. On the one hand, numerous studies found an association between interracial couples' perceived unique challenges and negative relationship outcomes, such as lower relationship satisfaction (Genç & Su, 2021; Haughton & Afifi, 2022; Maffini et al., 2022), lower relationship commitment, trust, and lower closeness to the partner (Caselli & Machia, 2021, 2022; Rosenthal & Starks, 2015), increased divorce rate (Bratter & King, 2008; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009), and greater odds of intimate partner aggression and victimization (Lavner et al., 2018; Rosenthal & Starks, 2015). On the other hand, researchers pointed out that challenges can also strengthen relationships. For example, facing challenges as a united front can increase bonding, commitment, and closeness (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004; Van Der Walt & Basson, 2015), and consciously using constructive communication styles due to the awareness of the impact of racial differences can increase relationship satisfaction and stability (Canlas et al., 2015); In short, challenges may not necessarily lead to relationship dysfunction, rather what matters is how the couple responds and copes. Thus, the current study will investigate how Asian-White couples perceive and handle those challenges, and how that may influence their relationship. The following paragraph will further illustrate the literature on how couples respond to those challenges.

Navigating Marginalization and Discrimination

How interracial couples handle marginalization has stimulated two domains of research, and mostly are explored through qualitative research: the tactics interracial couples have used to respond to marginalization and the extent and manner to which they facilitate “race talks” with

one another. Regarding concrete strategies, research demonstrates that interracial couples utilize various approaches to deal with marginalization and discrimination, such as directly fighting back (e.g., "I stared right back at them," Killian, 2003, p15), avoidance (i.e., restricting itinerary to avoid places that may elicit racism) (Killian, 2002, 2003), nonreactivity to others (i.e., resisting reactive responses, such as anger) (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013) or laughing about the discriminatory comments (e.g., "when people ask me are those your children?…I laughed it off") (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013, p52), and drawing a boundary away from the unsupportive social network (Csizmadia, et al., 2015).

Regarding whether or not and how partners facilitate "race talks with each other, researchers across studies found that many couples either minimize the role of race and its impact or never talk about it with one another. For example, Brooks and colleagues (2021) utilized a survey with open-ended questions to ask about the impact of race on their relationship and found that around 43% of the participants believed that race and racial issues had no impact on their relationships. Aligned with those findings, several qualitative studies indicated that interracial couples decenter/minimize the role of race, racism, and the impact on their relationship, via normalizing the couplehood (e.g., "we are just like every other couple") (Leslie & Young, 2015, p791), or emphasizing their shared values and similarities (e.g., "while these outward appearances make us sound like night and day, we are so compatible in thoughts, emotions and goals") (Brummett, 2017, p781). Some couples try to erase racial differences and the impact on the relationship through colorblind strategies (e.g., "I think there is only one race–the human race," Killian, 2003, p12; "love is color-blind," Brummett, 2017, p782)

Regarding the "no race talk" phenomenon, some researchers have noted that it may be a survival skill for interracial couples to reduce the negative impact of discrimination and allow

couples to continue living in a racial hierarchical society (Killian, 2003). Moreover, not talking about race or racism may help interracial couples avoid conflict, which may not constitute a clinical issue (Killian, 2003). However, other researchers have suggested the necessity and possible positive relationship outcomes for couples to communicate about those important topics. For starters, their coping strategies cannot cancel the personal pain and frustration derived from the stigmas (e.g., "I'm sick of feeling like we're in a circus all the time," Killian, 2003, p15). More importantly, when one partner is from the dominant racial group (i.e., White) and the other from a racial minority group, the power differences as a result of racial privileges can influence couple relationship dynamics in overt and subtle ways (Leslie & Young, 2015). The overt impact is that the White partner's racial privilege may place them in the position of experiencing dual realities (e.g., better service in a restaurant when he/she is alone versus when they are with the racial minority partner). This can activate feelings of guilt and the relief of acknowledging that they can "opt out" sometimes (Leslie & Young, 2015). A subtle impact is that there are tensions and hard feelings between a racially privileged partner and the minority partner because of their different narratives regarding race and racism as they grow up in different racial groups (Leslie & Young, 2015). As a result, under some circumstances, the racial minority partner may feel dismissed or devalued for reasons he/she cannot fully explain to the White partner, which can add stress and tension to couple relationships (Killian, 2013; Leslie & Young, 2015). However, studies found that when the White partner can use perspective-taking to understand and empathize with the partner's racialized experiences, not only did the White partner report self-growth in increased racial consciousness but also couples became closer (Caselli & Machia, 2022; Greif et al., 2022). In brief, if a couple avoid having race talks with each other it may have a survival function in the short run but may lead to damage in the relationship in the long run.

Therefore, there is a need to explore the ways in which Chinese American/White Euro-American couples facilitate "race talks" and how they interpret and construct couple narratives in order to better understand their unique relational dynamics.

Asian-White Unions

With regard to Asian-White unions, the literature is overall scarce, focusing on public attitudes toward Asian-White couples, Asians' mate selection preferences, and Asian-White relationship outcomes compared to same-race White couples and/or same-race Asian couples (Canlas et al., 2015; Chuang et al., 2021; Tsunokai et al., 2014; Yang & Prost, 2022). Topics such as racism, racial identity, and stigma against interracial unions are usually explored in Black-White relationships but rarely investigated in Asian-White couple relationships. Given Asian Americans' unique racialized history and concurrent racial hierarchy in the U.S. in is important to have a deeper understanding of how these interracial relationships are affected (e.g., Killian, 2003, 2012; Kim, 1999; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004). Moreover, the few relationship outcomes studies that have been conducted indicated that Asian-White relationships are as stable as same-race White couples, and that they are similar to White couples in levels of empathic communication towards one another and receiving endogenous social approval (Canlas et al., 2015).

A resulting discourse based on the outcome studies indicating that Asian-White unions are stable coupled with the high rates of Asian interracial marriages (i.e., 29% of newlywed Asians married someone of a different race or ethnicity) (Canlas et al., 2015; Livingston & Brown, 2017), it that Asian Americans have achieved the status of "honorary Whites" in the changing racial hierarchy in the U.S. (Bonilla-Silva, 2004, p. 32). However, many researchers point out that the marriage patterns about these couples still reflects racial hierarchies found in

the U.S. (e.g., Chow, 2000; Lee & Kye, 2016). For example, U.S.-born Asians who coupled with White partners typically showed high values associated with whiteness and simultaneously devalued Asians who were often viewed as negative stereotypical Asians (Chow, 2000). Furthermore, Asian-White marriages are highly gendered. Specifically, the high relationship stability of Asian-White marriages is more closely associated with Asian-female/White-male than Asian-male/White-female couples. For instance, White women with Asian partners were 59% more likely to end their relationship than same-race White couples, whilst the probability of dissolution among Asian women with White partners was only 4% (Bratter & King's, 2008). One of the explanations for the gendered results in Asian-White marriages might be linked to the Sexual Deviant Stereotype that considers Asian American men as emasculated and unattractive and Asian American women as hypersexualized and exotic (e.g., Hwang et al., 1997; Lee & Kye, 2016; Lee, 1999). Additionally, the offspring of Asian/White couples without an entirely Euro-White appearance still found it hard to be considered an insider to White group members (Song, 2019). In short, as Kim (2007) argued that, "social classmobility for Asian Americans is not a ticket out of racial subordination" (p. 564). Under the surface, the high rates of Asian-White intermarriages may underscore the gendered racial hierarchy and power dynamics that continue to devaluate Asian Americans relative to their White partners (Lee & Kye, 2016). Therefore, there is a need to focus on the relationship itself (e.g., the interactions, power dynamics, etc.) rather than on relationship formation and outcomes only. Specifically, the extent and manner in which racialized discourses, racial privileges, and racialized encounters have played out in couples' interactional dynamics, and thus shaped their couple narratives, in turn, has influenced the relational as well as indiviuals' well-being in the relationship.

Research Gaps

Although the literature provides valuable information in addressing and understanding interracial couple relationships, it is limited in several ways. These include 1) lack of focus on couple dynamics regarding Asian Americans' marginalized experiences; 2) lack of focus on Asian-White couples' overall experiences, especially how they navigate marginalized experiences, and 3) lack of systemic perspectives of understanding couples' experiences. In the following paragraphs, I will further situate each of these limitations, as well as provide a rationale for grounding how this study will address these gaps and limitations.

First, literature regarding Asian Americans' experiences of marginalization has mainly focused on individual racialized experiences (e.g., perceived racism and mental health consequences). A few studies have examined whether spousal support could buffer the link between one's perceived discrimination and psychological distress (Kwon, 2020; Rollock & Lui, 2016). How Asian American families navigate racism has been understudied. An exception is literature on parental racial-ethnic socialization (e.g., Atkin & Yoo, 2021; Juang et al., 2016, 2018; Woo et al., 2020). However, the focus of those racial-ethical studies is on adolescents' racial-ethical identity development while utilizing parents' reported data (Juang et al., 2016); and most parents are both Asian Americans with rare studies examining biracial families (Rollins & Hunter, 2013). In fact, my review of the literature found no studies that specifically focused on Asian couples' experiences of navigating marginalization, let alone Asians that have a White partner. This focus may add another layer of complexity in their relationship given the possible power imbalance that derives from the racial privileges (Leslie & Young, 2015). This is notable as couple subsystems are often considered a fundamental element for the development of family members and maintenance of family health (Ackerman et al., 2011; Schermerhorn et al., 2011).

Moreover, research of Black-White unions has found that racial privileges derived from racial hierarchy can influence couple power dynamics, commitment, trust, closeness, etc. via overt and subtle ways (e.g., details in Killian, 2013; Leslie & Young, 2015). Thus, there is a need to include studies focusing on how couple dyads navigate marginalization research instead of a sole focus on the impact of racialized experiences on individuals.

Second, interracial relationship well-being is overall understudied (Atkin & Yoo, 2019; Troy et al., 2006). Asian-White interracial couple relationship studies are especially limited and focus on the relationship formation process (Bohm-Jordan & Yang, 2020) and relationship stability (Canlas et al., 2015). More importantly, the high intermarriage rate of Asians in the U.S. (Livingston & Brown, 2017), combined with findings from relationship outcome studies that suggest Asian-White unions are often stable (e.g., Canlas et al., 2015) seems to indicate Asian-White intermarriages have broken down the racial hierarchy in the U.S. (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). However, researchers believe this claim might not be true because those relationships still reflect racial hierarchy in various ways (see more details in Lee & Kye, 2016). Thus, there is a need to focus on Asian-White couples' relationship dynamics and also center their marginalized experiences. This is notable for two reasons. First, diving deep into Asian-White couples' relationship dynamics could provide an in-depth understanding of their unique experiences, which could support the dismantling of rigid definitions of "The Family" as a prototype that reflects a mythical norm of a White, wealthy, patriarchal, heteronormative image (Lorde, 1984), and expand the understanding of how diverse couples and families' function in real time. Second, for the social-justice purpose, centering Asian-White marginalized narratives could offer counter-narratives to dismantle the negative social discourses that are attached to Asian Americans, such as the "honorary Whites" classification that has overcome a racial hierarchy

(Lee & Kye, 2016).

Third, it is significant to adopt a systemic perspective to understand interracial couples' dynamics. Most studies regarding interracial couple dynamics only include individual or couple-level factors (e.g., Brooks et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2019; Yancey & Yancy, 2007). Some studies stretch out to include familial and social network factors (Bell & Hastings, 2015; Greif & Saviet, 2020; Maffini et al., 2022). This is notable as several studies have found that larger historical-sociopolitical factors can influence interracial couples' dynamics in painful and unspeakable ways. For example, Killian (2002) found how dominant marginalized narratives (i.e., homogamy and racism) have activated pain and fear of talking about it openly among Black-White interracial couples. A systemic perspective makes it possible to investigate how the multiple systems that interracial couples are embedded in have formed an integrated influence to affect interracial couples' perceptions and the ways that they navigate marginalization. The consequences of ignoring the systemic influence, especially the historical-sociopolitical context, can compromise our understanding of interracial couples' unique challenges, fail to recognize the constraints of coping, and in turn, hinder developing effective interventions to target their unique needs.

Review of Guiding Theories

Theories regarding interracial couples' experiences of navigating marginalization and enhancing their relationship have fallen into two main disciplines: Communication and Family Science. Both fields take different approaches in their studies. Communication studies center the communication process, such as how interracial couples respond to discrimination and how their responses have influenced couple communication process in the face of relationship-based

discrimination from their social network and society. Related theories include Face And Facework Theory (Bell & Hastings, 2011, 2015; Goffman, 1967; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), Label Theory (Brooks & Ogolsky, 2017; Kitsuse, 1962), and the Theory of Resilience and Relational Load (TRRL) (Haughton & Afifi, 2022).

Family Science, broadly including the discipline of psychology, focuses on how interracial couples perceive, feel, and respond to marginalized experiences, which in turn, influence relationships and individual well-being. Some theories are more individual-oriented than others. For example, Racial Worldview Theory was used to investigate one's perception of the impact of race on their interracial relationship and whether and how couples facilitate race talks (Brooks et al., 2021). Perspective-taking Theory was often employed to examine whether the White partner's adoption of perspective-taking could buffer against the negativity of perceived race-based discrimination and, in turn, could affect their relationship outcomes (Caselli & Machia, 2022, 2021). Meanwhile, several theories are more relational or systemic oriented: Interdependence Theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), Systemic Transactional Model (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005), Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), and Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005). The following sections will briefly illustrate how those systemic theories are applied to research regarding interracial couples' experiences of navigating marginalization.

Interdependence Theory

A foundational social exchange model states that partner A & B in a romantic relationship interact in a way that not only maximizes their own rewards from the exchange relationship but also considers the other partner's needs (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Thus, the interdependent nature of a romantic relationship leads both partners to

rely on the relationship to provide rewards (e.g., satisfaction, love, commitment) (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Moreover, the interdependent theory is connected to the commitment model because when partners experience increased relationship satisfaction and devalue the desirable alternatives, the feeling of commitment increases with growing dependence (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult, 1980, 1983). This theory has been applied to explore how the unique challenges, including racism and discrimination against interracial unions, have influenced the individuals' feelings, thoughts and behaviors, as well as dyadic interactions (i.e., two partners' exchange of feelings, thoughts and behaviors within the romantic relationship), and in turn, how they affect relationship functions (Christensen, 1983; Gaines et al., 2015; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Leslie & Young, 2015). The mutual influence of interdependence theory has inspired other theories, such as the Systemic Transactional Model (STM) (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005).

Systemic Transactional Model (STM)

The STM (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005), developed from Lazarus and Folkman (1984)'s individual-oriented theory of stress and coping and interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), has been expanded by focusing on individuals' stress-coping to emphasize couples' dyadic stress-coping in adversity. Specifically, built on interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), it is believed that stress can influence one another via spillover (Bodenmann et al., 2007) and crossover (Neff & Karney, 2007), and also the resources that are shared and integrated between two partners. As a result, STM repeatedly emphasizes that the stress-coping process in a romantic relationship is a relational and interdependent process rather than the sum of two individuals' stress-coping responses and goes beyond the partners' support (Bodenmann et al., 2016; Folkman, 2009). The STM, highlighting the dynamics between partners' stressful

experiences, shared appraisals and joint goals in facing external stressors, has guided numerous studies to explore how couples deal with various stressors, including daily hassles (e.g., Falconier et al., 2015; Randall & Bodenmann, 2009, 2017), critical life events (Canzi et al. 2019; Molgora et al. 2019), severe illness (e.g., Berg & Upchurch, 2007; Kayser et al., 2007; Rottmann et al., 2015), and mental disorders (Bodenmann & Randall, 2013). Recently, dyadic coping was found to buffer the association between the stigma against the interracial relationship and the adverse consequences for relationship outcomes and individuals' well-being within the relationship (Rosenthal et al., 2019; Rosenthal & Starks, 2015). Finally, Randall et al. (2022) proposed integrating STM into the ecological model to expand the understanding of the intersectional and complex impact of social determinants (i.e., racial/ethnic background, religious background, living situation, etc.) on couples' stress-coping process.

Vulnerability Stress Adaptation Model

The VSA states that marital outcomes are affected by three variables: *enduring vulnerabilities* (i.e., the individual characteristics, such as personalities), *stressful situations* (i.e., perceived stressful events, such as job loss), and *adaptive process* (i.e., couples' respond to the stressful situations based on the enduring vulnerabilities in order to enhance relationship stability and quality) (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The VSA model asserts that those three variables interact with one another to affect marital quality and stability. Recently, the VSA has guided two interracial relationship studies. Vazquez et al. (2019) explored how relationship stigma serves as an enduring vulnerability that interacts with Black/White couples' adaptive process to affect marital satisfaction. Another study used longitudinal couple-level data and found that the enduring vulnerability (e.g., being in an interracial marriage) and stressful life events (e.g., losing extramarital social support) did not lead the interracial couples with more likelihood of divorce

compared to same-race couples in a local sample (Grether & Jones, 2020). Although being in an interracial relationship was considered an enduring vulnerability in this study, the VSA's foci are still more on the impact of individual factors than on the historical-sociopolitical environment of interracial couples' relationships.

The Ecological Model (EM)

The EM emphasizes individual and environmental interlocking influences on shaping an individual's development, consisting of five basic systems—microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem—arranged as Russian nesting dolls (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005). Several studies have applied EM to examine interracial or intercultural couple relationships. Macneil and Adamsons (2014) have utilized the ecological model to highlight the unique historical-sociopolitical background of interracial couples' experiences to compare how similar and different same-race and interracial couples are in conflict management strategies. However, the study did not illustrate exactly what each system was referring to and how those systems interacted with one another to reach a holistic understanding of the similarities and differences in same-race and interracial couples' conflict management strategies. Maffini et al. (2022) utilized the ecological model as a framework but only explored the individual, couple, and family-level factors that contributed to intercultural couples, including interracial couples' relationship satisfaction. The study did not explore larger contextual influences. Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) uniquely considered the couple an individual unit in the ecological system. They explored how the unit (i.e., "we") negotiates with the mesosystem (i.e., the family---"we and us"), exosystem (i.e., the community --- "we and them"), macrosystem (i.e., society --- "we and the world"), and chronosystem (i.e., time---"we and life"). The results showed the contextual influences from multiple systems was associated

with interracial and intercultural couples' unique challenges and coping strategies. Therefore, the extent to which and how to apply the ecological model in exploring interracial couples' process of navigating their marginalization is still not fully understood.

In conclusion, echoing the earlier literature review, these guiding theories also showed a similar trend of emphasizing individual or couple-level factors when studying interracial couples' stress-coping process (e.g., Interdependence theory, VSA, STM, etc.) while leaving out larger historical-political contextual factors. Moreover, only a handful of researchers applied a critical lens to add an understanding of the impact of negative social discourses (e.g., homogamy and anti-Asian racism) on interracial couples' unique dynamics. For example, Ross and Woodley (2020) applied CRT to examine the impact of race and racial identity on individual and relational well-being. Killian (2001) utilized a black feminist theoretical framework to explore how Black/White couples navigate the homogamy discourse via examining intersectional effects of race and gender. Some clinical-oriented studies recommended that clinicians explore how racial privilege and power are displayed between partners within the interracial relationship and, in turn, how it has influenced relationship commitment, trust, satisfaction, etc. (Killian, 2013; Leslie & Young, 2015). Therefore, the guiding theories may suggest the need to use a theoretical framework, such as the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner,1979; 1995; 2005) that could include larger contextual influences and focus on the systemic influences on couple relationship dynamics. Moreover, there might also be a need to utilize critical theory to highlight the social-justice core when studying marginalized populations, such as Asian-White relationships, to avoid perpetuating the marginalization.

Theoretical Frameworks Applied to the Current Study

Three theories will be applied to the current study. Specifically, the Ecological Model (EM) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005) will be used as a framework to explore interlocking systemic influences on Chinese American/White Euro-American couples' lived experiences, from conceptualizing the study to interpreting the results. The Systemic Transactional Model (STM) (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005) will be applied to focus on couple dyads---what it looks like to navigate historical and concurrent marginalization as a couple unit. Last, AsianCrit/Asian CRT (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Museus & Iftikar, 2013) will be employed as a critical lens to understand how historical and contemporary marginalized discourses have influenced couples' responses to anti-Asian racism.

The Ecological Model (EM)

The Ecological Model (EM) emphasizes the individual and environmental interlocking influences shaping an individual's development. The EM consists of five basic systems—the microsystem, ecosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005). In what follows, I briefly detail each system and how it is conceptualized in relation to this study. The microsystem refers to individual features such as age, gender, health, etc., and one's immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005). In the current study, the *microsystem* alludes to the features of the interracial couple unit (i.e., Chinese American/White Euro-American). I consider the couple as a unit to highlight the aim of exploring how they perceive and navigate the role of race and racial stratification as a couple and how this process may affect their couple dynamics. The mesosystem indicates the interactions among two or more microsystems and is considered the second layer of the system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005). The *mesosystem* in the current study refers to the perceived role of social networks in

those couples' navigation processes. The exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem encompass the broader context of couples' experiences. Specifically, in the current study, the *exosystem* refers to the perceived public (i.e., public spaces and social media environment) attitudes toward these couples. The macrosystem, composed of discourses and ideologies, can also indirectly affect individuals' development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005). The *macrosystem* refers to the marginalized discourses in the U.S. (i.e., current discourses of homogamy, racial hierarchy structure, and racialized history of Asian Americans). The chronosystem emphasizes that an individual's development is a process of continuity and change (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005). In the current study, the *chronosystem* refers to the couples' experiences over-time in terms of perceiving and navigating the role of race and racial stratification in their couple relationships. In brief, the current project aimed to have a systemic understanding of couples' experiences regarding the role of race and racial stratification by exploring couples' experiences within the systems that they are embedded in.

Systemic Transactional Model (STM)

The Systemic Transactional Model (STM) (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005) expands on Lazarus and Folkman (1984)'s individual-oriented theory of stress and coping by including interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) to emphasize couples' mutual and interdependence in facing life challenges. Thus, STM believes that life stressors trigger individuals' appraisal-coping processes and also activate the conjoint appraisal and dyadic coping between two partners due to the mutuality and interdependence nature of a romantic relationship (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005). Using a STM perspective, dyadic coping has been conceptualized as positive (emotion-oriented, problem-oriented, delegated) or negative (e.g., superficial, ambivalent, hostile) (Bodenmann et al., 2016). Positive dyadic coping has been

further distinguished as supportive dyadic coping (i.e., one partner provides support for another partner) and common dyadic coping (i.e., joint/shared efforts, “we-ness”) (see details in Bodenmann, 2000). Moreover, STM, especially the concept of dyadic coping, has been found to buffer the association between the stigma against interracial relationships and adverse relationship outcomes (Rosenthal et al., 2019; Rosenthal & Starks, 2015). In a recent review of STM, Weitkamp and Bodenmann (2022) pointed out that a future direction for STM could be to examine how dyadic appraisal and coping take shape in concrete interactions and how they change over time. Therefore, since one of the goals of the current study is to explore how an interracial couple as a unit understands the role of race and racial stratification in their couple relationships, viewing the stress-coping process in a romantic relationship as a relational and interdependent process fits the current study well (Bodenmann et al., 2016; Folkman, 2009). I am particularly interested in exploring how partners in an interracial relationship communicate their perceptions, feelings, and responses to marginalization against their relationship (e.g., how they communicate with one another when facing disapproval of their relationship from their social networks) and the long-standing and exacerbated anti-Asian racism (e.g., three stereotypes against Asians: Model Minority Myth, Perpetual Foreigners, and Sexual Deviant Stereotype), as well as how this communicating process may influence their relationships For example: How do couples perceive the necessity for them to talk about race-related topics? How do they talk about those hard topics? How has this communication process affected their relationships, has it brought them closer? Caused more conflicts? Are there any challenges in navigating this communication process? Have they found any resources helpful?

AsianCrit

AsianCrit was built on tenants of CRT (see more details in Crenshaw et al., 1995;

Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) to identify and dismantle racism, structural inequity, and white supremacy across societies and disciplines (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Museus & Iftikar, 2013; Yoo et al., 2021). CRT highlights the view of race as a social construct that is manipulated by the dominant White group to establish racial distinctions that serve as a powerful tool to enhance white supremacy and perpetuate oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Spickard, 2016). Meanwhile, derived from CRT, AsianCrit primarily focuses on illuminating Asian Americans' unique racialized experiences and their impact on Asian Americans' lives (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). AsianCrit is not a replacement for CRT but combines CRT knowledge with Asian Americans' unique oppressed experiences to generate tailored tenants that can advance critical analysis of Asian Americans' experiences of racism (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). The seven tenets of AsianCrit include three pillars drawn from CRT (i.e., Intersectionality; Story, Theory, and Praxis; and Commitment to Social Justice) and four additional tenants highlighting Asian Americans' unique racialized history and marginalized realities (i.e. Asianization, Transnational Context; (Re)Constructivist History; and Strategic Anti-Essentialism). In what follows I briefly detail each of these tenets. *Asianization* illustrates that Asian Americans have been racialized in a unique way distinct from other racial and ethnic groups. This includes being constructed as perpetual foreigners, model and deviant minorities, and sexually deviant hypersexualized women and emasculated men, as well as threatening "yellow perils" in a historical and societal context. *Transnational Context* emphasizes the global, political, structural level of influence on Asian Americans' racialized experiences. *(Re)Constructivist History* transcends Asian American' invisibility and silence to create a collective Asian American historical narrative and reanalyze existing histories to incorporate the voices and contributions of Asian Americans).Strategic *(Anti)Essentialism* recognizes and rejects that white supremacy that racialized Asian Americans

into a monolithic group and highlights the reality that Asian Americans actively intervene in the racialization process to reveal the diversity and complexity within their communities) (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Museus & Iftikar, 2013; Yoo et al., 2021). In brief, AsianCrit' s key tenets provide vital vantage points and an analytical approach for researchers to identify and challenge racial triangulation, racial stereotypes, and color-blindness that perpetuates the oppression of Asian Americans (Lee et al., 2016; Syed et al., 2018; Yoo et al., 2021). As a result, AsianCrit fits the current study because it can enhance the research goal by uncovering the possible impact of interracial couples' perceived racist experiences on their relationships when one is from the dominant racial group—White, and the other is historically and concurrently a racialized minority—Chinese American.

In summary, the Ecological Model will situate this project within a systemic frame for understanding the phenomenon, while AsianCrit will offer a critical comprehension of how larger historical-social-political contexts have shaped and continue to shape Asian-White couple narratives. The STM model will highlight couples' interactions and dynamics. These three theoretical frameworks will work together to provide a nuanced and complex understanding of Chinese American/White-European American interracial couples.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Research Questions

Informed by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005), Systemic Transactional Model (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005), and AsianCrit (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Museus & Iftikar, 2013), narrative inquiry was employed to explore the role of race, stratification, and intersectionality in Chinese American/White Euro-American couples' relationships. Specifically, I am interested in investigating:

1) What are the racialized incidents they have encountered as an interracial couple?
2) How do couples communicate and navigate those racialized incidents, as well as the general racial stratification of the U.S.?
3) What are couples' reflections on their experiences of navigating and communicating race-related topics in terms of moving forward as an interracial couple?

The discussion will be situated with extant literature to expand the understanding of the literature. Within these questions, I am also interested in related sub-questions: For example, how did couples respond to the general anti-Asian racism climate during COVID-19? How do they understand historical racial microaggressions against Asians? How do these responses and understandings affect their couple relationships over time? Do they think it is necessary to have race-based conversations at some point, and why? What are the difficulties and useful strategies in communicating this hard topic? In the following section, I detail my methodology for exploring these questions.

Methodological Approach

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative history. Before diving into what narrative inquiry is and what narrative can do, it is useful to briefly review the history of narrative inquiry. Until the 1960s, narratives were considered a source of data for researchers. For instance, sociologists and anthropologists collected life histories and documents to study cultures and lives, which aligns with the realist positivist tradition: stories are used for historical documentation with little attention to the uniqueness of narratives themselves (Riessman, 2008). Langellier (2001) points to the 1960s as the beginning of the "narrative turn" marked by a shifting away from realism and into the beginning of the postmodern movement across various disciplines. Four movements shape this turn:

(1) critiques in social sciences of positivist modes of inquiry, and their realist epistemology.
(2) the "memoir boom" in literature and popular culture.
(3) the new "identity movement"—emancipation efforts of people of color, women, gays and lesbians, and other marginalized groups.
(4) the burgeoning therapeutic culture—exploration of personal life in therapies of various kinds (Riessman, 2008, pp. 14-15):

Furthermore, the "narrative turn" is also marked by a shift from Marxian class analysis toward postmodernism, valuing human agency and consciousness (Riessman, 2008). As a result, narrative inquiries flourished during the 1980s with landmark works, such as *Interpreting Women's Lives* in 1989 (personal narratives group, 1989), which switched from understanding women's lives from a distant standpoint to focusing on narrator-interpreter relations, context, and

other narrative forms. In addition, the field of conversation analysis developed, spurred on by Elliot Mishler's radical view of the research interview as a narrative event (Riessman, 2008).

Additionally, narrative inquiry has undergone substantial changes, as Susan Chase named it as "a sense of growing maturity in the field… This maturity is both theoretical and methodological." (Chase, 2018, p. 1081). Specifically, narrative researchers attend to the distinctiveness of narrative as a human activity, the characteristics of narrative inquiry, and the particular ways that narrative inquiry can promote social change (Chase, 2018). The definition of narrative has been expanded and defined to clarify what constitutes narrative but at the same time remains open to be inclusive — "boundary without rigidity" (Chase, 2018; p1086). Furthermore, methodologically, many researchers, such as Donileen Loseke (2012), displayed detailed steps of her analysis of "the teen mother" stories, while Josselson (2011) explained how narrative researchers focus on layers of meaning within a single narrative. Examples like those have shown narrative analysis's rigor and uniqueness (Chase, 2018). In summary, narrative studies involving various fields that converged and informed narrative in the human sciences have experienced international and interdisciplinary turns since the 1960s (Riessman, 2008). Narrative inquiry remains "a field in the making" (Chase, 2005, p. 651).

Narrative functions. Riessman (2008) summarized multiple overlapping functions of narratives. One of the most important functions of narratives is to provide opportunities for individuals to make sense of past experiences. Moreover, narratives can also serve functions of social change by providing counternarratives or *testimonios* to document marginalized experiences, create group belongings and set the stage for collective action to facilitate progressive social changes (Riessman, 2008). Other functions include entertainment, the persuasive and argumentative nature of narratives, and the dramatic effect of engaging readers

and listeners to experience with the narrators (Riessman, 2008). Additionally, both Polkinghorne (1988) and Freeman (2017) emphasized the exploratory function of narrative to answer the "why" question of research.

Narrative research, then, can be defined as a way of understanding human experiences via collecting and analyzing people's stories and transforming those stories into complex and organized accounts to make sense of the experiences, engage audiences to live in the experiences of the narrator, and to mobilize others into actions for progressive social change (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Freeman, 2017; Riessman, 2008). Moreover, those experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted within social, cultural and institutional narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The following paragraph will briefly illustrate how narrative approaches have been used to inform both clinical and research work in the Family Science field.

Narrative in Relation to the Field of Family Science

Narrative frameworks have long inspired couple and family clinicians in their understanding of diverse couple and family dynamics (e.g., Gottman, 1999; Skerrett, 2010; White & Epston, 1990, 1992). In clinical practice, narrative therapy focuses on helping couples and families reauthor their stories in order to find new meanings to past experiences and bring forth new possibilities, resilience, and healing (Freedman & Combs, 2002; White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990, 1992). As a result, narrative couple therapy has been widely used in helping couples navigating various life issues, such as severe medical conditions (Hawkins et al., 2019), critical life decisions (Yu et al.,2022), pregnancy loss (Romney et al., 2021), partner(s)with traumatic experiences (Francis Laughlin & Rusca, 2020), and adoption-related issues (Stokes & Poulsen, 2014). Also, narrative therapy has been adapted to diverse couple populations, such as same-sex couples (Su & Parker, 2022) and intercultural couples (Kim et al., 2012). For example,

a case study explored how externalizing, reauthoring and remembering conversations of narrative therapy can help an intercultural couple (i.e., an African American partners with an Italian American) enhance their couple identity (Kim et al., 2012).

In research, narrative inquiry enables a deeper, more complex, diverse, and unique understanding of peoples' lived experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Freeman, 2017; Riessman, 2008). In couples research, narrative inquiry has been used to explore couples' lived experiences of navigating challenging life situations and how they make meanings out of those experiences to move their lives forward (e.g., Bentley et al., 2021; Killian, 2001; Stewart et al., 2019). For instance, in relation to the current study, Killian (2001) utilized a narrative theoretical framework to investigate how Black-White couples construct narratives about their racial histories, identities, and co-constructed experiences in their relationship. Bentley et al. (2021) provided an analytical example by applying Murray's (2000) levels of narrative analysis to longitudinal narrative interview data with couples living with Lewy body dementia. Gilmore and Miller (2013) used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) guidelines to analyze the story of a Kenyan couple's dual life experiences in both Kenya and Southern California. Stewart et al. (2019) utilized narrative inquiry to collect dyadic interview data from 40 newly formed same-sex couples to understand how they navigate minority stress at the couple level. Additionally, those studies overlap with and also enrich quantitative studies that evaluate couples' dyadic appraisal and coping via various measurements (e.g., Dyadic Coping Inventory; DCI, Randall et al., 2016) and aim to examine the mechanisms of conjoint efforts (Pagani, et al., 2019). In summary, these research studies are examples of the feasibility of using narrative research to the inquiry of interracial couples' lived experiences of navigating marginalization and how they make sense of

their experiences. In the following section, I explored more specifically why narrative inquiry is a good methodological fit for this study.

Narrative Inquiry in Relation to the Current Study

Narrative inquiry fits the current study for several reasons. First, narrative inquiry emphasizes exploring both "what" and "how" of people's experiences (Freeman, 2017; Joesselson, 2011). My study aims to investigate not only "what" interracial couples' lived experiences of how they perceived the role race and stratification in their couple relationship but, more importantly, "how" they made sense of those experiences in order to orient themselves to the world. This study asked what these experiences meant to study participants. Thus, narrative inquiry allows me to focus on these questions of meaning-making through storytelling, an examination of not only "what" but "how."

Second, narrative inquiry highlights the continuity (i.e., past, current, and future experience) and contextual influences (i.e., the story as it is told and lived is situated and understood within larger cultural, social, and institutional narratives) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; 2008). The emphasis on continuity provided an opportunity to explore and understand the trajectory of interracial couples' stories of navigating marginalization and discrimination over time. Thus, it enabled couples in this study to shed light on some nuanced questions, such as: Are there any changes in perceiving whether and how race may play a role in their couple relationships over time? And how they move forward based on past and present experiences. Moreover, the emphasis that narrative inquiry brings to contextual and relational influences contributes to the development of a more holistic understanding of interracial couples' experiences through situating their experiences within a unique historical background (i.e., the historical marginalization of interracial unions and stereotypes against Asian Americans), current

social contexts (i.e., current discourses of homogamy, and anti-Asian racism deriving from racial hierarchy) and their social networks.

Third, some couples' narratives illustrated how they navigate marginalization and discrimination as counternarratives to disrupt the dominant discourses of homogamy and racial hierarchy in the U.S. *Counternarratives* have been defined as "stories/narratives that splinter widely accepted truths about people, cultures, and institutions as well as the value of those institutions and the knowledge produced by and within those cultural institutions" (Given, 2013, p. 132). Narrative inquirers have used counternarratives to resist social injustice and facilitate progressive social changes (e.g., Goodall, 2010; Katriel, 2012; Shayne, 2014). As Freeman (2017) writes,

> The strength of narrative thinking is in its ability to make visible the interpretive capacities of human agents in relation to their actions, interactions, beliefs, and practices. As such, narrative thinking is not only considered an important way to understand human action and experience, but has become a core component for critical, emancipatory research (p. 43).

This methodological attitude fits the critical and social-justice orientation of this study and my own values as a researcher. Through this study, I am to center interracial couples' unique voices and stories, provide counternarratives to resist the historical and contemporary destructive social discourses as well as respond to the call for social justice in family science by adding understandings and inform interventions that target marginalized, non-normative family systems (Allen & Henderson, 2022; van Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2022).

The Process of Recruiting and Data Collection

In order to clarify the process, the flow chart is provided (see Figure 2 Flow Chart). As displayed in the flow chart, an initial eligibility survey was used to assess whether the couple met the criteria or not (see Appendix A: Eligibility Survey). Then, I reached out to the eligible couples via a consent email address to schedule a brief phone call screening with each partner separately. The phone call aimed to assess whether the participant was experiencing intimate partner violence with the current partner or mental /functional impairment related to race-based traumatic experiences or witnessing those incidents. Thus, this process required screening each partner separately (see Appendix B Screeners). When both partners passed the screening process, I sent each partner a HIPAA electronic informed consent via the consented email address. After I gained both partners' signed informed consents, I sent an email to both partners to 1) illustrate what would happen next to give them a road map; 2) schedule the first dyadic couple interview, and 3) attach a link to the demographic survey (see Appendix C: Demographic Survey). After I finalized the date of the first interview, I sent both partners another email at least three days early to attach the first interview protocol for them to read before the interview (see Appendix D: Interview Protocols). At the end of the first interview, I asked if they would like to schedule a second interview now or email me later. All eight couples scheduled their second interviews at the end of the first interview. All the second interviews started within a month of the first interviews. Again, at least three days before the second interview, I sent an email to welcome them back to the second interview and attached the second interview protocol (see Appendix D: Interview Protocols).

In what follows, I detail the recruitment procedure and the process of collecting dyadic data. Recruitment began after approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. The number of IRB for the current project is PROJECT00007063.

The Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria:

1) One partner self-identifies as Chinese American. The other partner must self-identify as White Euro-American.
    a. White Euro-American partners must self-claim that they were born and raised in the U.S.
    b. Chinese American partners who were not born and raised in the U.S. (i.e., U.S. citizens, Green Card Holders,1st generation Chinese Americans, 1.5-generation) need to have lived in the U.S. for at least ten years. This criterion was considered to represent a significant enough duration of time for them to be able to adequately reflect on the racialized social phenomenon in the U.S. and to reduce acculturation effects. Chinese American partners with diverse immigration statuses (i.e., 1st generation of Chinese Americans,1.5-generation, 2nd-generation, and generations beyond that) were included due to the exploratory nature of the study, aiming to get an overarching understanding of this phenomenon and to inform future research.
    c. Each partner needs to be in the age range of 21-65.
2) Couples must have been in a committed relationship before 2020, when COVID-19 occurred. This criterion aimed to capture the experiences over time of navigating marginalization and discrimination before and during COVID-19 and up until now. In

addition, as we were now entering year three of COVID, couples who met this criterion have been together for at least 3 three years. Thus, this criterion also ensured that couples have been together long enough to represent a significant enough duration of time for couples to reflect on their relationship patterns.

Exclusion criteria:

1) Same-sex couples were not included in the current study. This was because sexual minority individuals and couples have experienced dual minority stress: sexual and racial minority stress (Chen & Tryon, 2012). As the aim of the current study was to investigate whether and how anti-Asian racism influenced couples' well-being, exploring the dual minority stress was beyond the scope of the current study.
2) The current study needed to screen for traumatic stress-related impairment/functioning since participants may experience posttraumatic stress symptoms arising from race-based violent attacks or verbal insults. Having this exclusion was related to ethical concerns. The current study asked the participants to recall and reflect on their racialized experiences and was not intended to be an intervention study, which could trigger PTSD symptoms for participants with PTSD. The screening procedure was conducted via phone call before sending out the informed consent (see Appendix B Screeners).
3) The current study needed to screen for participants who had or currently experience intimate partner violence (IPV) with the current partner, given that the dyadic interview may create a threatening situation for the partner. The screening procedure was conducted via phone call before sending out the informed consent (see Appendix B Screeners).

The Recruitment Process

Several channels were used for recruitment, including sending emails and posting the recruitment flyer through online groups, social media, clinics, and a local tea shop. I started by sending emails with the flyer through my professional network and asked my colleagues to forward the email through their professional network (see Appendix E. Recruitment Flyer). Then, I posted the flyer in several online professional groups. Specifically, I posted the flyer in several National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) focus groups online: Asian American Families Focus Group, Diverse Family Structures Focus Group, Qualitative Family Research Network Focus Group, Social Justice Network Focus Group, Students and New Professionals (SNPs), and Southeastern Council. Meanwhile, I posted the recruitment flyer on my Facebook and Instagram and asked my friends to spread it. I also posted my recruitment flyer in two Chinese WeChat groups (i.e., a Chinese social app like Facebook Messenger group): “教育研究联盟” and “HDFS 华人学生学者交流会.” Several people responded to and asked questions regarding eligibility and were willing to help me disseminate the flyer. Besides spreading the flyer online, I also posted the flyer at two mental health clinics that provide various mental health counseling services to the community on the UGA campus. One was the ASPIRE Clinic in the Department of Human Development and Family Science; the other was The Center for Counseling and Personal Evaluation in the department of Education. Finally, I posted the flyer at a local boba tea shop where many Asians love to grab tea there.

Among all the channels, I had the most success using Chinese WeChat groups and Facebook. Based on participants’ reports, most stated that they saw the flyer on one of their Chinese friends' or families’ WeChat posts or that a friend/family shared the flyer via Facebook.

The Sample

The final sample was composed of eight couples. The initial sample included 11 eligible couples who passed the Qualtrics eligibility survey. However, one couple withdrew due to health issues. Another couple withdrew because of concurrent IPV (see the details in the later ethical issues section), and the third couple withdrew due to their busy schedule.

All eight couples are financially stable, with an annual household income of at least over 71k. All couples have been married for more than ten years except one couple who has been married for seven years. They all have at least one child together. All the couples are well-educated. In six out of eight couples, both partners hold graduate degrees. Regarding occupations, in five out of the eight couples, at least one of the partners is in academia working as a professor. In terms of gender-combination, three out of eight Chinese American men partner with White European-American women. The remaining couples are Chinese American women partners with White European-American men. Across all eight Chinese American partners, half of them are 1st-generation (i.e., born in China and immigrated to America as an adult). Regarding political stance, half of the couples hold the same political stance (i.e., self-identified as Democrats). Finally, six out of eight couples share the same religious belief (see details in Table 1: The Demographics).

Data Collection Process---Dyadic Couple Interviews

Reasons for conducting two dyadic couple interviews for each couple. Participants were asked to participate in two semi-structured dyadic couple interviews. Couple interviews as one modality of family interviews can be conducted in different ways based on the research purposes and researcher's epistemology: as an individual family interview, a conjoint family interview (i.e., interviewing family members altogether), and a combination of the two (see details in

Eisikovits & Koren, 2010; Reczek, 2014). The individual family interview is often utilized to compare and contrast similarities and differences in the same event either to achieve a closer version of the representational realities of family life (e.g., this often represents a (post)positivist perspective), or to reveal potentially contradictory notions of family accounts (e.g., constructionism) (Bojczyk et al., 2011; LaSala, 2002; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2002). The conjoint family interview is often used to examine how family members co-create mutual understanding of a specific topic, such as how same-sex couples negotiate and construct the meaning of commitment and marriage (Badgett, 2009). Also, conjoint family interviews are one way for researchers to collect observational data since the interview can provide an opportunity to observe family conflicts, alliances, roles, and dynamics (e.g., Eggenberger & Nelms, 2007; Reczek, 2014). The combined family interviews are often applied when research questions require both individual and conjoint perspectives (Reczek, 2014). For example, Nemoto (2009) conducted individual and dyadic interviews with mixed-race Asian American/White couples to investigate two aspects of an individual's view of the relationship: "one as an intersubjective self, and the other as a more reflexive self" (p. 34).

In terms of the current study, I chose to use dyadic couple interviews in response to my research purposes. Specifically, the current project aimed to investigate how Chinese American/White Euro-American couples perceive the role of race in their couple relationships. The dyadic interview is an appropriate way to examine how couples co-construct their couple stories regarding the impact of racial difference and stratification on their relationship and how meanings are mutually negotiated and constructed within the interaction of the interview (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010). In this context, co-constructing refers to the process of creating stories together that happens in the space of the dyadic interview, as well as the analytic process

of examining how “selves and communities are pulling together and pulling apart at the same time” (Bentley et al., 2021, p191). Additionally, although the main aim of the current study was not about collecting observational data on couple dynamics, how couples interact with one another may add additional understanding of couple dynamics (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010; Morris, 2001). For example, does the couple let each other finish their sentences? Do they look at each other when the other is speaking? Do they build on each other’s narratives and demonstrate prior knowledge about what is shared individually? The reason for conducting two interviews was to capture complementary levels of complexity to address the primary research questions. The first interview focused on couples’ stories to elaborate on the descriptive/explanatory aims of the study; the second interview was more reflective and an elaboration of meaning-making as the interview centered on how they interpreted their experiences. Conducting two interviews also allowed for member checking and following up across interviews, offering a measure of trustworthiness to the findings.

Preparing interview protocols for two dyadic couple interviews. The protocol of the first interview was the same across couples, with the purpose of collecting their stories related to the research questions. Before the first interview, I developed the interview protocols based on the research questions and followed the general guidelines for semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 2007). The protocol was written in everyday language to share with couples before the interviews. All eight couples except two read the first interview protocol before the first interview. The structure of the second interview was similar across couples but the questions were uniquely tailored to each couple based on the stories they shared during the first interviews in order to facilitate the reflections of their stories and fulfill member-checking purposes. As a result, after each couple’s first interview, I coded each couple’s transcript to generate the second

interview protocol. In the second interview protocol, I organized the stories based on how they answered the three sets of research questions. Moreover, at the end of each first interview, I transparently asked each couple to read their unique second interview protocol and share their reflections and feedback in the second interview to fulfill the second interview purposes. All eight couples reported that they read the second interview protocol and started sharing their reflections from there (see Appendix D: Interview Protocols).

Conducting dyadic couple interviews via Zoom. All interviews, including the first and second interviews across all eight couples, were conducted via Zoom. Participants were sent a document describing what to expect during the couple interviews conducted on Zoom after they signed the informed consent (See Appendix F: Dyadic Zoom Interview Preparations). The reason for conducting this research over video-conferencing was to boost recruitment since the online platform can overcome geographical and transportation barriers to include participants who are hard to reach (Noonan & Simmons, 2021). I, as the interviewer, and the interviewees were instructed to be physically located in a confidential space and have access to reliable Internet with installed and properly functioning Zoom software, which is HIPAA compliant through the University of Georgia. The same practical and ethical parameters were utilized conducting all interviews. Zoom interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using transcription software. I then verified each transcript against the audio and corrected discrepancies.

The dyadic couple interview process. I started each interview with instructions. Specifically, I first explained the research aims and the purpose of the interview, and followed by emphasizing the key points in the informed consent, such as confidentiality and the right to withdraw without consequence. The interview followed the format in which I asked a question, and each of the partners took turns answering. Moreover, in order to maximize the safe space for

them to share their vulnerable feelings and thoughts, I laid out some ground rules, including letting each other finish their sentences before sharing their own, and respecting each other's different thoughts and feelings (see Appendix D: Interview Protocols). After each interview, I immediately emailed participants an e-gift card to their consented email addresses (i.e., $60 for each couple in each interview, and $120 in total for each couple who participated in both the first and second interviews). Overall, the length of all interviews ranged from 1.5 hours to 2.5 hours. The length of time between the first and the second interview was within a month to reduce the impact of natural memory decline.

Regarding language, I collected their language preference, either English or Mandarin, via Eligibility Survey (see Appendix A). All the couples chose English. Thus, all the interviews were conducted in English except for a few terms where the Chinese partner felt using Mandarin could better express himself/herself. In those moments, I took the responsibility to translate to ensure the other partner was included in the conversations.

Data management. I took steps to protect your privacy. ALL information and recordings were kept confidential and stored in a password-protected laptop in the researcher's office, where only my two co-advisors and I could get access to this computer. All data, including demographic information, screening results and recordings, were de-identified. Specifically, I used a number to label each couple and A & B to label the individuals within the couple. For example, 001 A (man) & B (woman) meant the first couple, including both heterosexual partners. I chose pseudonyms to report the results. How and why I chose certain pseudonyms were described in detail in the results chapter. Raw data will be destroyed five years after the data collection. The audio interviews were transcribed via the Zoom transcript function.

Ethical Issues Encountered During Data Collection

Overview of ethical issues in conducting dyadic couple interviews. Conducting dyadic/conjoint couple interviews raises unique ethical considerations for preserving the relationship that participants have (Voltelen et al., 2018). In a review regarding ethical considerations about conjoint family interviews between 1980 and 2016, Voltelen and colleagues (2018) pointed out that ethical issues can occur before, during, and after conjoint interviews (Voltelen et al., 2018). Specifically, during the planning stage, ethical issues could involve 1) coercion to participate (e.g., one partner feels like they have to participate in making the other partner happy) (Wittenborn et al., 2013), 2) not carefully reading or understanding the research aims, and 3) not clearly understanding risks and benefits of participating the study (Voltelen et al., 2018). Moreover, couples may have a different motivation than the researcher to participate in the interview (e.g., couples may "use" the interview to safely address difficult issues in front of an interested third party) (Braybrook et al., 2016; Voltelen et al., 2018). During the conjoint interview, major ethical issues that could arise are disagreements and conflict between two partners (Helen Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018; Morgan et al., 2013; Sakellariou et al., 2013; Voltelen et al., 2018), and power imbalances in the couple relationship can emerge (e.g., one partner leads the conversation) (Helen Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018). Finally, there could be an aftermath impact of the interview on the relationship (e.g., feeling closer or inducing more conflict) (Margolin et al., 2005; Sakellariou et al., 2013). In brief, ethical issues can arise before, during and after the dyadic couple interviews. The following paragraphs document the prevention measures I took to reduce ethical risks as well as the ethical issues encountered and the ways I handled them during the data collection process.

Ethical issues and responses during the phone call screening process. After participants

expressed interest in participating in the study and completed the Qualtrics form, I scheduled a short phone call with each partner. This phone call screening process was created due to ethical considerations. Specifically, it was designed to 1) assess whether it would be safe enough for participants to engage in the dyadic couple interviews; 2) ensure the participants understood what the study was about and the commitments they were going to make to avoid incidents, such as signing up by accident or motived by the incentives only; 3) provide an opportunity for me and my participants get to know each other a bit before the formal interview, and 4) answer their questions to reduce anxieties and facilitate a smooth transition to the dyadic interviews. As a result, two couples were excluded during the phone call screening process: one couple did not pass the screening process due to intimate partner violence (IPV) concerns; the other couple passed the screening process but later asked to withdraw from the study. Specifically, the reason that the couple did not pass the screening process was that one partner reported physical violence from his/her partner, although his/her partner already passed the IPV screening earlier that week. Given that IPV can jeopardize safety in a dyadic couple interview environment, I had to let the couple know that they could no longer participate in the study without jeopardizing their own safety, and provided a list of resources if they needed. However, conveying the information to this couple regarding why they could not continue participating in the study was delicate. I had a consultation phone call with my advisor (i.e., Dr. Wieling) to discuss this situation. After the discussion, I immediately called back the participant who reported IPV and asked if he/she wanted me to convey this information to his/her partner or if he/she would like to do it himself/herself. When I reached out, the participant had already told his/her partner that they were no longer eligible for the study. Then, I asked if he/she needed any resources regarding IPV, and the participant said no.

Regarding the couple that withdrew from the study, they both passed the screening process. However, there was a discrepancy in the information they each shared during the phone screening. Specifically, the Chinese partner shared a racist attack incident that happened to her parents during COVID-19, which brought her lots of stress. Later, when I conducted a phone call screening with the White Euro-partner and asked whether there were racist incidents that happened to him, to his partner, or to anyone close to him, the partner said no. Given that they had both already passed the screening process, I struggled with how to move forward to the interview with the mismatched information. Again, I consulted with my advisor to discuss how to move forward with this discrepant information. We came up with two strategies. Strategy 1, when it came to discussing the impact of racist incidents during the interview, I could check with them and monitor the tension between them by saying, "Were there any racist incidents that happened to you or anyone who close to you? Have you two talked about it? Do you want to pause if this topic is too distressing?" Strategy 2 was to add a question in the future phone screening process whenever either partner mentioned racist incidents to check whether they had shared the information with their partner: "Has this been shared with your partner? Would you be comfortable sharing with your partner during the interviews?" In this case, a few days later, one partner of this couple called to tell me they were too busy with two young children at home to participate in the study. I thanked them for their participation so far.

Ethical considerations during the consent process. After both partners passed the screening process, I sent consent forms to each partner to sign instead of sending only one consent form. The reason behind that was to avoid coercion to participate and specify the unique ethical challenges of a dyadic interview in the informed consent) (Eggenberger & Nelms, 2007; Reczek, 2014; Voltelen et al., 2018; Wittenborn et al., 2013).

Ethical considerations, issues, and responses during the dyadic interviews. In order to provide a safe space for couples to share their experiences during the dyadic interview setting, I started the interviews with instructions that consisted of four parts: repeated the purpose of the study, highlighted the key parts of informed consent, illustrated the interview format (i.e., take turns answering questions) and set up ground rules to facilitate a safe environment. All participants reported appreciating the clear instructions and ground rules and made efforts to follow them.

A safety issue arose in one dyadic interview when the couple frequently fought over race-based topics, such as whether it was a racist incident or not, whether they should talk about race-related topics, and so forth. The ethical concern here was that the constant fights might jeopardize the safe space and harm their relationships during the interview. As my ethical commitment was to safeguard the interview space and not create more stress for couples, I stopped several times to check in with the couple by asking, "I am monitoring the tension between you two because one of my ethical commitments in conducting this interview is to make sure it is not creating more stress in your relationship. Do you want to continue or pause for a minute?" This couple responded each time by moving forward with the interview and stated that this type of interaction is how they usually communicate about race-related topics in real life. Moreover, they shared that arguing or even fighting was better than repressing true thoughts and feelings and expressed that fighting in this way was one of the strengths of their relationship.

For this specific couple, two other challenges occurred during the interview that made me as the interviewer have to reflect and be prepared to respond: one issue was about how the Chinese American partner seemed to be marginalized by her partner and by me during the interview process; the other issue was about the challenge of holding boundaries and balancing

the alliances with each partner. The details about how those ethical issues arose and how I responded at that moment are included in the structural analysis in Chapter 4 Results with the subtitle “Part 2---Conversation dynamics: the push and ally seeking.” The purpose of zooming in to analyze those two ethical issues was to inform future dyadic couple interviews regarding how to balance the alliances between two partners and how to conduct research with marginalized populations.

Trustworthiness

Scholars in qualitative research (e.g., Espisito & Evans-Winters, 2022; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) argue that within research studies, the intimate connections and consistencies among paradigms, theories, methodologies, and methods are a critical consideration for rigor. My positionality articulated earlier has illustrated how those aspects are consistently intertwined with each other in the current study to strengthen the rigor of my research. In brief, my scholarly focus on social justice drives the research topic. The postmodern paradigm that focuses on the process of how knowledge is socially constructed with complex, diverse, and situational understanding of the human experiences aligns with a narrative inquiry that underscores the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (i.e., interaction, continuity, and situation or place) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The ecological model (Bronfenbrenner,1979; 1995; 2005) aims to better understand narratives within contexts with a specific focus on couple-level dynamics via Systemic Transactional Model (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005). Additionally, AsianCrit adds a critical understanding of lived experiences, which echoes the social-justice orientation of the study (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Museus & Iftikar, 2013).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) advanced four criteria of trustworthiness to evaluate a qualitative study: credibility (i.e., the confidence in the “truth” of the findings), dependability

(i.e., the extent to which our findings could be repeated), confirmability (i.e., the level of researcher bias present in the study), and transferability (i.e., the extent to which findings are applicable to other contexts). When applying these evaluating criteria to narrative analysis, the focus is on the generated story's production of coherence among the contextual, situation and particular elements of the data (i.e., the exploratory power) and plausibility (i.e., whether it could provide readers with insights) (Connelly & Calndinin, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1995). In other words, knowledge produced via narrative inquiry is not an "objective" truth or subject's life as it "actually" occurred due to its philosophical and theoretical underpinnings (Freeman, 2017; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008). Thus, it is inappropriate to ask if it is a true story (Polkinghorne, 1995). Instead, trustworthiness is a result of a series of constructions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1995), such as constructions between the couples, between couples and their historical and contemporary contexts, and between the researcher and the researched. As a result, Etherington (2004) pointed out it is important to be transparent in regard to the interpretive decisions made in the process of constructing a narrative research report.

Therefore, in order to improve the rigor of my study, I attempted to be neutral in producing and representing findings because I need to draw on my disciplinary expertise to provide a scholarly explanation and interpretation to support the plausibility of the offered stories instead of the accuracy of the data (Polkinghorne, 1995). Thus, I practiced reflexivity along the way to show my audiences and participants my thoughts and reflections. I committed to keeping a detailed journal of my thoughts and reflections along the way. I also took a co-author role in sharing drafts of the results and asked participants for feedback rather than taking an expert stance in generating and co-constructing knowledge. Additionally, I consulted with Dr. Wieling and Dr. Flint routinely to discuss the complexities and plausibility of couples' stories. Finally, I

was transparent about how I prepared and conducted interviews in the methodology section in order to enhance the quality of generating stories (Polkinghorne, 1995; Scheurich, 1997), as interviews have often been criticized for failing to address the process of generating data from interviews.

Reflexivity and My Interpretive Lens

My postmodern paradigm, systemic lens, and the embedded social-justice-orientation in my scholarship have informed my interpretation and representation of the data. In particular, postmodernism values multiple meanings and divergent interpretations rather than reconciling conflicting meanings of situated truths and realities (Derrida; 1992; Foucault, 1980; Given, 2018). This paradigm has enabled me to embrace diverse couples' experiences when analyzing and representing results. Moreover, I am trained to take a systemic perspective to understand individuals' and families' experiences. That means, I pay special attention to how the multiple interlocking systems that a family is embedded in have shaped a family's well-being. This perspective also aligns with my postmodern paradigm that emphasizes the contextual influence on human experiences. As a result, in the current study, I draw on the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005) to understand and interpret couples' experiences holistically. That is, how couples perceive and respond/resist the impact of the racial structures of the U.S. in order to inform systemic interventions. Additionally, I am passionate about promoting the wellbeing of racial minorities, especially Asian Americans' mental and relational health, my scholarly work aims to amplify their voices and center their unique experiences. Accordingly, my social-justice perspective has assisted me in interpreting the data in a way to identify interracial couples' unique challenges and strengths to inform future relevant couple

interventions that can meet their unique needs. Finally, I wrote reflexive memos to reflect on the research process to enrich data interpretation as well as to debrief with my co-advisor (i.e., Dr. Flint) and further elaborate my interpretations of the data throughout the analytic and writing process.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the underlying methodology and method used to design the study, recruit participants, conduct dyadic couple interviews with ethical considerations, and analyze data. All processes were rooted in a reflexive naturalistic inquiry guided by narrative methods and procedures to enhance study rigor and trustworthiness.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter, I present the results from both my thematic and structural analysis. I use composite narratives as a way to represent findings from my thematic analysis. I then zoom in on one particular couple's communication process to enrich the understanding of the research topic using a structural analysis. In what follows, I first document the process of generating composite narratives. Then, I represent three composites in detail: composite 1 (Sarah & James), composite 2 (Xiu & David), and composite 3 (Jessica & Ryan). Next, I move to the structural analysis, which includes two parts with two purposes: 1) The first part of the findings displays how racial privilege has served as a root of the couple's arguments with the purpose of enriching the thematic understanding of couples' experiences in whether and how they perceived the role of race in their relationship; 2) The second part of the findings illustrate the ethical challenges of conducting research with marginalized populations and navigating couple dynamics during the dyadic interview. The purpose of the second part of the findings is to provoke ethical discussions regarding research conduct.

The Process of Generating Composite Narratives

In qualitative research the practice of writing is a highly interpretive process that is deeply tied to the process of analysis (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Thus, being transparent about the writing process and how the results are generated is a practice used to increase the trustworthiness and rigor of the study (Crewell & Poth, 2018). In this study, I conducted a thematic analysis to create composite narratives. In these composite narratives, I combined

several couples' stories into one composite to offer archetypes of how couple's navigate differences in their perceptions of racism. Thus, I placed emphasis on demonstrating the link between the original transcript and the final composite narratives. Guided by Willis's (2019) process of generating composite narratives, the following paragraphs will illustrate how I composed composite narratives from my interviews with couples and their stories.

Pre-Composing Process

There is a close relationship among the data collection procedures, data analysis, and writing in all approaches to qualitative studies (Crewell & Poth, 2018; Freeman, 2017). Thus, "How do I represent couples' stories?" is the question I started asking after I interviewed the first three couples. Based on those three initial interviews, I asked three sets of questions to inform writing and future interviews: First, I asked questions about my research questions. These questions included: Have those stories answered the research questions? Are there any off-topic stories? and so forth. Second, I asked analytic questions. These included: Thematically, what are the common themes across couples' stories? What is the uniqueness of each couple's story? Structurally, how do couples talk about race-related topics? Are there any communication patterns that have stood out? Overall, how to represent those themes, stories and communicating patterns in a way that can contribute to the exploratory purpose of the study. Finally, I asked questions about the interview process, including: Are there any questions they found hard to answer? Are there any questions I need to tweak or add in future interviews? I specifically used memos as a way to facilitate critical thinking during this process (Birks et al., 2008). For this section of my dissertation, I elaborate on the second set of questions related to my analytic process to provide the reader with more depth about how this narrative inquiry was conducted.

The initial process of attending to common themes in the first three couples highlighted

the spectrum of experiences, which served as the foundation for how I created the composite narratives. Specifically, the first couple underscored the process of learning and raising racial awareness over the years. They highlighted the process of realizing the impact of race and racial stratification on their relationship. The second couple were social justice activists who were on the same page in perceiving the negative impact of race and racial stratification on their couple relationship. The third couple showed different perspectives on racial awareness and argued over race-related topics, such as whether certain incidents were racist or not. Initially, while there was a common theme of negotiations between each couple, there was a great deal of difference in *how* they negotiated race and racial stratification. When I compared these three transcripts to the research questions, I realized the diversity in the ways that couples navigated these topics might be indicative of what I called a spectrum of experiences: from not being on the same page to being highly aligned about their perceptions of race-related topics and its impact on their relationship. As I began to prepare for additional interviews, I started to pay attention to how future couples' stories unfolded along this spectrum. In doing so, I also began asking a methodological question: How can I appropriately report the diverse spectrum of experiences and simultaneously enhance the exploratory purpose of the study? With this question in mind, I reviewed and compared various narrative analytic approaches (Chase, 2018; Freeman, 2017; Riessman, 2008; Wertz et al., 2011; Willis, 2019), and identified composite narratives (Willis, 2019) as a good fit for representing my data because it can represent the spectrum of couples' experiences and the maintain richness of the stories.

When I attended to how those three initial couples unfolded their stories, the second couple stood out because they replayed their communication patterns during the interview. Also, there were unique language patterns within their communication when they were discussing

race-related stories, for example, their description of "self-inflicted pain." As a result, I realized it might be beneficial to use structural analysis to illuminate their communication process and to deepen the thematic understanding of couples' stories. Later on in the analytic process, after I completed all eight couples' interviews, no other couples shared communication patterns that were similar to the second couple. More importantly, when I checked the literature regarding how racial privilege can affect couple relationships by causing conflict (Killian, 2003; Leslie & Young, 2015; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013), their arguments over race-related topics enlightened me that it might be worthy of analyzing their communicating process to show how difficult it is sometimes for couples to navigate race-related topics. Thus, the findings from my analysis may be used to inform future couple intervention efforts.

Furthermore, listening, memoing, and debriefing were the methods I simultaneously utilized to navigate this pre-composing process (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). I immersed myself in listening to the interviews and writing memos along the way. I have been memoing since I started this project. Memoing after each interview was specifically helpful in enhancing my reflection about couples' stories, including the aforementioned three sets of questions (Roulston, 2010). Those memos became instrumental in informing how to frame the results, discussion and implications sections of the dissertation. Meanwhile, I also debriefed my insights regarding how to combine couples' stories into composite narratives with my advisors on a regular basis. Given the richness of the stories and their similar and divergent thematic elements, I decided to combine couples' stories into three composite narratives, which illustrated different communication archetypes of couples. Additionally, since one couple's communication patterns stood out among the rest, I decided to apply a structural analysis to that particular couple, to pay close attention not only to *what* they were communicating, but *how*. The following section

documents the composing process of the composite narratives and the structural analysis.

Composite Couples and Their Stories

Rationale. Three composite narratives were derived from 7 couples' stories (i.e., 14 interviews). There could be many ways I could have grouped these stories into composites. I could group the stories by similar gender combination, geographic location, political position, immigration status, etc. However, the purpose of my research was to examine "what" are the couples' stories regarding the role of race and racial stratification in their relationship, and "how" they interpret those experiences and its impact on their relationships. Thus, paying attention to similarities and differences in relation to these questions is how I began to compose my composite narratives. This process also served the exploratory purpose of the research (i.e., embracing diverse couples' experiences). As a result, *Composite 1* represents a couple who did not perceive race to have an important role in their relationship, nor did they think it necessary to discuss race-related topics. *Composite 2* describes a couple who gradually realized the role of race and racial stratification in their relationships. They perceived it as a hard ongoing learning process, but it brought them closer. Finally, *Composite 3* illustrates a couple who are quite aware of the impact of race and racial stratification on their relationships and who have developed strategies to navigate the impact as a couple. They were also actively advocating racial justice via their work and daily lives.

These composite narratives then serve as archetypes or cases of different kinds of couples and how they attend to these questions in their relationship. That means, each composite couple's stories were integrated from 2~3 couples. For instance, in Composite 1, Sarah and James' stories were mainly derived from two interviewed couples who fit the composite one description (i.e., not perceiving race as playing a significant role in their relationships). More information

regarding how I decided who is who, the pseudonyms, genders, and so forth will be described in detail in each of the composites. In what follows, I attend to a few methodological considerations in composing these composites including comments regarding opinions and feelings and direct quotes.

Comments. Comments of opinions and feelings were taken directly from participants rather than my interpretation. For instance, in Composite 2, I write, "they found it was funny and unique when they were first called out as an interracial couple." This interpretation is directly paraphrased from the couples' comments. In the original interview, David (pseudonym) had said, "It was funny. That was the first moment where I think I've ever actually been identified as being an interracial couple..." and Xiu had responded, "I think, probably at that time, my feeling was like, oh, we're unique. You know we're an interracial couple, and people see us as being very unique."

Direct quotes. Direct quotes from the transcripts were used in the composites to distinguish that the three composites are narratives, not fiction. Moreover, as the purpose of composite narratives is to have a thematic understanding of couples' stories, quotes have been cleaned to make them easy to read. For instance, I deleted mouth-filling words without thematic meaning, such as "like," "you know," "right?" I also used three dots "…" in each composite to represent an omission of words. This is because many stories were quite lengthy and involved some irrelevant details and some repetitions. For instance, in Composite 1, when Sarah shared a story of their friend's house being robbed and trashed as the target of a hate crime, she provided lots of details about the crime scene and their friend's mental status before she shared how that incident influenced her and James. Thus, when I used her quote, I used three dots to omit her description of her friend and the crime: "I did have a friend whose house got robbed. And then the police kinda told her it's kind of targeted Asians… We were like, gosh, since our house is under my last name too… So he got his handgun actually from basement to upstairs." However, I left many quotes long due

to the richness of their stories. Finally, I use "[note:]" in the middle of some quotes to provide background information for readers to understand what the character was referring to. For instance: "Just like that comments [note: the laundry mat incident] makes me wonder if this happened to my child, how would I teach my child to respond to it."

The Resulting Composite Narratives

In the following composites, I first included a section on "representational decisions" to document the rationale of how I composed the composite couple. These include decisions about social locations (e.g., gender, immigration status, etc.) needed to provide the contexts for the stories, I chose to assign those social locations in each composite to align with their shared stories. Then, I share the composite story in detail.

Composite 1 (Sarah & James)

Representational decisions. Sarah and James' stories primarily came from couple 4 and couple 7. The pseudonyms "Sarah" and "James" were picked from the "Popular names of the period 1990s" (Social Security Administration, 2023). As Sarah and James' stories mainly came from two interviewed couples who used their American first names to participate the interviews, I chose American pseudonyms for this composite couple. Moreover, Sarah's occupation is based on those two Chinese Americans' occupations whose jobs involve creativity. Similarly, James's occupation derives from those two White Euro-Americans who were in senior leadership positions. Finally, although none of the two Chinese American partners explicitly mentioned how their immigration status affected their relationships, they both had several references regarding Chinese culture and their parents' migration history. Thus, it makes sense to develop Sarah as a 1.5-generation Chinese American who carries both Chinese and American cultural features. In what follows, I provide a narrative account of Sarah and James' experiences

regarding race-related topics.

Background information. Sarah (i.e., a Chinese American female) and James (i.e., a White Euro-American male) have been together for over 10 years and have two children. Their shared Christianity has been the foundation of their relationship, although they hold different political positions (i.e., Sarah self-identified as Democrat, and James self-identified as Republican). Currently, Sarah works as a senior architect in an international company. James is a senior manager in a local company. Sarah is a 1.5-generation Chinese American (i.e., born in China and migrated to the U.S. as a minor) carrying both Chinese and American cultural heritage.

Stories. James and Sarah expressed that their relationship was accepted by their families and friends from the beginning. As a Christian, James believed people's personality plays a role in this acceptance. Sarah recalled her age had played a big role in accepting James, and the racial differences did not seem to matter to her parents.

> **James**, "I grew up in a Christian family. And it's all about the person. They loved Sarah right away. They could tell she is a wonderful person."
>
> **Sarah**, "Pretty similar here for my situation… I guess, in China, if you're over 30, you haven't gotten married at that point. I think a lot of it's like, accept anybody… My parents migrated over. Race wasn't even an issue for them. They were like, find someone who you can build a life with and be happy with."

During the election season, Sarah and James recalled a heated argument about voting for Trump or not, but it did not last long. They navigated the incident by trying to understand each other's perspective, reconnecting to God, and refocusing on the important aspects of their lives.

> **Sarah**, "So, I say you vote for him. That means you also agree with his view about racism and that stuff. I feel disrespectful for my view of race. so, I feel like he shouldn't vote for him and stand on my side.… I'm pretty sure I was crying, and there was sad and stuff, but then he will usually try to be quiet… Then he will apologize to me. We resolved the conflict by hugging each other, kissing each other…We're pretty good at putting an end to it and then moving forward and focusing on more important things… I think God helped. I think the Bible says don't bring any arguments overnight. So, we usually resolve it on the same day… no matter whom we vote for. We actually have the same idea. We want the world is God's will to be

down here in the world and through us."

James, "And I did understand her point. She was making a very valid point. But my voting had nothing to do with that kind of stuff. It was more policy, compared to one person to the other…Arguments are actually helpful because I feel like you argue. And then you actually learn how to communicate better, how to resolve things better."

During COVID-19, they did not encounter any racist incidents personally nor discuss anti-Asian incidents that much because they were isolated and tried to focus on their day-to-day life.

Sarah, "We didn't discuss too much in that (i.e., anti-Asian racist incidents happening across the U.S.), like two of us … we're pretty isolated… I focus a lot on work and also my family… the main thing, I would say, is to focus on life, and then we have so many other things to worry about. So that's why we didn't communicate. I guess we didn't discuss often, and also, when you have kids, you don't even have time to watch the news."

James, "So sometimes that's the stuff you think about it, but you don't really talk about a whole lot, I guess. But we were kind of isolated. I guess we never really had any incidents like that around here… we spend a lot of time focusing on ourselves."

However, after their Asian friend's house was robbed and trashed as a victim of a hate crime, they were both scared and worried.

Sarah, "I did have a friend whose house got robbed. And then the police kinda told her it's kind of targeted Asians… We were like, gosh, since our house is under my last name… So he got his handgun actually from basement to upstairs."

James, "Yeah, makes us kind of worried. It was a scary deal, but I never thought of something happening like that. To target a certain race just because they think they keep cash in their house."

In general, during COVID-19, Sarah was not very scared because they lived in a small town. James described how he still worried "with" her because they are a couple; he perceived this worry as a "weight" to the whole family.

Sarah, "If you gave me a scale from 1 to 10 of scary level. I would only say maybe one or two. I wouldn't say I am very scared in this small town. Maybe if I go to New York City, those big cities, I might be a little bit more concerned."

James, "I was kind of worried with you. Just never know how people are gonna react. Then we've got little kiddos that are both half Asian… it kind of weighs on your whole family because we're a team. It's not just one of us going through that. We're all going through that. So yeah, it's definitely something I was worried about, but I was at the same time very glad that we really didn't have to deal with anything like that."

Growing up, neither of their parents had a conversation with them about what it means to be White or Asian in the U.S. or what racial diversity means. However, James' parents taught him to treat people with love and respect regardless of their race. It is rooted in Christianity. His

father's openness to making friends with people of color also influenced him. He also recalled his first awareness of racial diversity. He emphasized how the uncomfortableness went away when he started interacting with people of color.

> **James**, "They told me to treat people with love and respect no matter what race they are or what they look like. You look at the person they are from the inside, so the color of the skin, their look doesn't matter… my dad had black friends and college. He's really open, not judgmental at all, and I think that kind of rubbed off on me."
>
> **James**, "I don't remember my parents discussing what it means to be White… but there are two things, I think, that shaped my understanding of racial differences growing up. And one of them was my elementary school, which had a racism-free zone… the second is that my aunt is from Africa… I think that shaped my understanding that people aren't only White, and people have different skin colors, and that culture is in that doesn't make them much right or wrong. It's just different."
>
> **James**, "We went to your Chinese church for a Bible study one night. I think I was pretty much the only White person…And I'm like, oh, gosh, this is a little different because everybody was kind of looking at me, who's this guy? And yeah, so I guess I felt a little uncomfortable at first, but then they were so welcoming and nice…I remember I went to S city one time for a field trip when I was younger; we got it on the train, and I was the only White kid on the train. Everyone else is black. Oh, my gosh! I'm not used to it! It kind of jolts you for a little bit, but once you start getting around people and they're nice to you, you just kind of get used to that. And it's not a big deal then."

Sarah's parents were not aware of race, racism, and racial diversity since China is not a racially diverse society. She recalled her parents called out on black people and did not realize it.

> **Sarah**, "So for me, I guess my parents never really thought about racism and those things in China…even when it came to racial diversity, there was never a talk about relationships with other races and how we should approach them… I remember I asked stories about them coming over to the States...my dad liked to call out that he met a black person, and a black person taught him how to drive."

Overall, they did not think it was necessary to discuss race-related topics unless something might happen, nor did they perceive race had a significant influence on their relationship.

> **James**, "No, no, gosh! Not unless something comes up to where it affects it, because, to me, I don't see us as one race or another race…I really don't think about it very much. To me, you're Sarah. I mean, I hardly ever even recognize that you're Asian. I guess you're just my wife and mother of my kids…unless there's something from the outside triggering it or something that's bothering her, then we can talk about it. Otherwise, we're just two people living in this world. And I don't really look at race as having any influence on our relationship. God's the focal point of our relationship."
>
> **Sarah**, "As you said, you are just my partner. I didn't really think about too much like race…I guess the same. I didn't think it is necessary to talk about race, but I do talk about culture, but that's

related to race, right?"

However, they do believe they may need to talk about race-related topics for the sake of their children. They preferred having those conversations with their children when they had questions because it seemed too early for their children to grasp race-based topics. Also, they started wondering how to approach this topic with their children in the future.

> **Sarah**, "For James and I, even for the other parts of raising our kid, we do have to talk about a lot of things and make sure we're on the same page. So I'm sure when it comes to race and identity about our kids, we will do that as well."
>
> **James**, "If they bring it up, I'll definitely want to have a conversation about it. I guess I don't want to over-focus on it. I think some people over-focus too much on their ethnicity… I want them always to think it's positive. I don't wanna them to think, oh, people are against you because you're half Asian, half White."
>
> **Sarah**, "I have the same belief. I'm more towards when they have questions, bring it up and tell us maybe we will get to that topic… when they are at the wrong age to know too much. I think it's not a good moment for them."
>
> **James**, "Right now, I don't think they think, oh, I'm different than anybody else. I'm half Chinese, half American. They are just too busy playing and doing their own things… I feel it's a benefit that they are multiracial. I think, hopefully, they'll be able to be accepted in both places. I think, if they can speak Chinese and English, Oh, my! She's gonna have the world at their fingertips."
>
> **Sarah**, "In the back of my head, I know that, hey, we're gonna have to probably address the identity, race… why do we wanna do it? And then what would we want to say? The intentions? Because I don't just wanna do it for the sake of doing it. I wanna add some value to it, too … there are probably the positive things, but also the negative things. And I just don't know what the right way is of talking about it."

In brief, Sarah and James did not perceive race to have a significant influence on their relationship nor did they think it was necessary to have race-based conversations. However, they did believe it might be necessary to have such conversations in the future with their child, but did not know how to approach this topic.

Composite 2 (Xiu & David)

Representational decisions. Xiu and David's stories mainly came from couple 2 and couple 5. The name "David" was picked from the "Popular names of the period 1990s" (Social Security Administration, 2023). The pseudonym "Xiu" was picked from the "Chinese names"

(Hu, Sept. 2023). As with Sarah and James, I chose the Americanized name "David" to mirror the similarly American name of the couples who composed this composite. I specifically picked the name "Xiu" because it is a common Chinese first name but is hard to pronounce for Americans. This setting fitted the name stories that this character would share later. Also, Xiu's name stories represent several Chinese Americans who shared marginalized experiences due to using a Chinese first name. Xiu's occupation as a professor represents three female Chinese American participants who work in academia and have encountered various marginalized experiences. Xiu, as a first-generation Chinese American, represents two first-generation Chinese American participants who were minoritized after coming to the U.S. David represents two White Euro-Americans who have been through a transformation process of raising racial awareness. Their son represents several couples' children who started asking race-related questions.

Background information. Xiu (i.e., Chinese American female) and David (i.e., White Euro-American male) have been together for over 10 years with one young son. Xiu came to the U.S. as an international student. Now, she is a professor at a university. David is an entrepreneur.

Stories. Their relationship encountered some suspicions from David's family at the beginning, but it became better over time, especially after they had a child. Xiu's family and friends accepted David at the very beginning. Xiu guessed it might be because she had dated a White guy before, and she also had a supportive family.

> **David**, "When we first started dating, one of the first things my mom said was, what if she steals my grandchildren to China? I never see my grandkids; this was six years before the grandchildren existed. I was like, what the hell are you talking about? …I think again. I don't know that race was explicitly coming out, but it was certainly part of the deal, and I think folks were suspicious of our relationship. And it took some time before both peer groups and even my family realized, oh, Xiu is wonderful."
>
> **Xiu**, "I'm just too different, out of their comfort zone…I guess, showing up to the family events occasionally, and they know, oh, she sticks round, and then through conversations they can tell

the relationship between the two of us…and then become more like an insider eventually for a lot of the families. When grandchildren come in, that's why I feel like I gain some statuses, more power."

Xiu, "I was dating a White guy before I met my husband…so I think probably my parents already used to it…I had my master's mentor give a speech to, you know, at the wedding. And she's a psychologist. And I remember one of the things she said, you know, is that you know your marriage is interracial and cross-cultural. It's really important that you communicate and work across the differences. So we have some supportive families."

In the beginning of the relationship, race was not a salient topic. However, Xiu was guarded against being targeted as an "exotic foreign woman."

Xiu, "I think race wasn't a very important theme in our relationship in the beginning. It was mostly about getting to know each other. And I remember vividly when we were dating, I asked him, 'why are you dating a Chinese girl?' And he said, 'I'm just dating a girl'… I guess maybe it comes from the stereotypes that I hear. Sometimes, some White guys just like Asian women, and they exist. They would not date anyone else other than Asian women. I think I was just curious. Why did you date me? What was there for him to like me? Is it just because I'm Chinese, like some sort of exotic foreign woman?"

David, "I agree with everything that Xiu said... And actually, I was gonna use that same example… But as Xiu said, it [note: race] really wasn't relevant, or even a thought, or really even conscious to me at the early stages of our relationship."

Also, they found it was funny and unique when they were first called out as an "interracial couple."

David, "We were visiting some sort of Museum Park. We had to pay for a ticket. And there was a guy who was leaving who already had a paid ticket, and he was gonna hand it to us. Just so we didn't have to pay. But I didn't see him, and then he called over to us and said, 'hey, you! Interracial couple, come here. I have the ticket for you.' I laughed about it…It was just a laughing moment. We got a free $3 ticket to park. And I don't know why I still remember it today. It wasn't a negative experience at all. It was funny. That was the first moment where I think we've ever actually been identified as an interracial couple because I did not see race at all at that point in our relationship. It was not a conscious thing to me."

Xiu, "Yeah, I think at the beginning of our relationship, we were pretty color blind…like he said, it was like a laughing moment. I think, probably at that time, my feeling was like, oh, we're unique. We're an interracial couple, and people see us as being very unique… now I think if that same event happened today, I would have a moment to pause and see. Nowadays, I would be a little bit more suspicious about whether this is a racist comment or just someone being ignorant."

Over the years, each of them and their son encountered various racist incidents in their daily lives. Xiu recalled that experiencing marginalization was new to her when she first came to the U.S. because she was part of the majority group in China. She recalled several marginalized

experiences being an Asian and international. The most recent one was related to a stereotype attached to the earliest Chinese American immigration history: that early Chinese immigrants usually work in a restaurant, a laundry mat, or other service industry (Lee, 2015)

> **Xiu**, "So I was born and raised in China. I'm Han… I always feel like I have decent power between my family background, and my ethnicity, even as an academically well-performed student… But then, coming to the United States, you realize, oh, there's a thing called race. The majority of people around our neighborhood, or even on campus, were not Asian. They were White… They were trying to figure out how to pronounce my name…I encountered things here and there… I was trying to figure out what's happening."
>
> **Xiu**, "I once went to a museum and was asked where are you really from? ... My advisor back then also had some sort of benign stereotype, like, I'm Asian, of course I know how to do stats …., every single time I talked, it was either, 'Oh, your English is really good', or 'what did you say?' It did make me feel you're always judged because you're not from here."
>
> **Xiu**, "The other day, I went to a laundry mats store to put a flyer there… when I stepped into the door, this older lady said, 'Do you work here?' and I said 'No,' and she said, 'Oh, I lost 90 cents,' and I said, 'oh, I'm sorry about that.' And then I was leaving, and then she said, 'Do you work in the Chinese place?' And I said, 'no.' And I just left… David told me you should have told her that you're a doctor…I didn't say anything because I didn't have the skill to respond at the moment."

David also shared a story of being accused of being a racist; as well as an experience where a stranger made racist comments on their son's phenotype, which was the first time he encountered racism.

> **David**, "We're walking in in New York City, and a black guy was hanging out pamphlets or something, I don't know what, and he offered to take me on. I said, 'No, thank you,' I just kept walking, and he said, 'fucking racist!' And I'm like, excuse me, I don't remember what I said to him… Because I don't want whatever you're handing out…it's disgusting…Xiu is right. It's not worth the energy to explore because that guy is an idiot. And the correct answer is to put it out of my mind and simply walk away."
>
> **David with their son**, "Last year, I was walking with my son at the park… And there was an old White man who was passing by us…And he looked at me, and he looked at my son, and he said, 'Oh, he must get his looks from his mother.' And I didn't understand. I said, 'okay'… Whatever the reason, that event stuck with me, and I didn't understand why. And I told her about it recently…And then we agreed that the reason why I couldn't forget that and let that go was because that was a racist comment…I've never experienced that ever.… Even if it wasn't intentionally negative, he didn't have to say anything at all. He could just say hello or anything, but he chose to make that comment that he may not have even realized that was racist to himself…But now that we spoke about it, we relive it. That was a very racist thing to say. He wouldn't have to say it at all."

Xiu also recalled encountering racialized incidents from her students and her department. For

instance, Xiu received rude comments from her students. She suspected it might be because she is a combination of an Asian, young, female professor versus a White old male professor. David agreed with her and supported her in the process.

> **Xiu**, "I have students who say really rude things to me. They don't comment on my race directly, of course…I am almost certain that they wouldn't say the same thing to a White male, older professor… They would say it's a waste of their time… I'm very disappointed in you as a professor very direct…. I think they're saying that to me because I'm this combination: Asian, female, younger versus older."
>
> **David**, "It's awful what she's going through…I think it's entirely possible that she's correct that they're treating her this way because she is who she is… I've been speaking with her about what she should be doing about this to make sure everything is being documented…I think the most important thing I can do as her husband, who's removed from academia, is to listen and provide support where I can…"

Moreover, Xiu and David recalled another two examples at Xiu's department, which showed the inconsistency regarding whether Xiu is a minority or not. On the one hand, Xiu was disqualified to apply for minority funding since Asian was not considered as a minority. David felt offended for her. On the other hand, she was called out by a Diversity, Equity and Inclusiveness (DEI) representative and was reminded that she wasn't participating in DEI activity enough.

> **David**, "It was some sort of opportunity, and they were looking for a minority. And she went to apply for it, and she found out she didn't qualify. I thought that was really disgusting…It bothers me, and I don't know if it bothers me so much because it happened to her or it bothers me because I disagree with the concepts morally. And now they're tweaking it to kind oh no, we want this color, but not that one. It bothers me. I really don't like it. They're picking and choosing."
>
> **Xiu**, "I got called out by a person who was in charge of DEI work, 'hey, you are the only person who hasn't participated in this summer book reading'…I don't know how much more EDI work I need to do, right? Because there are a lot of people out there, you did not go call them out, right? What do you mean by public shaming? You are doing the DEI work…I don't know if I were David, and then that person would say the same thing?" David, "No, I've never got that."

During COVID-19, they did not encounter racist attacks. However, Xiu stopped using her first name when she talked to customer service representatives. Also, she got sick of being asked to spell out her first name over the years. David empathized with her experiences.

> **David**, "I can tell you one thing that she did during COVID-19 when we saw those acts of violence

> against Asians, she stopped using her name when talking to online chat support people. So, let's say, we had something on Amazon that we wanted to return it…Xiu felt that she would get a better response from their customer service if she used my White American name instead of her Asian name. They would treat her differently. She would be more likely to be able to return that item."
>
> **Xiu**, "I don't remember that at all."
>
> **David**, "She doesn't remember it. So, it must not have happened as often as I'm remembering. But it made me sad that she thought that she had to do that. I thought it was a little bit silly. But now, reflecting back, I don't think it was silly at all because it's very possible that she may get a different result if she was using my very White American name versus her very Chinese name."
>
> **Xiu**, "Even yesterday, I was ordering food. They asked, 'what's your name?' I said, David, because I'm just tired of saying my first name. They'll be like, 'What?' And then I'll have to spell it. And then I have to explain…most of the time, it takes me so much effort if I use my first name."
>
> **David**, "It is hard, like, we order a lot of food, and I'll go in and pick it up, and it's under her name. when I go in, and I say, 'pick up for Xiu,' and then they are like, 'for you?' And then I said, 'oh, that's my wife,' I have to say it every single time… and it pisses me off that I even have to do that a few times… but she lives with it."

Regarding how they navigated racist incidents as a couple, they mentioned multiple strategies such as laughing it off, debriefing with each other, sharing related articles, and watching shows that are related to race, racism, and social injustice to learn and grow together.

> **David**, "laughed it off …And I think at that time it was just surprising and just kind of like we just moved along."
>
> **David**, "Most of the time we receive those inappropriate comments, you just shake your head. There's no need to argue with those people. They don't understand…the biggest one I do is I try to change the subject because I don't wanna have to deal with this right now."
>
> **Xiu**, "It feels really good when I can go to David and say, you will not believe what happened to me..."
>
> **Xiu**, "Sometimes not talking, sometimes could be David found some books about race, or I found some books, we both agree that these are great books and we put on a shelf and read about them. That's another way to kind of be on the same page and communicate, or a movie or show or that…That's another way to kind of communicating."

However, they were not always on the same page, especially early on in their relationship, regarding how to understand race, racism, racial diversity and its impact. It has been a long learning process, from getting defensive immediately when talking about race and racism to really understanding each other's perspectives. David addressed his slow transformation process

of raising racial awareness through learning, which helped him drop his defensiveness and connect to Xiu at an emotional level, and made the relationship stronger.

> **Xiu**, "I mean, it's not always easy. It can be hard…early on, when we were in our relationship, it could feel very defensive. That's where I think when we talk about race and what's not, I think our defenses would immediately go up. And wanting to be defensive about how we're feeling and what not. I think that's lessened over time. I mean, it's not perfect. It's gonna come up every now and then."
>
> **David**, "It is just my own racial awareness and recognizing that it has happened over time. It happened slowly. It's happened through reading. It's happened through watching the Asian American documentary series… and it just suddenly something clicked for me about how White people have this privilege blindness to how race affects all of us, our perceptions. And it just that awareness helps me let go with the defensiveness to be able to say, yeah, 'this really sucks for Xiu' in ways that I don't have to deal with'.…so, for me to identify with the feeling, as opposed to, 'oh, yeah, I can see why you'd be like, don't be offended by that.' It's no big deal as opposed to, 'Oh, you got hurt.' That's different. And so connecting to the emotion behind it."

As a result, they believed it was necessary to have race-based conversations with one another. Xiu believed that talking about race-related topics can make their relationship better although the process was not pleasant, and also for the sake of their son. David emphasized wanting to validate Xiu's experiences and talking about it brought them closer. However, it can be challenging for him when he felt he was being pointed the finger at.

> **Xiu**, "It's also important for us to talk about race and racism, our racial identity for our couple relationship… I cannot imagine having a satisfactory couple relationship if he doesn't believe racism exist... I guess it's like getting treatment or getting surgery. You know the process is not pleasant, but the outcome is healthier and better."
>
> **Xiu**, "Just like that comments [note: the laundry mat incident] makes me wonder if this happened to my child, how would I teach my child to respond to it…. It's like some sort of skills we have to equip ourselves with so that we can parent our child and prepare him to grow up in this world."
>
> **David**, "I don't see how an interracial couple can draw closer together unless they address it. The it being racism unless they have some kind of shared understanding of what it is and, how it impacts them and how it impacts their relationship. I just don't see how you could maintain the kind of delight in a relationship like I have with Xiu."
>
> **David**, "It's hard to deal with, especially when I feel like someone's pointing a finger at me…but I want her to be happy…and I know that these problems are here, and the only way to do that is by talking about it. So, as challenging as it is, it's also necessary. I wouldn't say that this makes her happy to talk about it with me, but I think it makes her feel empowered to know that her husband supports her and understands these issues on a level that's probably a little bit deeper

than average Americans."

When David mentioned race-related topics that can be challenging to him, Xiu recalled a specific incident that David felt about being accused of being White; and how they both made efforts to try again and again to have a constructive conversation about race and its impact.

> **Xiu**, "So that morning I wanted to share with him one of the monologues that a black father did from YouTube because when I did watch it, I cried… he wrote a poem to speak to his son in his wife's belly …he said, 'I want you to grow up like this…but this world has a lot of racism. You're gonna be a black kid…' I showed D the video. I think you said something, I don't like it, or I don't have a feeling about it."
>
> **David**, "I kind of tuned out as soon as he started talking about any sort of racial thing, at least it was saying. You are gonna have a hard time because of the color of your skin…and then Xiu asked me about it. And I basically told her that."
>
> **Xiu**, "Once he shared that with me, I think we started to talk. I don't remember exactly how. I think I brought up our child again. I said, 'this is really important for us to talk about it and to our child.' And then he recalled the event from the park [note: the old White man commented his son's Asian phenotype]. Then, we were talking about that event again. And then I said, 'now, having this awareness, would you like to listen to this monologue again?' And then he was more open-minded. So, I played the video again. I think the second time, he got a little bit more from it, right?"
>
> **David**, "I know that Xiu obviously is a minority in this country. And she's my wife. I love her dearly. And this is obviously a topic in our relationship. It's a topic in life…They're hard to deal with, especially when I feel like someone's pointing a finger at me… Yeah, I was able to listen to the whole thing the second time around, and he actually did have some very nice touching things he was saying about his child."

Growing up, neither of their parents had a sit-down conversation with them regarding race, racism, or racial diversity in the U.S. For David, he got the message that racism was history. For Xiu, her parents are Chinese and did not have a clue about race and racial structure in the U.S.

> **David**, "I don't think my parents did… And maybe when you read about discrimination against Chinese people in the nineteenth century in Washington state, but we're fine now, that was the message I grew up with."
>
> **Xiu**, "No, I don't think that's the thing. They know I'm going abroad to study, which is something to be glorified…No clue about what's happening in the United States other than some of the TV shows or movies… I think, as a child, we listen to how between the two governments talk about human rights violations or how racial minorities are treated… you didn't know that's gonna happen to you, to your face, in your life. So no."

However, they both agreed on the necessity to learn more about race-related topics since a) children can form opinions at a very young age, and their son started having race-related questions; b) help their son respond to possible negative situations in the future; They recalled

that they started discussing how to address race-related topics even before their son was born.

> **Xiu**, "I do think it's really important to talk about it early on because kids are forming opinions one way or the other. And if you're not involved in how they're forming their opinion, they can make the wrong assumptions and then perpetuate inequalities."
>
> **Xiu**, "He asked, 'why do some people not like other people because of the way they look?' He asked me straight up, how come some people don't want a black little mermaid?"
>
> **David**, "My son's experience will be very different than mine because obviously he is not me, and he's not her. So, I grew up in a 99% White area…So it's very possible he'll face some actual challenges of that. Yeah, it's important to navigate that appropriately."
>
> **David**, "We even talked about it before he was born, just like, what is this going to be like to communicate to him, how beautiful he is in being different than other kids."

Moving forward, David appreciated Xiu's persistence and patience along the way. Xiu mentioned she recognized David's transformation process. However, it would make her feel more supported if David could acknowledge his privileges and perceive racism is "our problem" rather than "your problem."

> **David**, "She would say, 'they said this, and this is how I felt about it'…. her persistence, but it's also patience. For those times, I have stumbled through these conversations not very well…And I feel like I'm a better human because I've had to wrestle with these issues. And I've wrestled with it with someone who is very safe to me, someone I feel like I can do that with."
>
> **Xiu**, "I do acknowledge that David has been going through a transformation process, and he has changed a lot. And yes, it's really challenging for him to have to navigate this with me. That he probably doesn't have to if he married a White person…What I will feel more supported is his acknowledging that, okay, well, problems like this do exist in our society. I never realized that my name, and being White can give me this free pass. But you have to hide your real identity and change your name to have an easier life. Just acknowledged that this is really imbalanced and unfair…this sort of self-awareness and reflection of the privilege that he has… it makes me feel hopeful…I mean, the people who have the privilege acknowledge that they have this privilege that we don't have…Then this is not just your problem anymore. It's our problem because I want to share that privilege with you."

In brief, Xiu and David have gradually raised their racial awareness and realized the role of race in their couple relationships through encountering racialized experiences over the years, and learning racial justice materials, and growing together.

Composite 3 (Jessica & Ryan)

Representational decisions. Jessica and Ryan's stories came from three couples: couple 3, couple 6, and couple 8. The pseudonyms "Jessica" and "Ryan" were picked from the "Popular

names of the period 1990s" and reflects the Americanized names used by the couple's composing this composite (Social Security Administration, 2023). Ryan's occupation was based on those three Chinese American partners who centered their work around social justice. Jessica's occupation was based on those three White Euro-Americans whose jobs involved working at schools or other educational organizations and actively integrating social justice into their work. The part-time job setting was used to address a particular challenged situation: when couples are also coworkers, how they navigate racist incidents at the workplace can be complicated. That story happened in a church, and most of the participants in the current study have religious beliefs and are passionate about providing services in their church. Ryan, as a second-generation Chinese American, represents two participants' experiences of the intergenerational discrepancies regarding how to perceive and handle racism and identify one's racial identity between them and their first-generation Chinese American parents.

Background information. Jessica (White Euro-American female) and Ryan (Chinese American male) have been married for over 15 years and have three children. Ryan serves in leadership roles in several social justice groups. Jessica teaches at a local middle school. Moreover, they also volunteer to work at a local church part-time. Ryan is a second-generation Chinese American (i.e., born and raised in the United States), and his parents are first-generation Chinese Americans (i.e., born and raised in China and migrated to the United States as adults).

Stories. Jessica's family accepted Ryan immediately. Jessica thought it might be because she grew up in a family where there are Asians and interracial relationships already.

> **Jessica**, "He met my parents and they liked him right away...I mean, all these years later, and they are still just raving about how wonderful he is… It's kind of strangely or coincidentally, or whatever. My brother, who is 5 years older than me, married a Chinese American woman… we had some members of the family that were not White. I think, having grown up with that my whole life, they were in my life, and it's kind of normalized interracial relationships for me."

Ryan recalled how Jessica, being a Christian, played a positive part in being accepted by his parents. When looking back, he had a suspicion that if Jessica were a person of color, it would be hard for his family to accept based on previous comments his parents' have made that were anti-black.

> **Ryan**, "I'll say my parents are devoted Christians… they always had told me that they cared more about me marrying someone who's Christian than me marrying someone Chinese."
>
> **Ryan**, "The one thing that I remember over time is mostly negative: don't be black, and don't hang with darker skin people. And I frankly, I think over time that would affect our relationship because I think if Jessica were not White and she was of a different race that's darker skin, I think it would be a harder acceptance."

Moreover, Ryan had a retrospective reflection that the internalized sexual stereotypes against Asian men made him hesitate to pursue a romantic relationship with Jessica early on. Although the concerns went away soon, he still had to push aside those negative stereotypical scripts from time to time. Also, Jessica made efforts to balance the racial and cultural dynamics between them.

> **Ryan**, "In the beginning, there's a part of the hesitancy… kind of like internalized thoughts about, oh, being Asian male is not desirable or attractive. And so having a White girlfriend was like something that I feel like, oh, not only am I gonna get stares from White men? but from other Asian males?… And so, I have to perform Americanness so that I can hopefully be more attractive to her. I think I have definitely felt a little bit of that, looking back. I think that feeling went away when we kissed, right? I felt the sense that she was attracted to me… But I think, of course, there's always gonna be these kind of messages in your head that you're trying to push aside."
>
> **Ryan**, "I can tell that she was a lot more intentional in trying to understand Chinese culture, etc…it's a big factor in how and now understand that kind of racial dynamics so that I don't feel I'm always subordinate to White mainstream culture."

They were both passionate about advocating for social justice even before they met. Jessica was already involved in social justice work because it was part of her Christian calling. She also recalled how they met and how she was attracted to him.

> **Jessica**, "There's always been an interest on my part to care about and love other people in the world because of our faith: wanting to be caring and loving and share God's love with other people… Even before this relationship, I was pretty involved in things related to social and racial justice."
>
> **Jessica**, "We met at that college. I remember before we were dating. He worked with our orientation

> crew at our college.… Ryan being up on the stage and challenging all the new freshmen …He said, 'You're starting to make friends with these people in this new program. And I want you to think about looking through all the faces and how many of them look different than your face.' Just like challenging people in that way, be friends with people that are different from you, get to know them, kind of expand your worldview… I was attracted to him. I meant that and many others."

Ryan perceived doing social justice as part of his identity, lived experience, and faith (i.e., improving oneself and making the world a better place).

> **Ryan**, "I actively doing it [note: social justice work] for my own healing and understanding of my identity and the experiences I'd had in my life…especially after 2016, there's this urgency of survival for people of color in America to be able to find people who are your allies…If I don't find those spaces, if I don't find people, if I'm not doing the work, then question why I'm even in this country."
>
> **Ryan**, "I think something's driven by our faith too. It's a process. We're recognizing we need to change who we are and we're constantly trying to improve ourselves. And then also we're invited to be participants in a bigger project whether that's your community or your neighborhood or your school, your work… what I'm thinking in terms of that process of always think about how to transform ourselves and transform the world at the same time."

Currently, advocating for social justice was Ryan's career; and Jessica was also very "engaged" in social justice work. Ryan was very impressed by Jessica's genuineness and appreciated that they shared this passion that has bonded them.

> **Ryan**, "You look at my resume in my background. That's my career in terms of fighting for justice and looking at systemic change…I have this one role trying to bridge that gap between majority White American and even European colleagues, and everybody else, I guess, in talking about that."
>
> **Ryan**, "I was really, really encouraged and impressed because she went even farther… She was often reading books, listening to podcasts, reaching out to authors… I've been in groups for minorities, talking about racial justice and trauma. And for a lot of people who are in biracial marriages. That's actually a huge point of contention when their White partner doesn't share that concern, doesn't share that care. And I've seen a lot of marriages get very rocky and even break up because of that. And so it's been a huge bonding thing for us because it wasn't just that I was growing and learning about this, and then she was being dragged along or forced to think about these things. It felt very much like we were both looking into this and growing in this end and learning about it."

Over the years, they have encountered various racist incidents. For instance, Ryan was suspected of being a thief when he first began his job. More recently, he was racially profiled at the U.S.-Mexico border.

> **Ryan**, "When I first came to the job, I guess there had been someone that had come in and stolen

someone's purse. So, they asked people to look for suspicious people. And guess who they found? They kept telling the director, 'I've seen this guy walking around.' And the director had to keep telling them, 'No, he's just our new employee."

Jessica, "It reminded me we just got back from Mexico 2 days ago. Upon coming across the border into the United States, It's my family... And Ryan is the only one that got stopped and asked where are you from? It was not even a checkpoint. It was a random guard person asking as we were walking by and pulled him aside to ask. And Ryan was like, okay, I'm definitely getting racially profiled right now… when you said I'm an American citizen, I'm like, yeah, but some people question that still. You have to show them [note: U.S. citizen passport]."

They each recalled how some people failed to recognize their children because their children did not look like them. Interestingly, they kept receiving comments that their children were extra cute. They did not like the comments because they were rooted in exoticism.

Jessica, "I had an incident at an airport when he was a toddler where he was playing on the baggage claim. I was a few steps back from him. So, the baggage claim attendant scolded an Asian woman who was standing in front of me to keep her child off the baggage claim. And I'm like, this is mine…So there have been moments like that…Just recognize that it has an impact on my feelings."

Ryan, "I was in the grocery store with my daughter. One of the checkout clerks asked me if I adopted her. Yeah, they didn't think that she was my biological child. That's the most striking one that I remember."

Ryan, "well, I have so many people telling me, both White and Asian, telling me mixed kids are so cute, or like Chinese-White kids are gonna be so cute. At first, I thought it was okay. And then, over time, I've not felt so comfortable with that… it was so strange for people to say, oh, this baby's extra cute because they especially don't look like you…the whole exoticism kind of idea."

Besides the racialized incidents, they both recalled how strangers had doubts about their interracial relationship.

Ryan, "When you ask the question initially, the first memory I had was we were walking out as a couple holding hands in a small town. And I definitely felt people's looks."

Ryan, "We were having dim sum in a Cantonese restaurant…the server who comes with the cart, with the dim sum. She lingered and talked to me in Cantonese. And then, after a while, she left, and then Jessica asked, what did she say? I was kind of hesitant because I didn't want to say it. But then I said, the server asked me whether I was gonna really commit to this relationship. Because later on, these White women are gonna look very old. So, there are things like that too, where I also have to navigate as being in predominantly Chinese or Asian spaces where there are also people who have thoughts about why you're in this interracial relationship."

Jessica, "About 15 years ago, I was teaching at a local school, and one of my male Asian students came up, and I had a picture of Ryan and me at our wedding, and he said, 'oh, your husband is an Asian? But you're so pretty!"…I tried to have a little bit of a conversation with that student, but it was hard to really get through to him. He couldn't understand that Asian men would be

attractive to a pretty White woman. So, that was really a sad story to me."

In terms of how they responded to those incidents, Ryan mentioned he sometimes pushed back, and other times, he made it a teachable moment. Jessica mentioned her learning process of being able to catch those incidents and push back in a way to defend minorities.

Ryan, "If they ask me where am I really from? Sometimes, I would push back and try to make them feel uncomfortable about asking that question. But I think in my best days, I understand that's actually an opportunity for me to talk about who I am and then also make them realize that you know, they have a responsibility to understand their identity."

Jessica, "I'm a lot more intentional now to catch those things [note: racist incidents]… I'm learning more, and I'm getting more comfortable in expressing it to other people. I feel comfortable bringing this conversation even into my classroom… And I think post-2016, I've been more aware and more ready to respond in a way that is more defending minority cultures and people."

However, there was one incident that happened in the church they both worked at. It was challenging for them to navigate it due to their dual roles: life partners as well as coworkers. They still felt emotional during the interview.

Jessica, "During the pandemic, we were meeting over Zoom, and George Floyd had been murdered. And there were people in our session, including us, who were pushing to make a statement about racial justice. And there was one very vocal session member who said, 'racism isn't a thing anymore. We don't need to worry about this. Why are we making a big deal out of this?' That really triggered R is my experience at that moment…And he was just speaking of his own experience about racialized aggression that he's experienced. 'You can't tell me this is not an issue when this has happened to me here. We're both at the church but in our offices. I'm not even near him. It's over Zoom. I remember feeling so distressed at that moment. And it was this mix of emotions, both just really worried about R. Clearly, he is upset, and this is not okay, but also a little embarrassed because you don't usually lose your cool. And he had just lost his cool in front of a very significant group of people. And I didn't know how they would react. And I'm his wife. I'm like, what do I do now? Am I supposed to say something? Because he shut his camera off. He took a break after that. And that's been really hard."

Ryan, "It was interesting to me that even talking about it fills me with so much emotion, which makes me wonder, did we ever really talk it through?"

Jessica, "I don't remember. I think we talked about it. The fact that I just admitted right now that I was embarrassed by your reaction. I did not feel like I could tell you that in that moment, and nor probably should I have in that moment. I don't think I regret that. But it is interesting to reflect on this emotional experience that my own reaction might make things worse. So, in this way, I have to kind of step back for a moment so that I can be present to the person it actually deeply affected. I think we're still trying to figure out how to navigate the racism that we encounter at our church, which is small and in these weird ways, right?

Ryan, "I agree with that."

During COVID-19, they did not encounter any racist attacks or receive any racist comments. However, they were aware of the anti-Asian sentiment. They tried to hold more space for each other to process the pain, keep learning, and actively advocate racial justice for Asian Americans via various groups and organizations.

> **Ryan**, "I'm always watching a documentary or listening to their podcast or news about processing all of this [note: anti-Asian racism]… But I think we did definitely think deeper and more, and I appreciated Jessica holding space for me to process a lot of this, too... and then we were trying to get involved. I think we tried to join some different Asian American groups online. I started meeting with this one Asian American group that was against Asian hate and trying to do advocacy in that realm. So those are the different things I think that we got involved with at that time."
>
> **Jessica**, "We both sent each other news, articles, incidents that happened…There was a church group. They were looking to see how they could get churches to think more clearly about how churches can help Asian Americans, with some of the agents stopping Asian hate… that's kind of what I was trying to do was to see where I could maybe get my church or the places where I had some connection or some kind of influence to help them think more about this."

Besides getting involved in activist groups to fight for racial justice, they also intentionally supported Asian businesses in the way they could.

> **Ryan**, "We're very much like, let's go see the next Asian American movie. Let's go support Asian American media because this is why it's important to see us on screen to see us have complex, nuanced characters. We're not just stereotypes."
>
> **Jessica**, "When we heard that the Chinese area of town wasn't in business because they weren't getting enough business like the restaurants. We have a Chinese restaurant that we really like. So, I thought, well, let's just spend a little extra money and focus on going to this restaurant more than others to maybe help do business there and prop it up. So, we would call the order as long as they were open."

Given their shared passion for advocating for social justice and navigating racialized incidents over the course of their relationship, they believed it was definitely necessary to talk about race, racism and its impact with one another. Ryan emphasized racism is a reality and a systemic issue that needs to be addressed. Jessica expressed that she wanted to validate Ryan's lived experiences and identity, and talking about this hard topic was one of the ways.

> **Ryan**, "Definitely…we can't just live in a race-line society. And yet there's these awkward things that people say, 'oh, I don't mean to be racist, but…' it's because we don't know how to talk about it yet…the more we talk about it, the less of a problem it is, and the more opportunities we actually see. I think it's definitely exhausting, but it's a very important thing for us to do it right,

to address this issue, to advocate."

Ryan, "racism isn't just personal, but it's systemic. And so, to me, it's about, okay, we talk about it because we believe that there are better systems in our world that need transformation. How do you bring that about you? You can only bring that about if you talk about it… I'm thinking about racism three generations from now. Like, what's this gonna be like for my grandson?"

Jessica, "It's a big part of his life…it's his lived experience as well. He's still seeing it and feeling it. And I feel like if I ignore that or minimize it, then it's ignoring or minimizing who he is. So, I feel it's a really important thing to have that as a conversation and talk with him."

Regarding how they felt about talking about race-related topics with one another, they both felt those conversations brought them closer and strengthened the relationship. Ryan also added that being able to have a race-based conversation with Jessica made him feel this was a safe and comfortable relationship.

Ryan, "It definitely makes me feel less alone knowing that I could at least talk to J about things… I feel like I can have this closest relationship with J even though she's not also Asian or not a minority. It makes me feel like this is a safe relationship that we can be comfortable with."

Jessica, "I think if you're not having conversations about race with your partner in an interracial relationship, you can have a relationship…but that makes it hard to have a really deep relationship with your spouse if they don't have that space to share that part of who they are…. I think probably the more that you are able to have those conversations, and the more that you are able to share that side of yourself, the stronger your interracial relationship will become."

Moreover, during those talks and discussions about social justice issues, Jessica recalled a moment when she realized her white privilege in their relationship.

Jessica, "I remember saying something like, let's just take a break for a little while and he was like, yeah, cause you can, cause that's your privilege. You can just walk away and not think about it for a while…I think that was a really strong moment for me to realize that, for him to say that to me."

Growing up, neither of their parents had a sit-down race-based conversation with them. But Jessica recalled her parents showed through their actions what it looks like to be a "bridge builder." However, she wishes they could have a serious race-based conversation with her early on. Then, she would have learned how to dismantle whiteness sooner, avoided acting in a hurtful way out of ignorance, and become more helpful as a bridge builder.

Jessica, "I don't think my parents have those conversations directly with me. And in retrospect…I just saw them doing that and it was more of a show by your actions rather than by words… I know of a conversation my dad had with the church when we were just newlywed. The church was

> gonna merge. Some people were worried about the new church coming that had more Asian members, and they were worried about interracial relationships. My dad was really fired up about it…my mom ran a Catholic education class on the weekends or after school… that was a diverse little group that for 7 years, we would meet once a week, Thursday night in my living room. And usually, it was working through kind of moral conundrums. Read a little bit, usually some sort of Bible verse, and then talk about, okay, here's a scenario, what do you do? And my mom was one of the co-teachers. So, I took that to her like, yeah, you got to do something. You don't just look away."
>
> **Jessica**, "I think I appreciate all that my parents did. I think it took me some time to work through white privilege and what that means…I wish that I had known sooner. I can see times in my life when I acted in a hurtful way out of ignorance…I think after college, I look back and realize I could have been more useful in terms of that bridge building than I was."

Ryan remembered he struggled with both racial identity and how to handle racism growing up. He had lots of internal struggles with being Chinese American before college. His parents did not have the sense of what racial identity was to help him navigate the process.

> **Ryan**, "I definitely remember in high school struggling a lot with, am I American? Am I Asian? I never felt like I could really erase the Asian part. I can't say, oh, I'm just American; don't think of me as Asian at all… I was really embracing the Asian American part when I went to college…I started to feel special and good instead of marginalized and bad because the college I went to was 40 some percent Asian and it was a whole new world for me… I think before that, in high school, I had this ambivalent feeling about my Asianness. I didn't know what to do with it. I disliked it."
>
> **Ryan**, "My parents didn't have the words or the knowledge to know how to talk about that [note: racial identity] because for them, they're Chinese, and they know they're Chinese and they are immigrants. And for us, they expected, oh, you're going to be raised in American culture. And you'll be American because you'll speak English. So, for racial identity, they don't have a sense of that. And so that's been something I just had to try to figure out growing up."

Meanwhile, he did not feel he could talk to his parents about the racist incidents he had encountered either. The message he received from his parents was to ignore it. Later, he realized his parents had very different views from him about why racism happened and how to handle it. The differences were related to their different immigration status.

> **Ryan**, "My earliest memory at school is of being taunted for being Chinese when I was at preschool. I never told my parents all the times at school when that happened as I was growing up. I was made fun of for being Chinese, made fun of for my food. People would say all these things, pull their eyelids down, pretend they were speaking Chinese at me, ask me to speak Chinese, and then make fun of me."
>
> **Ryan**, "Don't complain, keep your head down, people are ignorant, and they say things about you, that's their problem, but you move on…it was like just kind of ignoring the reality of things. So, when racial injustice did happen, when there were microaggressions, there were no words

for it. It was just this unpleasant thing that you had to keep living with."

Ryan, "I think my parents said something to me like, of course there's racism. We're coming to this new place. Of course, there'll be racism. And to them, they take it as part of the experience that they will receive in a new country... And I realize that there's a difference because for them, as naturalized citizens, they expect that people will treat them differently and poorly because they're Chinese. But then they're also extremely proud of the fact that they have worked so hard and are able to claim citizenship and claim that they are Americans. Meanwhile, my generation was born here, and we feel as though we should be treated equally. We don't feel like we should be treated in racist ways because we've been raised with this premise that we are equal."

Additionally, Ryan recalled his parent's and relatives' anti-black racist comments over the years and felt the need to have race-based conversations with his parents and relatives to raise their racial awareness. But it seemed going to be very hard.

Ryan, "When he [note: his uncle] drove us around, I remember him telling my sister and me, 'This is the black neighborhood. And look at how bad the neighborhood is, and you need to avoid these types of people and this type of place'...They also would bring up little things with me that I don't wanna press, but I'm also like, wow, I need to have that conversation with my parents. I needed to have a reverse talk with my parents because they would say things like, 'Oh, black people are just complaining too much.'…And so, it's been really hard for me to actually process this because I know I need a lot more time and patience and vocabulary to talk to my parents about these issues."

When it came to having race-based conversations with their children, they both agreed it was essential to have such conversations for multiple purposes: a) to embrace their biracial identity; b) to understand the racialized structure and handle racism; c) to advocate for marginalized populations.

Ryan, "I think we've been trying to be mindful of how to raise our kids so that they can talk about that [note: racial identity]…Our kids are biracial. So, there's something that neither of us know or understand… They're probably gonna get a lot of this. What are you? What's your background? Where do your parents come from? People are going to look at them and wonder…So yeah, for them, being biracial, they're gonna have to figure out identity-wise how to function in the U.S. and the world."

Jessica, "The fact of the world still sees race, there are racists, you know, a whole world with complicated and complex racial history… I want our children to be equipped to navigate stuff and to not feel like they're crazy, like, because I'm just unlucky that I run into folks who are constantly rude… I want them to feel empowered, they can navigate those things successfully, and they can recognize this isn't about you…The goal would then be, you know, to kind of figure out, okay, is this an unsafe situation where I need to remove myself to find safety, or is this something where education, you know, informing somebody else might be helpful."

Ryan, "They should also advocate for those who are more victimized or marginalized… I think, for us,

> we care more about them becoming kind and compassionate people than getting good grades, succeeding and making money, or anything like that. We want them to be citizens of the world and to recognize that everybody is equally valuable, no matter who they are."

Moving forward as an interracial couple in America, they shared insights into how being in an interracial relationship has contributed to their social justice work (e.g., having an insider's perspective, forming allies, etc.) and self-growth. Ryan mentioned Jessica's journey made him feel the "hope." Jessica emphasized how having this close relationship with Ryan has changed her perspective regarding racial justice in a way that reading a book cannot.

> **Ryan**, "And I think it's been really helpful to ask her about things that I don't understand. Why would White people think this? So it's helpful to have someone who can really take that position and explain it to me from an insider perspective. Even though I feel like I do understand a lot of why White people would think or say or do the things that they do. It's still helpful to have that insight… There are certain friends that we have in common. Maybe some will listen more to me and some people would listen to Jessica more. And so, it's helpful to have each other work together on this. So, when I think about her as an ally, I just think of it a lot more as a partnership because we're able to both care a lot about this."
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> **Ryan**, "Being married to a White person and knowing that like I love her and I can see her journey and her growth. That gives me a lot of hope for other White people because that's how change happens through personal relationships and conversations over time… modeling what could happen in the rest of society if we have people in our lives who are close to us, who are of a different race that we can help each other."
>
> **Jessica**, "I think just because I cared so much about Ryan that I wanted it to take on as much of his perspective and reality as I could… I wanted to really understand him so that I could love him as best as I could. And I think that's what it meant for us was that I understood this racial, this other racism, racial side of things."
>
> **Jessica**, "I think definitely being married to R, and listening to his and seeing how he's treated sometimes and hearing his stories has been really big for my understanding and growth and seeing what the world is like…I think I've learned a lot in terms of racial justice and race issues. And I've learned it from a lot of other sources, but then it always kind of comes back to us…If only we all could have this strong of a bond with someone that's totally different from us because it does change you in a way that reading a book can't. And I think that's really the genuineness. There's a lot of talk right now about LGBTQ acceptance from older people and how that's shifted in large part because there are so many people that know someone that they dearly love is LGBTQ. And that totally shifts the perspective, like you're not going to other someone that you're so close to."

In brief, Jessica and Ryan were both passionate about advocating for social justice, which is one of the reasons they stated that they were attracted to one another in the first place. Over the years they actively practice social justice through their work and daily lives. Navigating racialized

incidents together and doing social justice work side by side has formed a deep bond between them.

Structural Analysis

A structural analysis was utilized to analyze one particular couples' interaction when they talked about race-related topics (Gee, 1991). Structural analysis has the advantage of attending to the structure of narratives, and in this instance, I used it to illuminate and understand this couple's unique communicating dynamics when they talked about race. As previously mentioned, I specifically used structural analysis to enrich the thematic understanding of diverse couples' experiences. That is, how communicating about race causes conflicts and stress in the relationship when a couple is not on the same page in perceiving and handling race-related issues. This kind of interaction was different from the other seven couples who were on the same page regarding race-related topics. Moreover, this couple's uniqueness in communicating about race-related topics may inform couple interventions to help couples engage in constructive conversations over race-related topics.

Representational Decisions

Dong Mei is the pseudonym for the Chinese American woman partner. For this narrative, I chose to use a Chinese pseudonym instead of an English one because the Chinese American partner used a Chinese first name with two syllables. She did not report any difficulties for Americans in pronouncing her name. Thus, I chose "Dong Mei" from the popular "Chinese names" (Hu, Sept. 2023) since it was a two-syllable common Chinese first name and easy to pronounce for English speakers. Andrew represented the White Euro-American male partner. The pseudonym "Andrew" was picked from the "Popular names of the period 1990s" (Social Security Administration, 2023). In regard to occupation, I chose to leave these broad for both

Dong Mei and Andrew to maximize confidentiality. Specifically, Andrew's occupation in the narrative is described as an engineer. He has also enrolled in a Computer Science program in the evening since both his occupation and night school have become part of their argument. I kept consistent with the interviewee Dong Mei's status as a first-generation Chinese American since her stories clearly show her immigration status.

Background information

Dong Mei (i.e., Chinese American female) and Andrew (White Euro-American male) have been married for around 10 years and have one child. Andrew is an engineer in a large engineering company and is enrolled in a computer science program at night. Dong Mei studied at an American university as an international student. Thus, she is a first-generation Chinese American (i.e., born and raised in China and migrated to the U.S. as an adult). At the time of the interview, Dong Mei had just started her career as a professor of humanities at a university. During the interviews, Dong Mei and Andrew argued over race-related topics, such as whether an incident was racist or not and whether it was necessary to talk about race-related topics.

The Resulting of Structural Analysis

The following structural analysis includes two parts. By attending to an example, an analogy, and a specific concept the speakers use, part one analyzes the process and highlights that racial privilege may play a role in their arguments. Part two focuses on the interview process to underscore a possible ethical challenge when conducting research with marginalized populations and facilitate a discussion regarding the role of an interviewer in navigating couple dynamics during the dyadic interview.

Stanzas in blue front, refers to a language unit that deals with a unitary topic or perspective that appears to have been planned together (Gee, 1991). Stanzas displays my coding

process by highlighting the interaction process and patterns. In each of the following acts, I illustrated stanzas first to give readers a structure of the conversational process followed by the corresponding excerpts.

Part 1: Conflicting communication process

In the following sections, I chose four acts or instances that occurred during interviews with Dong Mei and Andrew to unfold the impact of racial privilege in their couple relationships. Each Act is composed of scenes (or dialogue between Dong Mei, Andrew, and I) broken apart by summary and stanzas, which describe and foreground what happened in the scene. Act 1 has four scenes which illustrate how this couple used the same example repeatedly to argue about whether the question "do-you-work?" was a racist-implied question or not, and how they interpreted this question and similar situations as a couple. Act 2 includes a specific word Andrew used to dismiss Dong Mei's experiences. Act 3 includes an analogy to illustrate the argument process further. Act 4 shows how I pointed out the root of their argument by citing the literature regarding power differences attached to racial privileges and marginalization.

Act 1 "Do you work?" —Scene 1

The following exchange illustrates the first time Dong Mei and Andrew argued over the do-you-work example. The example in this first scene may represent many similar situations where they argued whether a certain situation was racism-related or not.

> **Yabin:** If I understand you correctly, Dong Mei, you feel frustrated. You really want Andrew to learn because this is part of your identity.
> **Dong Mei:** yeah, because I navigate my life as a person of color in the United States, and Andrew needs to acknowledge that.
> **Yabin:** What does it look like if he could acknowledge that?

Stanza: Dong Mei brings up the "Do you work?" example for the first time to make a point: she considers it a racist question because it contains a biased assumption: an Asian woman is married to a White man and depends on him financially. She still feels "mad" being marginalized by that woman when she talked about the example at that moment in the interview.

Dong Mei: Just one example we were at some kind of Computer Science social program. And there was this White woman that don't know anything about us, except that we're a couple. And Andrew in the Computer Science program. And she came up to us and she talked to Andrew first and said, oh, "Where do you work?" And Andrew said XXX. And then right after that, she turned to me and said, how about you? Do you work? Seriously? The only thing she saw, she knew about us was we're married. We're a couple. And I was very mad. I'm still quite mad like thinking about that right now, and I talked to Andrew about it, and he didn't even acknowledge like he just dismissed me. I don't even remember what you said, but you said oh, maybe she's …

Stanza: Andrew uses humor to deflect Dong Mei's point.

Andrew: My response was "do you work? because you were a Ph.D. student.

Yabin: I see, you tried to joke around.

Stanza: Dong Mei feels dismissed at that moment when Andrew uses humor to argue that it is not a racist question. Then, she tries to tell Andrew how she expects him to respond in that situation: she wants Andrew to see through her eyes to consider it as a racist-implied question and stand up for her. In the end, she emphasizes how she feels "more invisible" after she shares her frustration with Andrew, but he does not perceive it as a racist question nor validate her feelings. The pain is clearly there in her narratives with highlighted words, "belittled," "dismissed," "invisible."

Dong Mei: See? He just dismisses me like that. But in the ideal world, if he was more racially aware, like he would, he could have brought it up like in the moment he could have advocated for me in that moment, and asked the woman: oh, what do you mean by that? Why did you ask that? Yes, she does work like, you know, something like that, not even like, you know, like confrontational like that. But he could have said something like to advocate for me. but I just felt like that woman made me feel like invisible and belittled. I do have an income. I do work, but like I feel belittled, but like talking to Andrew about it, just how she sees me as an Asian woman married to a White man, and you know all these things. And all these assumptions that she had. You know, she asked us two completely different questions in the same scenario. Instead of advocating for me, or even addressing that it was racially related

after the incident. After I brought it up and talked to him about my frustration, he just dismissed it. So, I feel even more invisible and belittled because of that.

Stanza: Andrew argues about why he does not perceive it as a racist question. He believes that Dong Mei considers it a racist question because she assumes there is a racist-implied assumption behind that question without checking with that woman. Dong Mei explains that the racist-assumption is implied in the question by asking her a yes/no question (i.e., do you work?) compared to asking Andrew an open-ended question (i.e., where do you work?)

Andrew: But you didn't ever check her assumptions or ask her about anything.

Dong Mei: I should have, in that moment, I should have been like, what do you mean by that? Because if you think about the question, like, we talk about critical discourse. She asked you, where do you work? And she asked that with the assumption that you have a job, and you work somewhere. But then she turned to me 30 seconds later and asked, Do you work? And she asked that with this assumption that don't work. Because instead of where do I work? She asked a yes or no question.

Act 1 "Do you work?" —Scene 2

In Scene 2, the do-you-work example is discussed in terms of how to move forward in situations like do-you-work. Specifically, Andrew suggests moving on while Dong Mei still feels the pain and emphasizes her expectations of Andrew's learning of social justice materials to be able not to dismiss her.

Stanza: I include my question because I was checking their at-the-moment feelings and thoughts when they were talking about the do-you-work example to see if re-living the story may trigger new thoughts or feelings to deepen their narratives. I include this because this opened up the additional conversation.

Yabin: So we are talking about this today. Do you feel anything different? You wanted to change what you think, or do you have more thoughts about this by now?

Stanza: Andrew responds by suggesting "move on" since it happened a long time ago. His comment immediately triggers Dong Mei's feeling of "being dismissed" and "not

acknowledged." She points out that the do-you-work example was one of countless examples where she feels "belittled" and "invisible" by Andrew when he could not see her reality or validate her feelings. In the end, she emphasizes that she wants Andrew to learn about racial justice materials and raise his racial awareness in order to enable him to understand her experiences.

> **Andrew**: You can go, all right, you wanna me to go? Okay, I can go. My thought is, it happened so long in the past that it doesn't even matter anymore. So just move on.
> **Dong Mei:** Wow! Can I respond to?
> **Andrew**: No, that's my, that's my answer.
> **Dong Mei:** So, I don't want to agree with your answers. Respond to your question, Yabin. I feel, obviously, I still feel the same about this situation, and there's countless situations like this. And like, and you know, like these things build up, right? Like, the anger, the belittling, the invisibility of me with a White man, like, it builds up, and like even now recounting this experience, it still makes me very mad, and like I feel like my blood pressure went up, or something like, and like this, like, you know, Andrew just says, just move on. It's like, continuing, I feel continuing being dismissed, and not acknowledged. and that's why it goes back to Andrew needs to continue to learn and learn and acknowledge race and not be colorblind. Which was the point I made in the very beginning.

Act 1 "Do you work?" —Scene 3

In Scene 3, the do-you-work example is used in this scene to illustrate the continued tension regarding whether they should consider other reasons besides race in interpreting certain situations; and, if race plays a role, how much the role of race may play in that situation.

Stanza: Again, here I include my prompting as I aim to explore some resources to reduce the tension whenever they talk about race-related topics.

> **Yabin:** so, based on the story you shared, what do you think you need that could help you navigate the race-based conversation with your partner?

Stanza: Andrew uses the do-you-work example to illustrate that he wants Dong Mei to consider that there could be various interpretations of that question other than race-based interpretations only.

> **Andrew**: I think for me, what I would want from Dong Mei to better navigate race-based

conversations is for her to kind of take into account why something happened for more than just racial reasons. For example, I think we talked about this before, like the Computer Science lady asking me where do I work? And asking Dong Mei if she works. Dong Mei took that as a racial attack. But I saw many other ways. You know, I'm in an evening Computer Science program and I have a job. And that's a common question that Computer Science students ask each other. One, she doesn't know Dong Mei. And she doesn't know if she's working or not, or anything about. So, there are many other reasons that things could happen. And I feel like Dong Mei only focuses on the race.

Stanza: Dong Mei argues that there could be various explanations, but race is the "salient" one.

Dong Mei: I still think it's race-based, like, do you think she would ask if it was Claire [Note: use a pseudonym] which is a woman. Do you think she would ask Clair's husband? Clair is Andrew's classmate, if he works?

Andrew: It doesn't matter.

Dong Mei: It matters. but it's totally race and gender-based.

Andrew: So this is my point. This is exactly what I would want from Dong Mei, a kind of acknowledge…

Dong Mei: No, I acknowledge other reasons you're pointing out.

Andrew: But you say no to me every single time.

Dong Mei: but I guess the most salient reason is race-based. That's what I'm saying. Obviously, she doesn't know anything about me, if I work, and all those things. But she knows that I'm an Asian woman. And she knows that you're my husband. So, she made an assumption based on that.

Stanza: the tension continues; Andrew continues emphasizing there is more than just race to interpret the do-you-work question. Dong Mei argues that Andrew should consider reasons other than neutral ones. Then, she starts joking about using a spreadsheet to consider all the reasons to lighten the mood.

Andrew: so, there's assumptions that are more than just…

Dong Mei: It's totally race-based.

Andrew: There's more than just…but see? So this is my point. And then my answer to that question.

Dong Mei: I guess, Yabin you ask asking, what can your partner do to help you navigate it? sorry! I misunderstood your question. I thought your question was what resources would be helpful to help you navigate it with your partner?

Yabin: That is the next question I wanted to ask. What do you think you can do? And also your partner can do to make this the conversation a little bit easier for both of you

Dong Mei: I think, like along the lines of what Andrew said. I would also like him to consider reasons that are related to race other than the other neutral reasons that he thinks. We should make a spreadsheet next time something happens: possible reasons why this person said this thing that made you mad. and then you'll know you'll realize.

Act 1 "Do you work?" —Scene 4

In Scene 4, the do-you-work example is used in this scene by Dong Mei to reclaim her point: Andrew needs to learn about social justice materials in order to understand why it was a racist-implied question.

Stanza: Dong Mei circles back to the do-you-work example and restates she expects Andrew to understand it is a racist-implied question and stand up for her.

Dong Mei: but even like in that situation, like, for example, the Computer Science situation. You are the White man in this situation. and I'm your wife. If, you know, if you were a co-conspirator like, if you were advocating for me, using your privileges, you would shut her down or say something to her. But at that moment you didn't say anything. and I was just caught in a moment, neither, nor I didn't say anything. I didn't stand up for myself, either. but it would make me feel so much better if you knew you stood up for me in that moment.

Stanza: Andrew immediately responds that he does not "catch" it. Meaning he does not perceive it as a racist-implied question. Dong Mei immediately points out that is why he needs to learn and raise his racial awareness so that he could "catch" it.

Andrew: Maybe I didn't catch it either.
Dong Mei: So that's why you should catch it. Because I caught it.
Andrew: We have different lenses in that.
Dong Mei: If you caught it. If you understand racial stuff I'm going through, you could have stood up for me in that moment using your privileges. That's all I'm trying to say. like trying to get at. Does that make sense, Yabin?
Andrew: you can't just say a billion words. And say, does that make sense?
Dong Mei: (Laugh)
Yabin: You want Andrew to be more …
Dong Mei: Just be more aware.
Yabin: If he could learn more and he could raise his awareness, he could be more sensitive in that situation. That will make you feel more supported and validated?

Stanza: Dong Mei's frustration is implied in her narrative by emphasizing how much effort she has been making to try to "convince" Andrew about what she perceives.

Dong Mei: Yeah, I'm trying to get at like, that's all I want as opposed to having to even convince him that woman's question was racist, and spending so much time trying to convince him.

Act 2 "Self-inflicted" pain.

In the second act, the argument between Andrew and Dong Mei is about "self-inflicted pain" versus increased racial awareness that led to more acknowledgeable racialized experiences. This argument builds on Act 1 to further pull apart the "do-you-work" example.

Stanza: Andrew uses the term "self-inflicted" pain to describe how Dong Mei considers a certain incident is racist and puts all those pains on herself while she could just move on. Dong Mei argues that is her lived experiences she is living in.

Andrew: I think my frustration comes from…There's a lot of… I feel like it's a lot of self-inflicted pain. And I don't understand why you're hurting yourself. In my mind, you're kind of putting this pain on yourself. The story of the woman who asked her, does she work? And she asked me, where do I work? That was a long time ago, and you could just, you're still kind of self-inflicting the pain. You're remembering it, and it's painful. So just move on. And that's where my frustration comes, like, a lot of this, like Dong Mei is scared of getting shot while she pulls up to a stop by like. In my mind that's not something you should ever worry about that because you can't really control. So just like I think it's self-inflicted, and I don't. That's where I don't, don't want to, I don't self-inflict. So, I don't self-inflict any pain on my. But Dong Mei self-inflicts a lot of pain because of those racial stories.

Dong Mei: But we have to be more like what I mentioned. You know, in the beginning of our relationship I had a romanticized version of America, too. You know it's harmoniously diverse. That's why his friends made those comments [note: would you like to order some orange chicken? Does her eyelids pull up or down?]. I just genuinely thought it was funny. But now, but because I grow, and I'm more so socially and racially aware now. yeah, I feel those things. So, in some ways, yeah, it is self-inflicted. But in other ways, it is a reality that I have to navigate.

Stanza: Andrew brings up the same example to illustrate how he perceives Dong Mei's racialized experiences as self-inflicted pain because she has not "navigated" it.

Andrew: So, you haven't navigated the do- you-work story yet?
Dong Mei: What?
Andrew: You just said you're self-inflicting because you haven't navigated.

Stanza: Dong Mei explains that she understood situations like do-you-work are racist-implied situations now because she has grown and raised her racial awareness compared to how she was colorblind before.

Dong Mei: I'm saying, it's my reality that I live in. I'm just more aware of it now, as opposed to before. So obviously I'm feeling these things more now as opposed to before.

Act 3: An analogy and reached out to Mandarin.

In the third act, the argument continues. It focuses on whether Andrew should learn about social justice materials and why. Andrew uses an analogy to illustrate how he feels Dong Mei asks him to learn social justice while he does not ask Dong Mei to learn thermodynamics. Dong Mei uses Mandarin at one point to clarify her point that racial issues are her lived experiences and social justice is not comparable to thermodynamics.

Stanza: Andrew feels like he is being taught as a student about social justice. To make his point clear, he uses his engineering background to compare to Dong Mei's social justice work to make a point: he does not come home and teach Dong Mei about engineering. So, Dong Mei should not come home to teach him about social justice.

Andrew: and so, for example, Dong Mei is bringing it home or Dong Mei's other friend is bringing what she learned home and trying to, I think, like, teach, or you know, or give it to the partner. But, I'm wondering what if you reverse this? So, for example, I work in the energy industry. What if I bring home the stuff I learned from school and portray it on Dong Mei, why don't you know how our refrigerator works.

Dong Mei: I do know. I learned it in high school.

Andrew: So, stuff like this, right? You turn a light on you get the electricity. To me, there's like, are you coming at me because of your lived experiences, or you're coming at me because you learned it in school. I could come to you how does all this stuff work. But I don't think you would like that, either.

Stanza: This is a very hard moment for Dong Mei since she literally could not find equivalent English words to describe how she disagrees with Andrew's comparison and how those two are not comparable. She reaches out to Mandarin. Later on, when I reflected, a better expression could be: you can't compare oranges to apples.

Dong Mei: I think you get a little mixed up I don't know how to say in English, in Mandarin, it's 混淆视听

Yabin: Let me translate it first. What Dong Mei just said is what you just said can mask the reality.

Andrew: It's half of the reality.

Dong Mei: You are 偷换概念 [note: meaning that's not what I said. You took it a wrong way.]

Andrew: It's just because racism is a big topic. It's the same, like, energy is also a big topic.

Dong Mei: But racism is also a big topic. Right?

Yabin: let me ask you this way, Andrew, who do you see her when she is talking about social justice researcher? Your wife? Or…?

Andrew: I see her as a social justice researcher.

Stanza: Dong Mei makes her point very clear this time: social justice work is not comparable to thermodynamics. She argues that although social justice work is the core of her scholarship, racial justice issues are her lived experiences. Thus, she is sharing her lived experiences with him rather than teaching him what she learned from her work.

Dong Mei: Well, I think that's what is not clicking, because, first of all, yes, I am learning these things in school and through my research. But they are the reality of my life and people around me. It's a reality. So, it's not like I'm just talking to you about what's in a book. I'm talking to you about real life and things people are experiencing. And second of all, like, you know, you compare energy and all those things to social justice and race. But I don't think it's comparable. Yes, it's what you study, and it's what I study. and yes, they're both concepts in our lives. But because you're a White person you have to learn your positionality in terms of race to navigate your life in this world. Does that make sense? Does that make sense, Yabin?

Andrew: No

Yabin: I actually understand. I guess this is the part, Andrew, may make you feel a little bit uncomfortable. I understand her, I also agree with her. This is her lived experience. This is something that already happened, and it may happen in the future. So there is fear and also anger.

Dong Mei: Yeah, and you can't equate race with thermodynamics.

Act 4: racial privilege conversion is upfront.

In Act 4, I turn to my own responses to Dong Mei and Andrew. During the interviews, while I was witnessing their arguments, I recalled the literature about how racial privilege can cause conflicts (Killian, 2013). Thus, I bring it up to try to validate that conflict is normal for many interracial relationships. It seems like a little intervention. However, it does not stop them from continuing to argue.

Stanza: I point out the possibility that racial privileges might play a role in their argument.

Yabin: Power dynamics sometimes can influence couple relationships. Actually, you mentioned the several examples about that. You want Andrew to learn his privileges because you want

him to understand and better validate you. He can choose not to and that will not influence his life.

Dong Mei: I guess that is a privilege in our relationship. He doesn't have to acknowledge it.

Stanza: I bring up the literature regarding how race-related disagreement can cause tensions in couple relations to back up my claim and soften the offensiveness.

Yabin: There is literature pointed out the White partner has the choice to choose to be the ally to understand and advocate for racial minority. If they don't, their life will not be affected. But for racial minority partner, they just cannot "opt out."

Stanza: they both agree with the claim.

Andrew: That's a good point.

Dong Mei: Yeah. When you were talking about privilege, I was more thinking like, do I think Andrew has more power over me because he's White, and I'm Asian. And personally, I don't think that. But now that you explain it with an example, I think it makes sense like. He has the choice of being upset or not. But I don't have a choice.

Stanza: Argument continues with an impasse.

Andrew: You have a choice.

Dong Mei: I don't.

Part 2: The interview process

This second part of the structural analysis focuses on the interview process with this couple to enhance the reflexivity process of *my* conduct as an interviewer/researcher. I highlighted two acts during the interviews. One was about how I perpetuated Dong Mei's marginalized experiences without awareness and the power of apology; the other was about how I thought about my role as an interviewer/researcher when I interact with this couple.

In the first act, I realized I may perpetuate Dong Mei's marginalized experiences through my push, such as asking her directly, "What was your point?" I was so focused on the point she was trying to make but ignored how hard she was trying to make her point, given race is such a hard and complex topic to cover. Also, I put the explanation/education burden on Dong Mei. For instance, although it might make sense for data collection purposes to ask Dong Mei to explain why she thought it was so important for Andrew to raise racial awareness, it could perpetuate the

educational burden that minorities usually feel: the minority has to be the one who takes the responsibility of educating or explaining to others (Bettez, 2012). Thus, it makes me wonder how to conduct social justice-oriented research and work with marginalized populations without marginalizing them again.

In the second act, I use four scenes/excerpts to display my various responses to highlight my struggles in figuring out where I should stand ethically during the interview. The purpose of displaying this process is to inform the future dyadic couple interviews as a way to collect dyadic data.

Act 1: The push. In the following, I chose four excerpts, including three examples of how I pushed Dong Mei and the apology I made to Dong Mei. By showing those four examples, I illustrated how sometimes a researcher can perpetuate participants' marginalized experiences without awareness. In highlighting this, I emphasize how important it is to reflect on one's research behaviors along the way and be able to admit the wrongdoing and make an apology and practice restorative behaviors to reduce the harm. The color pink was used to highlight the process of pushing. Again, stanzas are in blue.

Act 1: Go in tangent —Scene 1

This is the first time I pushed Dong Mei when she described her racial awareness process and why she wanted Andrew to raise racial awareness. The analysis process displays how hard she tries to illustrate such a difficult topic while I am pushing her, and all Andrew heard is she is emotional and angry.

> **Yabin**: Dong Mei, I know you just hold some thoughts. Now please share your thoughts and comments.

Stanza: First, Dong Mei starts explaining that U.S. racial structure can play a role in one's success and unsuccess; and what privileges, including racial privileges, she wants Andrew to raise his awareness.

> **Dong Mei**: so, from my perspective, you know, we have had multiple conversations about this, and from my perspective I try to explain to Andrew, like I try to help him understand his white privilege, and do better. Andrew is a great, nice person. but you know it's like colorblindness Midwesterner. You know what I'm saying like you're the same nice as everyone. Obviously, we have to be nice and kind to everyone but it. But you have to be more aware of the racial fabric of the United States, and how that contributes to your success or unsuccess, like we've had this conversation multiple times like because you're a White male, able body, cisgender, heterosexual, like all these, all these identities and experiences intersect. Yes, you can work hard, and you, working hard leads you to success.

Stanza: Dong Mei goes on to concretely describe the impact of privileges and marginalization by citing her own experiences of intersectionality: how she has been marginalized because she is an Asian, international, and a woman. She also uses a recent example to explain the impact of marginalization: even if she succeeded, her success was easily ignored.

> But other people they may have to work harder, like to reach that part, like for me, you know, as an Asian woman, international student, and also like married to a White man, like, I have to work way harder like, prove that I can do what I can do like.
> And now, you even see it with your own eyes, Andrew, like even now that I've earned my doctorate degree. People, faculty and my department still refuse to call me doctor, and they're just surprised that I have a job. And I was the only one that got a tenure track job in my graduating cohort this year like these are real life examples. How much harder I have to work to prove that I can do it, and even when I did it, people don't acknowledge it. but like, and you know it was even funnier, like even when I earned this doctoral degree, you know, when I defended my dissertation, found my job, instead of saying congratulations Dong Mei, they say congratulations, Andrew and Dong Mei. Obviously, Andrew supported me through all this. but if Andrew found a job, would they say congratulations Andrew and Dong Mei? No, they would say, congratulations, Andrew. Those are not even like systemic, larger societal examples of White male privilege. These are things that are really happening in our relationship.

Stanza: Dong Mei gives another example regarding why the low-ranking schools are usually in a certain neighborhood with mostly black and brown people. Her point is that the unequal power and resource distribution that are attached to different races is the systemic reason behind the ranking. She becomes more and more emotional and speaks faster and faster.

But like going back to your company example, like affirmative action, exists for a reason like, Even with our house hunting experiences, there's a reason why the higher-ranking schools are all Asian and White, and then the lower ranking schools are all in XXX, with mostly black and brown people. There's a reason.
It's like redlining, it's the resources, the resources these schools can get, the students, like all those things that are contributing to it. You think naturally Asians and White people are successful and naturally smart? No, like everyone has the same DNA.
It's just society that's shaping our thinking, the study that like maybe, you know, like we have, for example, like you know, we can move to a community with more Asian and White people with better grades.
So our kids can get a better education because we have 9 to 5 jobs. We can spend time with our kids. We have money that can afford them to go to school, and they have this financial stability where they can do extracurricular stuff. They can learn how to cope. But these kids in in in the inner city, like their parents, may have to work multiple jobs. They may have siblings. They have to take care of their siblings. They might have to sleep during the day, because it in school, because they, like

Stanza: Following Dong Mei sharing this example, I push her to focus on her own experiences and point.

Yabin: I may need to direct you to your own experience.

Stanza: Dong Mei explains to me and Andrew by stating that she lists all those examples in order for Andrew to think bigger and systemically to better understand racial stratification and its impact.

Dong Mei: No no no, but Yabin. I talk about other people all these things because I think Andrew needs to think bigger than just his personal experiences, like he needs to think more systemically, because yeah, obviously, we all receive oppression one way or another. But we need to think more systemically about how, you know, the society, how history shapes our society nowadays, and then do better in our own work, like in our research or, you know, I don't know what your engineering stuff like do better to help those underserved communities.

Yabin: you have a comment, Andrew? You go ahead and I have one follow question, for Dong Mei.

Stanza: After Dong Mei's passionate explanation, all Andrew heard is Dong Mei gets emotional and angry and does not want to engage in more conversations.

Andrew: My comment is this is a good example of how this conversation goes. Dong Mei gets emotional and angry.

Dong Mei: and because I care.

Andrew: then I just sit here, and then I that I don't want to continue the conversation. That's kind

of how the conversations go. You saw Dong Mei kind of go on this tangent.

Dong Mei: But do you agree with what I'm saying?

Andrew: But I don't, it's not. I don't know.

Act 1: Clarify – Scene 2

In this scene, I pushed Dong Mei for the second time to clarify why it was so important for her to want Andrew, her partner, to learn social justice materials and raise his racial awareness since she had emphasized several times throughout the interviews.

Stanza: This excerpt happens right after Dong Mei shares her racial awareness process and how she wants Andrew to raise his racial awareness too. I am checking to see the moment-to-moment thoughts and feelings.

Yabin: Dong Mei, you talk about a lot of things in the last 5 min, actually. How are you feeling when you talk about those things, and Andrew when you're hearing about this, how does that make you feel?

Stanza: Dong Mei first shares her frustrations that Andrew does not listen to her regarding race-related topics. Then, she emphasizes that there were multiple ways that Andrew could learn and raise his racial awareness, such as watching documentaries and reading books.

Dong Mei: Well, I can go first I feel frustrated because Andrew's not listening to me. He's just trying to use numbers and be like, yeah, one black person, one Hispanic person. I'm not trying to mock you (Hahaha), but. I feel like Andrew needs to like, I just feel frustrated because he's not. He's hearing me, but he's not listening to me.

And I think Andrew has a lot of learning to do, like, we all have a lot of learning to do better, and a lot of times, you know, in my research, my work, I really preach what I say. You know in my research, I help those that are underserved like, and we do that, too, you know, with our mentoring together, we mentor a robotics team together. and on that team it's mostly black and brown kids, and like, I mean, we are doing stuff like we are… (note: the narrator paused)

It's just frustrating to me that Andrew doesn't want to learn about it, you know. He's just sitting here like he could go read more. He could go watch documentaries, whatever he could, do a lot of things to learn, and he's not.

Stanza: At that moment, I am looking for an answer, but I still haven't heard it. So, I push Dong Mei to explain why it is so important for Andrew, as her partner, to learn.

Yabin: why this is so important for Andrew to learn?

Stanza: Dong Mei answers my push by describing how she feels belittled for what she preaches and the efforts she has made in conducting social justice work when Andrew does not believe in or understand social justice work. When I reflect, I realize she was talking about how part of her identity was not validated by her husband and how much she wanted Andrew to raise his racial awareness in order to understand that part of her.

Dong Mei: Why? Isn't it? Because it's what I do. It's my research, what I do. So how, what does it make you feel like a researcher. I think ethical research like because I like my study, my work, and just my whole career in the future. It centers around race and intersectionality and gender, and all these things, and that. What does it make me feel like when I say all these things in the work that I do. And then I come home, and my White husband, nothing wrong with you being White. But my White husband doesn't believe anything you do like it really belittles what I do, and it makes me really sad and frustrated sometimes.

Stanza: Andrew states that he does not perceive doing social justice work as part of Dong Mei's lived experiences and identity. Instead, he believes it is just the core of her scholarship.

Andrew: Yabin, I mean, I think that's a big component. A huge component of this is, this is what Dong Mei does, this is the field she's in, and the research that she does with regards to race and stuff, and that's why she sees it, and that's why she experiences it and cares about it a lot more than I do.

Stanza: Dong Mei argues that is her lived experiences, not only her work.

Dong Mei: But you have to care about it because we experience it together.

Act 1: Get to the point —Scene 3

The topic of this third scene is about why Dong Mei and Andrew chose a racially diverse school for their child. I and Andrew both pushed Dong Mei twice to make a point.

Stanza: After I asked why, Andrew laughed. Sounds like, see? Got you, Yabin wants you to explain why you care about racial diversity so much too.

Dong Mei: We're still looking, but when we look at a new house, the first thing I look at is the racial makeup of the of the school.

Yabin: Why?
Andrew: Hahaha

Stanza: Dong Mei starts describing the reason from a systemic perspective, and she is very aware she is trying to make a point. She is also aware that I want to hear her point. So, she tries to hint me to be patient with her.

Dong Mei: (laugh) I think it honestly, it's scared me, like, you know, White people, because again, it's not a personal attack. It's a systemic issue because of the colonizing history of the United States and the slavery. history, again informs our present-day system. I'm getting to a point Yabin about us.
Yabin: Okay
Dong Mei: so that informs the current system where White people are socialized into thinking that they're the norm. and that there is socialized into thinking that race doesn't have to exist, like, we just live in a harmoniously diverse place where there's no racial discrimination. Everyone's nice to each other like, it's like a whole every part of the society, the world we navigate fits into that narrative. So it's a socialization.

Stanza: Andrew and I both push Dong Mei but in a different way. Andrew pushes her directly. I push her by asking the question again. Dong Mei stands up for herself and pushes us back.

Andrew: You need to get to the point.
Dong Mei: So, Andrew socialized into thinking that, because again, like when I mentioned, he grew up in a predominantly white suburb.
Yabin: So, Dong Mei, my question is why you specifically wanted to choose a racially diverse the school for your children.
Andrew: Get to it.
Dong Mei: Stop that. I'm getting to it in my next sentence. So it really so, because of you know all the things that all the tensions that we navigate, like, what you saw, you know, just Andrew, not understanding, like, me trying to tell him, and he still sort of understands, but doesn't understand and doesn't try to understand, like, I don't want my kids to have that, like, I want my kids to grow up around diverse people and be exposed to diverse thoughts, and have, you know, decide on their own what they want to think. Because I don't want my kids to be socialized again into that white dominant norm. So that's why I want my kids to go to a more racially diverse school where they can be exposed to everyone, and where we can be exposed to everyone. And not only that, like I feel safer when I'm around people of color as opposed to all White people.

Act 1: The apology —Scene 4

In the final scene of Act 1, I initiate an apology to reduce the damage at the beginning of the second interview with this couple.

Yabin: Dong Mei, I think I owe you an apology!
Dong Mei: No, you don't.

Stanza: I share my reflecting process to let Dong Mei know where I come from and why I think it is necessary to make an apology with the hope that if there is damage, the apology could fix some of the damage.

Yabin: I do. After the interview, I discussed it with my co-advisor. I told her. I think I did something wrong in my interview. I think I jumped in and asked, what point did you try to make when you were trying so hard to make a point. I am so sorry I cut you out. Later, when I reflected on it, I realized I was too focused on the point you were trying to make. But I didn't recognize the way you were trying to make a point is also actually very relevant and valuable to this study.

Stanza: It turns out that after the interview, Andrew mentioned how Dong Mei did not answer my questions directly and clearly. Thus, it seems the apology is necessary to validate Dong Mei's feelings and also to get things straight: Dong Mei's ways of narrating are as valuable as the point she is trying to make.

Dong Mei: That's what I was saying. I remember what Andrew said. I just talk around and don't get to the point immediately. He said, "I should ask you for the transcript and read it myself to realize how I talk." But thank you for reflecting on that, because I really feel like the things, I said like that's leading up to the point, just the background knowledge. I think all those things are how I'm thinking through these issues as well, and how I'm trying to help Andrew think through these issues as well.
Andrew: When Dong Mei was talking last time after our call, I told her, did you know you started the conversation like you said, like, hi, Yabin, like a really soft voice. And then, when you were talking about some of this stuff like you had a furrow and you were angry, and she didn't realize that she was talking like that.
Dong Mei: That's because I care.
Andrew: She didn't realize she was talking like that.
Dong Mei: Well, cause I'm mad. But that's because I care.

Stanza: I re-emphasize I see her efforts and perseverance.

Yabin: Thank you for your trust. Actually, I don't mind that. That's really good because I want to study the real-time couple experience instead of those fake smiley moments. So, thank you for your genuine and honest presentation. I really appreciate that. And also there is one thing about Dong Mei, your perseverance! You tried and tried to make a point to Andrew and to me. When I reflected, I realized that your perseverance showed how much you want your partner, to see, to understand, and to validate your racialized experiences, and how

much you want him to join you to be a joint force to support you in the future and how much you want to include him to fight for social justice.

Dong Mei: Yeah.

Stanza: I re-thank her and validate how exhausting the explanation process could be. She agrees.

Yabin: So, Dong Mei, I really appreciate the whole way of your description. It told me a lot. I can feel there is a lot of emotional work you have carried behind that. First, you need to understand and process those experiences; and then you try to find a way to approach Andrew to explain to him, to ask for his understanding and validation, even to me.

Dong Mei: I agree with that.

Yabin: This is actually very, when I put myself into your shoes, I feel exhausted.

Dong Mei: I agree.

Act 2: Ally-seeking. In the following scenes, I highlighted Dong Mei's request in green and my diverse response in orange. Attending to these turns is a methodological practice of paying attention to how I responded to Dong Mei's request, it displays how I thought about my role as an interviewer/researcher when I interact with this couple.

Act 2: Caring —Scene 1

In the first scene we discuss how Andrew does not think he should care about social justice issues, while Dong Mei thinks he should.

Andrew: But I just told Yabin that I acknowledged it a little bit more [note: acknowledged that he may give that woman benefits of doubts when she asked about do-you-work], but I still don't care.

Dong Mei: but you have to care.

Andrew: I don't have to care.

Dong Mei: I navigate my life as a person of color. Your children navigate their lives as people of color. You have to care. Right, Yabin, you agree?

Stanza: I respond with a question, intending to explore more and hold the boundary of not taking her side. However, when I reflect back, my conduct may make Dong Mei feel unvalidated, lonely, and hurt because I share so many similar social locations but still did not empathize with her.

Yabin: You want him to care as your husband or a White person?

Dong Mei: He's both. I want to care as a white person more than my husband. If he's my husband, I'm okay with, you know, like us having disagreements, we can talk about it. And I'm okay with it. But I more so want Andrew to care as a White person, because there is a lot of white people like him that are nice, but colorblind.

Act 2: Open to Communication – Scene 2

In the second scene, Dong Mei points out the strength of their relationship: although it can cause tension, they still feel safe enough to fight over race-related topics rather than swallow it. Specifically, Dong Mei points out the strength of their relationship: fighting instead of not sharing true thoughts.

Dong Mei: Sometimes, most of the times, I feel like when it comes to race, I'm navigating it by myself. But what's good about our relationship, I think, is like we're always open to communicating. like, even when I feel frustrated and like I don't swallow it. And when Andrew feels frustrated, you know, we always tell each other, even though he knows he's gonna make me mad, he still says it.

Andrew: example?

Stanza: Dong Mei continues illustrating their communication process in terms of race-related topics: how they fight but still try to communicate on this hard topic.

Dong Mei: like, you know, when I tell you about my racial experiences and I get mad, or you know I complain like you don't say, like, you don't say things you don't believe in basically. You don't fake. You don't pretend you're super liberal, you know, like you just say what you mean. And then, instead of saying, oh, you're right. Well, let's go beat them up. Instead of saying that like to talk with me like you push against what I say and tell me, you know. Maybe you can think about it from the other way. So I'm saying like, what's like this is a part of our relationship like, I think we're both okay, with saying what we think, and not being afraid that our partner would leave. I don't know. Does that make sense? Does that make sense to you, Yabin?

Stanza: I respond to Dong Mei to highlight the strength of their relationship

Yabin: I understand that the openness part.

Act 2: The Analogy —Scene 3

In scenes 3 and 4, I return to earlier excerpts to highlight Dong Mei's request seeking alliance and my responses. Scene three focuses on how Dong Mei disagreed with Andrew's analogy.

Dong Mei: Well, I think that's what is not clicking, because, first of all, yes, I am learning these things in school and through my research. But they are the reality of my life and people around me. It's a reality. So, it's not like I'm just talking to you about what's in a book. I'm talking to you about real life and things people are experiencing. And second of all, like, you know, you compare energy and all those things to social justice and race. But I don't think it's comparable. Yes, it's what you study, and it's what I study. and yes, they're both concepts in our lives. But because you're a White person you have to learn your positionality in terms of race to navigate your life in this world. Does that make sense? Does that make sense, Yabin?

Andrew: No

Stanza: This is the moment I rejected the neutral researcher perspective who adopts postmodern paradigm. I respond to her directly because I agree with her that it is not comparable. She has been dismissed for a long time, and I felt the need to back her up.

Yabin: I actually understand. I guess this is the part, Andrew, may make you feel a little bit uncomfortable. I understand her, I also agree with her. This is her lived experience. This is something that already happened, and it may happen in the future. So there is fear and also anger.

Dong Mei: Yeah, and you can't equate race with thermodynamics.

Act 2: Raising racial awareness —Scene 4

Dong Mei emphasizes that Andrew should catch the implied racist assumption in the do-you-work question. She wanted me to agree with her that Andrew needed to raise his racial awareness in order to catch those racist hints.

Andrew: Maybe I didn't catch it either.

Dong Mei: So that's why you should catch it. Because I caught it.

Andrew: We have different lenses in that.

Dong Mei: If you caught it. If you understand racial stuff I'm going through, you could have stood up for me in that moment using your privileges. That's all I'm trying to say. like trying to get at. Does that make sense, Yabin?

Andrew: you can't just say a billion words. And say, does that make sense?

Dong Mei: (Laugh)

Stanza: I re-direct Dong Mei to continue describing her expectations for Andrew to follow her flow.

Yabin: You want Andrew to be more …

Dong Mei: Just be more aware.

Stanza: I ask a close ended question. On reflection, I should have left it open, although it is a clarifying question. However, Dong Mei fills in.

> **Yabin**: If he could learn more and he could raise his awareness, he could be more sensitive in that situation. That will make you feel more supported and validated?
>
> **Dong Mei**: Yeah, I'm trying to get at like, that's all I want as opposed to having to even convince him that woman's question was racist, and spending so much time trying to convince him.

Summary of Structural Analysis

In brief, the structural analysis has included two acts. The first part enriched the thematic understanding of couples' experiences to inform clinical interventions by including a couple who displayed a conflicting communication process when talking about race-related topics. The second part of the structural analysis focuses on the interview process with this couple to facilitate reflections on my conduct as an interviewer/researcher. In what follows, I will move to the discussion chapter and further discuss the results within literature, and highlight the implications and future research directions.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND POST-REFLEXIVITY

In this chapter, I discuss the implications of the analytic analysis within the context of the current literature and the theoretical frames used to guide this study. First, I summarize key results to highlight the unique contributions of this study. Then, I discuss theoretical, clinical and methodological implications, as well as limitations, and future directions. Finally, I end the chapter with my reflections on how this project influenced me professionally and personally.

Key Results

The current project aimed to explore how interracial couples (i.e., where one partner is Chinese American, and the other is White Euro-American) understand the role of race, stratification, and intersectionality in their couple relationship. Specifically, I was interested in three concrete questions: 1) What are the racialized incidents they have encountered as an interracial couple? 2) How do couples communicate and navigate those racialized incidents, as well as the general racial stratification of the U.S.? and 3) What are couples' reflections on their experiences of navigating and communicating race-related topics in terms of moving forward as an interracial couple?

In what follows, I organize the key results in response to the above three concrete questions: 1) Characteristics of various racist encounters as an interracial couple; 2) Diverse dyadic appraisals and coping processes, challenges, resources, and the missing piece; and 3) Insights for moving forward as an interracial couple in the U.S. The discussion will be situated with extant literature to expand what we currently know from the literature.

Characteristics of interracial couples' racialized experiences

In this section, the results highlighted three unique features of interracial couples' marginalized experiences. In what follows, I discussed those features within existing literature to expand the understanding of interracial couples' race-based marginalization.

Feature 1: Biases against interracial unions underscore the negative effects of historical marginalization against interracial unions. The results of this study demonstrate that some interracial unions received questioning from their families along with stares and rude comments from strangers. Those incidents happened in both American and Chinese spaces. For instance, Xiu's experiences represented two Chinese partners whose White partner's family did not fully accept them until many years into their relationship. Although these couples were not sure how much the role racial differences played in their family's suspicions or hesitations, they were certain it was part of the hesitation. In addition, several couples reported experiencing racialization in public spaces. For example, Ryan remembered the stares when he held Jessica's hand while walking in a small town; and a server in a Chinese restaurant asked him how committed he was to Jessica since White women aged so fast.

Couples' experiences of biases against their relationship reflect the lingering effects of historical taboos and marginalization against interracial unions, including slavery, exile, imprisonment, and even death (Head, 2018). Although the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on the Loving vs. Virginia case in 1967 legalized interracial marriage (Loving vs. Virginia, 1967), public perception and feelings towards interracial coupling did not change immediately. The current results echo previous research which demonstrates that interracial couples continue to experience microaggressions in public and private spaces. This includes research which reports couples being stared at in public spaces (Greif & Saviet, 2020; Killian, 2003, 2012), as well as

couples who initially received questioning about the stability and quality of their relationship from their social networks (Bell & Hastings, 2015; Leslie & Young, 2015). However, all couples in this study reported being accepted over time by their immediate family and communities, especially after having children, a finding that also maps onto previous research (Inman et al., 2011; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013).

Feature 2: Racial biases against couples' biracial children focusing on their phenotype echo mixed-race racialized experiences. Couples reported people's biases and obsessions with their biracial children's looks. Those biases focused on three aspects: 1) strangers misrecognizing their children due to their interracial appearance (e.g., a clerk thought Ryan adopted his daughter due to her White adjacent appearance while the baggage attendant thought Jessica's son belonged to an Asian woman due to his Asian adjacent look); 2) judging the child's look (e.g., a stranger commented that David's son looked too-Asian, which disturbed him a lot); 3) complimenting how extra cute the child was since they do not look like either of parent (e.g., Ryan and Jessica received those comments over the years from both Chinese and American families and friends, which baffles them because it reinforced the racist stereotype of Asian or biracial children as 'exotic').

The results support the literature regarding racialized processes experienced by racially mixed populations. Specifically, racially mixed bodies are othered and often perceived as exotic and also designated as different because they carry both familiar and novel physical racial features (Ali, 2005; Matthews, 2007). Asian-White and Hispanic-White are considered highly desirable or a "good mix" (Curington et al., 2015; Haritaworn, 2009, p. 59). However, the idea of a "good mix" is problematic because "it depend[s] on racialized and gendered distinctions between people with and without white parentage, who were implicitly considered less good-

looking. The white 'refined' the look – 'enough to be 'exotic' but not so dark as to offend your colonial sensitivities" (Haritaworn, 2009, p. 66). Thus, seemingly benign comments about how extra cute biracial children fit the "good mix" stereotype and serve as a racialized tool to reinforce whiteness and marginalize other mixed-race populations who do not fit this image. Moreover, failing to recognize their mixed children or judging their biracial children's looks may reflect the colonial narrative where race is naturalized as fixed, categorical and hierarchical (Miron & Inda, 2000). Those results may inform future research to further explore how whiteness is reinforced or perpetuated through discourses surrounding biracial individuals, and how that may impact their biracial individuals' mental health and well-being.

Feature 3: Chinese partners' racialized experiences highlight Asian Americans' unique racialized position in the U.S. A variety of racist stories shared by participants in this study paints a picture of racial triangulation that has been experienced and documented throughout Asian Americans' racialized history in the U.S. Specifically, findings document three stereotypes against Asian Americans: The Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype (Wu, 2002), the Model Minority (Yoo et al., 2010), and the Sexual Deviant Stereotype (Lee, 1999).

1) ***Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype:*** The perpetual foreigner is a racial representation considering Asians in America as foreigners or not "true" Americans regardless of their citizenship or length of residency in the U.S. (Wu, 2002). This stereotype has been extensively adopted as an underlying reason to explain Asian Americans' "othering" experiences (Hyun, 2005). For instance, The Chinese partners in the current study shared numerous examples, from being asked, "Where are you really from?" to Ryan, as a U.S. natural-born citizen, being racially profiled at the U.S.-Mexico border recently. Xiu is also a U.S. citizen, but she stopped using her very

Asian first name during COVID-19 when she talked to a customer representative because she was worried that she might not receive decent services with the exacerbated anti-Asian racism at the time. Those examples may indicate robust biases against Asians in the U.S. by perceiving them as others and disallowing full integration. This stereotype is quite opposite to the Model Minority myth, which will be discussed in the next paragraph.

2) ***Model Minority Myth*:** The Model Minority Myth refers to how Asian Americans, including Chinese Americans, are believed to have already "made it" (Shih et al., 2019, p. 415) in U.S. society due to their educational and socioeconomic achievements (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Moreover, increased numbers of intermarriages with whites (Livingston & Brown, 2017) are often viewed as evidence of Asians having assimilated into white society (Shih et al., 2019). Thus, it is assumed that Asian Americans are exempted from racial discrimination and other oppressions (Shih et al., 2019). More importantly, imposing two opposite biases, Model Minority and Perpetual Foreigner, simultaneously act as a way to racialize Asians and enhance white privileges. The most astonishing example is Xiu's experiences of fluid racial identity. Specifically, she was disqualified from applying for funding that supported minority faculty because Asians were not considered as a minority. Meanwhile, she was called out by a DEI representative for not participating in DEI activities enough. Thus, her experience not only highlighted the Model Minority Myth (Yoo et al., 2010) but is also an example of interest convergence: the needs or desires of a marginalized group will only be met or responded to when they further that of the White or dominant group (Bell, 1980). This concept may further explain why Xiu's

racial identity was fluid instead of consistent, and her value was defined by the contributions she could make to benefit the dominant group at her institution. This will be further discussed in the theoretical implications.

3) ***Sexual Deviant Stereotype*:** The sexual deviant stereotype has an impact on couples' relationships, especially at the early stage of forming an intimate relationship. Specifically, the sexual deviant stereotype refers to how Asian American men are perceived as being emasculated and unattractive and Asian American women are hypersexualized and perceived to be exotic, setting up contrasting forms of gender and sexuality that diverge from the "normal" White male heteronormativity (Lee, 1999; Park, 2013). In the current study, Ryan, as an Asian male, suspected he might internalize the emasculated and unattractive Asian male stereotypical narrative, which led to his hesitation to pursue Jessica and the need to display more Americanness to be more attractive to her. Similarly, one of Jessica's Asian male students was surprised that Jessica, as a beautiful White woman, married an Asian male. Meanwhile, Xiu represented two Chinese women who raised their guard when they first started dating their husbands because they were worried about being targeted as exotic Asian women.

In brief, the results demonstrated that interracial couples had encountered various unique racialized incidents against their interracial unions, their biracial children, or toward the Chinese partner in the couple. Those stories suggest that claims proclaiming that racism is history; and that we are living in a post-racial society, are invalid (Bonvilla-Silva, 2014; Li & Nicholson, 2021). Thus, there is a need to attend to these issues because it can affect interracial couples' relational well-being, which will be discussed in the following section.

Diverse dyadic appraisals and coping processes, challenges, resources, and the missing piece.

The previous sections illustrated couples' various encounters with race-based discrimination, stereotypes, and biases. In order to understand whether and how those external stressors affect couple relationships, the current study zoomed in and explored how couples communicated and navigated those race-based incidents and the general racialized structure of those narratives. They demonstrated examples of how communicating and navigating those processes had affected their couple relationships.

In what follows, I illustrate couples' diverse communication process. Moreover, I highlight the challenges, resources and a missing piece in this process.

The diverse dyadic appraisal and coping process in navigating racist incidents and the racialized structure of U.S. as a couple. Three couples (Sarah & James, Jessica & Ryan, Xiu & David) were on the same page in terms of perceiving and navigating racialized encounters and racial stratification in the U.S. Specifically, *Sarah & James* held a race-neutral approach, stating that they preferred to see all human beings as equal and did not think about or talk about race-related topics much. Moreover, they did not report encountering racist incidents over the years. Additionally, during COVID-19, their dyadic coping strategy was to focus on their day-to-day life in response to the anti-Asian climate. Taken together, they did not think race, racism, or racial stratification had a significant impact on their relationship, nor was it necessary for them to have race-based conversations with one another unless something happened. The biggest bond for them was their belief in God.

Xiu & David have made long-term efforts to slowly get on the same page regarding their perceptions and experiences of navigating the reality of racialization. David went through a

transformative process, from being colorblind to raising his racial awareness. Meanwhile, Xiu patiently communicated and explained race-based situations and provided social justice materials to him, which they engaged with together. Due to their journey of learning and growing together, combined with encountering various racist incidents in the last decade, they developed dyadic coping strategies to support each other, such as laughing it off, debriefing, learning to raise racial awareness together, etc. As a result, they believed navigating those incidents as a couple, learning racial justice materials together, and discussing race-based topics were hard but necessary and they reported that it brought them closer.

Jessica & Ryan were on the same page, acknowledging racial privileges and marginalization and its negative impact, which was one of the reasons that they were attracted to each other in the first place. This perspective, combined with the racist incidents they experienced as a couple, meant their dyadic coping strategies were proactive: actively advocating for social justice for historically marginalized populations, including Asian Americans, through their career and daily lives. As a result, they believed their relationship had become deeper, closer, and safer due to their shared passion for social justice and being able to hold each other's hands in navigating the racialized reality. Thus, they believed it was absolutely necessary and essential for them as an interracial couple, to have race-based conversations in order to form a deep connection.

A fourth couple, Dong Mei & Andrew had a hard time seeing things eye to eye and struggled talking about race-related topics. They constantly argued over whether a certain incident was racist or not, how to respond, and whether they should learn about social justice together in the future. The impact of those arguments had increased conflict in their relationship. However, they believed that, as conflicting as it was, it was better to argue than repress their true

thoughts and feelings within the relationship.

Challenges, resources, and the missing piece.

Challenges. The imbalanced power dynamics rooted in racial privilege had caused conflict and hurt during the process of navigating racialized incidents and communicating about race-based topics. In the current study, Dong Mei expressed feeling "dismissed, belittled, and invisible" when Andrew argued that the do-you-work question was a not-racist-implied question, and described her frustrations as "self-inflicted" pain. At one point, Dong Mei literally ran out of vocabulary to articulate why that was a racist-implied question and why Andrew needed to learn and raise his awareness. Their communication process has been echoed in the literature by suggesting that those arguments are driven by the impact of racial privileges that are attached to racial differences; and it created invisible couple dynamics that perpetuated unequal power and hindered intimacy, which couples usually do not have awareness of (Killian, 2013; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009; Leslie & Young, 2015). Frequently, it is hard for the White partner to comprehend the racist situations as he/she has grown up in the white dominant narrative and naturally believes what he/she perceives is more "true" than the racial minority partner's reality, which can lead to the minority partner feeling dismissed or devalued for reasons he or she cannot fully explain (Leslie & Young, 2015, p705).

Another challenge is that it is a long and hard process for both partners to get on the same page of navigating racialized incidents and communicating race-based topics in general, as well as maintaining constructive communication along the way. In the current study, Xiu & David represented two couples who had been married at least 10 years, and gone through this process. Specifically, for the White partner, it required a transformative process to raise their racial awareness through learning about racial justice and being able to connect to the racial minority

partner at the emotional level. For the racial minority partner, it required patience in tolerating the White partner's "colorblind" stage and being persistent about the need for broader awareness (e.g., why I think it might be a racist incident, how that made me feel, and what I wanted from you as my partner to support me at that moment). Moreover, Xiu and David's story of trying to watch the black father's monologue together demonstrated that the communication process was not easy in a way that required both partners to be vulnerable and willing to try multiple times until they could have constructive conversations. These challenges are further discussed in the clinical implications section to inform clinical preventions and intervention efforts.

Strengths and resources. The results of this study have identified internal and external strengths and resources that have helped couples in the process of navigating racist incidents and the racialized structure of the U.S. Internal strengths include focusing on the relationship. In other words, having a solid foundation of their relationship (e.g., love, trust, high level of commitment, shared faith) to a higher-level alignment of life values (e.g., shared religious beliefs and passion for advocating for social justice) and to instrumental strengths (e.g., attempts to use open and constructive communication skills). Couples shared that those strengths had provided a safe space and served as a buffer when they communicated about race-based topics. For instance, Sarah & James emphasized that their shared belief in Christianity softened the argument they had over voting for Trump or not. Jesscia & Ryan stressed that their shared passion for social justice was both a reason for their initial bond, and a source of shared strength and passion as their relationship has continued. Xiu & David highlighted the significance of being vulnerable and using open communication skills to discuss race-based topics.

Another resource couples described was gaining external support from various social justice groups. Jessica & Ryan represented three couples who were actively participating in

social justice actions and realized that they needed external support to deepen their understanding of race-based topics. Specifically, they pointed out that connecting with social justice resources, including listening to other stories and discussing in larger groups could help to expand their understanding of race-based topics. They also found that having these experiences meant that they were then able to bring what they learned to facilitate deeper conversation with one another. Moreover, Jessica & Ryan pointed out that doing social justice work could be exhausting, although it was their shared passion. Gaining external validation and support from allied groups helped them recharge their energy to avoid letting exhaustion affect their relationship.

Those results are consistent with the literature that investigated the positive ingredients of building and maintaining a strong intimate relationship (e.g., Rossignac-Milon, 2021; Ogolsky & Stafford, 2022). For instance, the findings of this study align with the metaphor -- Sound Marital House -- which was created by John Gottman, a couple relationship researcher and clinician (Gottman, 1999). He compared a foundational secure partnership to a solid house, which requires two pillars (i.e., trust and commitment), and incorporating the foundations of shared friendship to the higher level of shared meanings in life. Moreover, Ryan & Jessica's practice of plugging into various social justice groups to seek support and stave off exhaustion aligned with the literature, which finds that fighting for social justice can lead to burnout among activists, such as exhaustion, chronic frustration and feelings of isolation (Gorski & Chen, 2015; González 2015; Gorski, 2019). This study expands this literature by indicating that social justice activist couples need to be mindful about the possible negative impacts, such as fatigue and exhaustion, that can be caused by doing justice work on their relationship. Future research can identify resources that may help these couples move forward to participate in social justice work without allowing some

of the adverse consequences to affect their relationship. In brief, a strong relationship foundation as well as external supports have served as a buffer in navigating race-based challenging couple situations.

The missing piece. All couples mentioned that growing up, neither of their parents had sit-down conversations regarding what it means to be White or Chinese in the U.S., or how to understand and navigate racial structures in the U.S. (i.e., parental racial socialization, Juang et al., 2016, 2018). Couples' retrospective reflections on the impact of their parental racial socialization were varied.

For the White partners, their parents taught them to "see people, not race" and treat all people equally (e.g., James' parents); or they received the message that "racism is history" (e.g., David's parents); or their parents showed their values through their actions by engaging in social justice work (e.g., Jessica's parents). Reflecting on those moments, James agreed with his parents' teachings about seeing people not as racial categories; David started realizing that racism was real after encountering various racist incidents with his biracial son and witnessing Xiu's racialized experiences; Jessica appreciated her parents' efforts in practicing social justice but wished they could have had conversations with her early on. Then, she would have learned how to dismantle whiteness sooner, avoided acting in hurtful ways out of ignorance, and becoming more helpful as a "bridge builder."

For the Chinese partners, overall, they reported that their parents did not have racial awareness. This included a lack of knowledge of their children's racial identity development process and the stratification of race in the U.S. Retrospectively, Chinese participants believed their parents' racial awareness was related to their immigration status. Specifically, Xiu represented two first-generation Chinese Americans (i.e., born and raised in China, and migrated

to the U.S. as an adult) whose parents were still living in China. Her parents were not familiar with the racial structure in the U.S. Sarah and Ryan represent 1.5-generation Chinese American (i.e., born in China and migrated to the U.S. as a minor with parents) and 2nd-generation Chinese American (i.e., born and raised in the U.S.) who parents are "hard-working immigrants" in the U.S. That is, when their parents immigrated from a racially homogeneous society to a racially diverse society, they were unaware of the racial map in the U.S. and might not afford resources to learn about it. As a result, they were not equipped with the knowledge to assist their children's racial identity development. Moreover, Ryan emphasized how his parents perceived racism as supposed-to-be part of an immigrants' experiences. Consequentially, Ryan mentioned that growing up, he had to navigate racial identity and deal with racism all by himself.

In summary, none of the couples' parents had formal conversations with them growing up except Jessica's parents, who modeled for her how to be a "bridge builder" to advocate for marginalized populations. These results are also reported in the literature, neither Asian American parents nor White American parents engage in Ethic-Racial Socialization (ERS) processes, and the ERS process is different for each group. Specifically, there are limited studies regarding Asian American parental ERS (e.g., Hughes et al., 2006; Juang et al., 2017). The limited studies showed that Asian American parents are more engaged in ethnic socialization than racial socialization, partly due to a lack of critical awareness (i.e., awareness of Asian Americans' racialized history and the racial stratification in the U.S. Chang, 2016; Feagin, 2009) (see the review, Juang et al., 2017). The current findings illustrated that the immigration background might also be related to lack of exposure and critical awareness. On the other hand, White parents not participating in their children's ERS might be grounded in white supremacy. Therefore, race and racism do not need to be talked about. For instance, Nieri and colleagues'

(2023)'s review found that when White parents engage in ERS, many of them tend to "reinforce the colorblind indifference to racial inequality" (e.g., Abaied & Perry, 2021, p. 437) or lack intentionality and explicit conversations about racial inequality and structural oppression (e.g., Hagerman, 2018; Parris, 2020; Thomann & Suyemoto, 2018). It is recommended that White parents rethink "good" White parenting (Hagerman, 2018). For example, White parents could teach their children that it is not racist to talk about race because there is a distinction between race and racism (e.g., race is not bad, but racism is; being White is not a problem but whiteness is) (Pinsoneault, 2015; Thomann, 2012). Also, White parents could engage in comprehensive racial learning and be able to directly name ethnic-racial injustice, acknowledge and use their privileges to promote justice (Abaied and Perry, 2021; Freeman et al., 2022; Hagerman, 2018). Interestingly, all the couples in this study emphasized that they needed to have conversations about race with their children. Given the current project focused on couple dyads instead of parent-child dyads, findings about how they are going to engage in RES with their children were only briefly discussed.

Moving forward as an interracial couple in the U.S.

In this section, I examine couples' insights into how being in an interracial relationship has shaped their understanding of racial justice and implications for how to move forward as an interracial couple in the U.S. In what follows, I summarized their insights in three aspects: 1) the impact of being in the current interracial relationship, 2) on each partner's understanding of racial structures in the U.S., and 3) on their insights for moving forward as an interracial couple.

For the White partners, they became more aware of racial inequality, and were more willing to embrace racial diversity, due to witnessing or experiencing various race-based biases against their interracial union, their biracial children, and their Chinese partner. As a result, they

gradually become allies to advocate for racial justice for racial minorities, including Asian Americans. For instance, David went through a transformative process from colorblindness to being able to acknowledge race issues in the U.S. and talk about them with his partner. Jessica mentioned she consciously started educating White people around her regarding general racial stratifications in the U.S. and how to talk about race. Those results are consistent with the literature that when a White person partners with a racial minority, they may witness or experience racism for the first time, which stirs up their narratives regarding racial realities in the U.S. As a result, they become more empathic with minoritized populations experiences and even become allies (e.g., Caselli & Machia, 2022; Greif et al., 2022).

For the Asian partners, they emphasized the feeling of hope, ally-building, and mixed feelings evoked by their Asian identity. Specifically, after Xiu witnessed David's transformational process to raise his awareness; and Ryan witnessed Jessica's efforts in practicing social justice, both Ryan and Xiu emphasized that it gave them "hope" to conduct social justice work to challenge racial hierarchy and to eliminate the privileges and marginalization that is attached to racial differences. Moreover, Ryan shared his reflections that partnering with Jessica helped him to think more about how to collaborate with White people and other allied groups to join forces in moving social justice work.

Moving forward, although not all couples believed that race and racial stratification had played a significant role in their couple relationship, they all agreed they needed to discuss how to engage in ERS process with their biracial children. One of the reasons is that some of their children had already experienced race-based biases (e.g., a stranger commented on David's son's Asian phenotype) or had race-based questions (e.g., why some people do not like other people because of the way they look?). However, all couples felt unequipped with the knowledge and

skills necessary to carry out the process. This is partially because their parents did not have formal conversations when they were growing up, as mentioned earlier.

Implications, Limitations and Future Directions

Following the aforementioned key results, this part of the discussion will highlight implications of the current findings, address the limitations of the project and illuminate future directions. I end the chapter with a reflexivity statement regarding how the project has affected me professionally and personally.

Implications

In this section, I examine the question: What are the implications of the current findings, theoretically, clinically and methodologically? In what follows, I discussed each of these aspects in detail.

Theoretical Implications. Theoretically, the current results have provided empirical evidence to support all three applied theories and also provide evidence to expand them in specific ways (i.e., the Ecological Model, the Systemic Transactional Model, and AsianCrit).

1) Ecological model (EM)

The EM, which is conceptualized by the intersection of five basic systems—the microsystem, ecosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005), was utilized to have a systemic understanding of interracial couples' experiences regarding the role of race and racial stratification in their couple relationship. The results of this study highlight how larger marginalized discourses (i.e., current discourses of homogamy, racial hierarchy structure, racialized history of Asian Americans) at the macrosystem level can affect couples' relationships (i.e., microsystem) directly and indirectly.

Regarding direct impacts, the exacerbated anti-Asian racism that occurred during COVID-19 has caused worry, fear and conflicts, although none of the couples had encountered racist violence against them. Specifically, Sarah and James got worried when their Chinese friend's house was trashed. Xiu stopped using her Chinese first name when she talked with a customer service representative to avoid being treated unfairly as an Asian. Jessica and Ryan held space for each other to process the impact of the negative sociopolitical climate on themselves and their relationship. Moreover, racial hierarchical structures caused conflicts between couples in terms of their perceptions of race, racism and racial stratification and its impact. Dong Mei and Andrew constantly fought over race-based topics due to imbalanced power dynamics driven by racial privilege. Indirectly, although interracial marriage has been legalized since 1967 (Loving vs. Virgina, 1967), the discourse of homogamy still affects people's attitudes toward interracial relationships, in turn, influencing interracial couple relationships. For example, it took David's family a long time to accept Xiu and their relationship. They suspected race and culture had played a role in it. Also, Jessica and Ryan received unwanted stares and comments about their interracial union from strangers. In brief, all those examples have provided empirical evidence to support the negative impact of marginalized discourses on interracial couple relationships.

In terms of how couples navigated racist incidents and communicated about race-related topics with one other, the findings highlight microsystem stress-coping processes (i.e., dyadic appraisal-coping process, such as debriefing, validating, open communication, etc.). To be clear, although the study focused on couple dyads with the intention of informing research and clinical interventions, it does not mean it should only be the couples' responsibility to navigate such hard topics. Instead, I advocate taking a systemic-social-justice perspective in

perceiving interracial couples' stress-coping processes and in developing systemic couple interventions and prevention programs. For example, specific questionnaires should be developed to evaluate the extent and how marginalized discourses may affect interracial couples' relationships, what strategies have been useful, and what resources they need. This will be further discussed in the later clinical implications section.

2) Systemic Transactional Model (STM)

The Systemic Transactional Model (STM) was used as a theoretical framework to zoom in on couple dyads to explore how an interracial couple as a unit understood the role of race and racial stratification in their couple relationships. Specifically, STM views the stress-coping process as relational-orientated and emphasizes couples' dyadic coping from managing daily hassles to critical life events, such as the loss of a child, cancer, etc. (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005; Bodenmann & Randall, 2013; Kayser et al., 2007; Rottmann et al., 2015). From the STM perspective, dyadic coping has been categorized as positive (emotion-oriented, problem-oriented, delegated) or negative (e.g., superficial, ambivalent, hostile) (Bodenmann et al., 2017). Positive dyadic coping has been further distinguished as supportive dyadic coping (i.e., one partner provides support for another partner) and common dyadic coping (i.e., joint/shared efforts, "we-ness").

The current findings have supported STM in two ways. First, STM believes stress in an intimate relationship can affect each partner through stress spillover (Bodenmann et al., 2007) and cross-over (Neff & Karney, 2007), as well as the relationship's overall well-being (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005). This relational-oriented perspective is reflected in the current findings. For instance, when James mentioned that he worried about Sarah and their young children, who might be targeted during COVID-19, he described the worry as a "whole

weight on the family." Second, the stories regarding how couples navigated racist incidents and communicated about race-based topics with one another provided empirical evidence to support dyadic coping tenants. For instance, when Andrew used hostile dyadic coping (i.e., blaming Dong Mei for creating the stress, criticizing how she has responded to the stress, or minimizing the seriousness of her stress, [Bodenmann et al., 2017,]) to arguing about race-related incidents with Dong Mei, which caused constant fights between them and left Dong Mei feeling dismissed and belittled. In contrast, Ryan & Jessica shared a passion for social justice, learning and growing together as social justice activists and strengthening their bond. Their stories support the positive impact of using common dyadic coping (e.g., shared goals, and emotional support for each other) in navigating the stressor of racial stratification.

One of the unique contributions of the study is that the findings have highlighted how dyadic coping is not a static event but a process, which expanded the understanding of STM. For example, Xiu & David's stories highlighted that it is a process to form a joint perception of how to understand race-related issues and develop a joint force to navigate racist incidents or racial structures. They started out by both getting defensive when talking about race-related topics (i.e., Negative Dyadic Coping). Then, slowly David raised his racial awareness and was able to understand Xiu's perspective and connected to her emotionally (i.e., Emotion-Oriented Support Dyadic Coping: one partner provides emotional support to another to reduce his/her stress). Currently, they are still in the process of maintaining open communication about race-based topics and enhancing joint efforts in navigating racialized structure in the U.S. For instance, they tried again and again to have a constructive race-based conversation about a black father's monologue. In brief, the current results expanded the STM by suggesting that when facing larger sociopolitical stressors, it may take time for

couples to form “we-ness” in perceiving and dealing with stressors as presenting a united front, which is promising but also hard.

3) AsianCrit

The current results have mutually expanded both CRT (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and AsianCrit (Museus & Iftikar, 2013) through supporting several interrelated tenets of the theory. Specifically, Asianization from AsianCrit has expanded CRT utility and necessity to be tailored to explain racial minorities’ racialized experiences aside from Black/African Americans. Meanwhile, CRT tenants, especially intersectionality & interest convergence, have deepened the understanding of Asian racialized experiences. Also, both CRT and AsianCrit share the same mission: eradicate all sorts of oppression.

Asianization refers to the reality that racism is a pervasive among Asians’ lived experiences as well as emphasizing Asians’ unique racialized processes highlighted by three longstanding stereotypes against Asians in U.S. history (Museus & Iftikar, 2013): the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype (Wu, 2002), Model Minority (Yoo et al., 2010), and Sexual Deviant Stereotype (Lee, 1999).

First, regarding pervasiveness, although not all couples reported experiencing racism, they were all aware of anti-Asian racism during COVID-19 and expressed different degrees of fear or concern. Moreover, all the Chinese partners except Sarah shared their racialized encounters from blatant racism (e.g., being asked. “Where are you really from?”) to microaggressions (e.g., Xiu being assumed to work at the laundry mat) over the years.

Second, as mentioned earlier, three stereotypes against Asians have been documented in the current study: the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype (Wu, 2002), the Model Minority (Yoo et al., 2010), and the Sexual Deviant Stereotype (Lee, 1999). However, it is worth

emphasizing that two tenants, intersectionality and interest convergence, helped to explain the root of those stereotypes. For example, Xiu's experiences on the surface level of fluid racial identity: not being perceived as a racial minority since Asians have been racialized as a Model Minority and at the same time being considered a racial minority when her department needed a racial minority to be present at the DEI book club. On a deeper level, the simultaneous acknowledgment and denial of her racial minority identity can be further understood as interest convergence which was used by the dominant group to perpetuate marginalization and enhance white supremacy (Bell, 1980). Moreover, the Sexual Deviant Stereotype has expanded the CRT by highlighting the uniqueness of intersectionality among Asian Americans. Specifically, the Sexual Deviant Stereotype has manifested in polarized extremes, with emasculating Asian men and hypersexualizing Asian women (Lee, 1999). The current study has provided evidence to document this uniqueness and how these dynamics have affected Asian Americans when they pursue romantic relationships with White-Europeans. For example, Ryan shared his hesitation to pursue Jessica in the beginning, while Xiu openly asked David whether he pursued her because he saw her as a hypersexual Chinese woman, wanting to avoid being targeted as a sexual stereotype. Additionally, Xiu shared her suspicion of being marginalized because she was a young Asian female in academia, which re-emphasized her intersectional marginalized experiences. For instance, Xiu mentioned she received rude comments from her students (e.g., it is a waste of time to attend your class. I'm very disappointed in you as a professor). She had a suspicion that students would not give those comments to an old White male faculty.

Finally, couples, such as Jessica & Ryan, who are activists in advocating for social justice in their daily lives, mirrored the core of both CRT and AsianCrit: the commitment to

eradicate all sorts of oppression, including racism (Matsuda, 1991). For instance, they joined several social justice groups to engage in solidarity with the marginalized populations, including racial minorities. They also represented two couples who shared that their goal of parenting was not about ensuring their children had a comfortable and privileged life but forming empathy and compassion for oppressed populations. In brief, CRT and AsianCrit provided an intertwined framework to better understand Asian Americans' distinct racialized experiences.

Clinical implications. In this section, the discussion is aimed to illuminate the translational nature of family science research. In what follows, I discuss how findings may inform future clinical prevention and intervention programs to promote interracial couples' mental health and relational well-being.

First, it is necessary to attend to systemic influences on couple dyads and incorporate social justice perspectives in coupe therapy sessions to empower interracial couples and promote relational well-being. The current findings showed that racial privileges can lead to conflicts among interracial couples and marginalization of the racial minority partner, such as Dong Mei & Andrew fighting over race-based topics, and Xiu & David's long process of raising racial awareness and identified ways to navigate the impact of the racialized structure. These results support the clinical literature stating that many individuals and families come to therapy because they are struggling or suffering from the negative effects of social inequity, such as frequent microaggressions, lack of access to quality housing and health care, etc. (Parker & McDowell, 2017). These negative effects can be both individual and relational, such as creating mental and emotional distress, limiting coping strategies, generating imbalanced power dynamics in couple relationships, and so forth (e.g., Knudson-Martin & Huenergardt 2010; Knudson-Martin &

Mahoney, 2009; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). A combination of high intermarriage rates among Asians in the U.S. (Livingston & Brown, 2017), exacerbated anti-Asian racism since COVID-19 (Stop AAPI Hate Reporting Center, 2020) and historical sanctions against interracial unions (Head, 2018), has made Asian-White couples extremely vulnerable to systemic marginalization. Attending to the impact of systemic marginalization and promoting social justice in working with Asian-White couples aligns with family science's systemic perspectives (i.e., emphasis of contextual influences on family dynamics) and the commitment to disrupt all kinds of oppression to promote equality and well-being for diverse couples and families (Allen & Henderson, 2022).

Second, regarding how to incorporate systemic-social-justice perspectives in couple therapy, the current findings can be used as a starting framework to develop a couple assessment measure to evaluate: 1) The alignment of racial awareness and sensitivity, especially about Asian Americans' racialized history and general racialized discourses in the U.S.; 2) How couples communicate and navigate race-based incidents and racialized discourses; and how the process has affected their relationship; and 3) What helps couple communication processes; and what resources are needed. The purpose of the assessment would be to evaluate the extent to and how racialized discourses may affect couple relationships, rather than assume there was no impact on their relationships.

Third, current findings highlight that talking about race can cause conflict and stress to a couple relationship when a couple is not on the same page. It may suggest that it could be beneficial to add "race-talk" components to current couple education programs to help couples navigate constructive conversations. For example, the Couples' Coping Enhancement Training (CCET) is a coping-oriented couple education program that was developed to help couples

navigate life stressors in general (Bodenmann & Shantinath, 2004). This program can be adapted to help couples develop constructive dyadic coping strategies (e.g., shared "we-stress" and "we-coping") to better communicate about race-based topics without causing excessive tension in the relationship. Another example is the Social-Emotional Approach that was developed to intervene in socio-cultural processes that hinder couples' ability to facilitate mutually supportive relationships, such as the impact of sexism that can cause imbalanced power dynamics among heterosexual couple relationships (Knudson-Martin & Huenergardt, 2010). This intervention program, with the integration of a systemic-social-justice perspective, could be adapted to empower interracial couples by identifying and disrupting invisible systemic oppressions that facilitate equal and supportive couple relationships. Those examples may illuminate the possibilities of developing couple prevention and intervention programs that can help couples adopt dyadic coping strategies to better communicate over race-related topics.

Fourth, in addition to resources for clinicians to help raise one's own racial awareness, there is a need for integrating DEI into Continuing Education Units (CEU) to promote clinician's competency in addressing the impact of social justice issues on couple relationships. Regarding self-learning resources, there are educational and awareness-raising resources for therapists to improve their sensitivity and competency in challenging systemic inequality, as well as resources that couples have found useful in raising their own racial awareness. For example, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) has a website, "Racial Justice Resources for MFTs" that lists resources and tools for therapist self-learning (AAMFT, n.d.). Similarly, the American Psychological Association (APA) also listed "No-cost DEI recourses for psychology instructors" (Blankenship & Melchiori, 2023), which clinicians can use as a self-education tool. Meanwhile, during the interviews for this study, several couples shared examples

of the social justice learning materials they found useful, including books (e.g., *How To Be An Anti-Racist,* Kendi, 2023), media (e.g., Asian American history on PBS), buying dolls with diverse skin colors to help their children adopt the concept of "diversity," and Facebook social justice groups (e.g., "Be the Bridge").

Methodological implications. In this section, I center my discussion around the implications of using composite narrative and structural analysis to analyze textual narrative data as well as using dyadic couple interviews to collect dyadic couple data. In what follows, I illustrate several implications to inform future methodological approaches.

First, the composite narrative has served the exploratory purpose of the study (i.e., embracing diverse couples' experiences) while maximizing confidentiality (Blundy, 2017; Sikes & Piper, 2010; Willis, 2019). Given that several participants were in disciplines close to family science and one couple includes a partner who is a leading scholar in their field, it is important to reduce the risk of being identified. Thus, I combined several couples' stories into one and resigned their genders and other social locations to maximize confidentiality while capturing the essence of couples' lived experiences and perspectives. Orbach calls this 'emotional truth'--- an authentic representation of feeling states rather than strict adherence to narrative truth' (2000, p. 196). Specifically, three composite narratives, derived from seven couples' stories, served as archetypes or cases of different kinds of couples regarding the role of race and racial stratification in their couple relationships while maintaining anonymity (i.e., *Sarah & James* did not perceive that race and racial stratification had a significant influence on their relationship nor did they think it was necessary to have race-based conversations. *Xiu & David* gradually raised their racial awareness and realized the role of race in their couple relationships. *Jessica & Ryan* actively practice social justice through their work and daily lives. In brief, the composite

narrative may offer an analytic approach that future researchers might use when seeking the richness of narratives while maximizing confidentiality.

Second, I displayed a transparent link between the original transcript and the final composite narratives. This is crucial due to the highly interpretive process of analysis and writing across qualitative approaches (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), especially composite narratives, which might be new to many readers. Being transparent about the process can increase the trustworthiness and rigor of the study (Crewell & Poth, 2018). Thus, for the composite narratives, I included a section to illustrate my pre-composing process (i.e., why I came to choose composite narrative) and rationale (i.e., the process of how I generated three composite narratives from seven couples' stories, including how I signed their social locations). In short, my efforts to be transparent may serve as another example to inform future narrative methodologists to consider how to be transparent about analytic coding and presentation of results to improve the rigor of narrative studies.

Third, the results showed the value of using structural analysis in the current study. One was that by zooming in on this couples' conflicting communication process, I enriched the thematic understanding of the research topic and informed clinical interventions. Specifically, the structural analysis results have displayed how racialized discourses as a contextual stressor can compromise couples' communication, cause conflicts, and underscore how racial privilege may be at the root of their argument. This information can inform couple prevention and intervention programs by targeting both couples' communication process to facilitate constructive communication and by taking a systemic-social-justice perspective to target deeply entrenched relational issues. Another advantage of utilizing structural analysis is that it enabled me to focus on the interview process and generate valuable reflection. Specifically, I realized

how I marginalized Dong Mei without my awareness and the power of offering an apology as an interviewer. Those reflections can inform future researchers on how to raise self-awareness of a researcher/interviewer's behaviors when working with marginalized populations (Shelton & Flint, 2019). I also reflected deeply about my role as an interviewer/researcher in the dyadic interview to facilitate a co-constructed process. Reflections on my role as an interviewer raised another ethical question: Is it possible – or even aspirational - for an interviewer to maintain neutrality when witnessing a couple fighting as a result of racial privilege and oppression in their own relationship? What is the role of the researcher in those situations and how might one's paradigm inform their position? As my post-modern paradigm believes that meaning is constructed, I may think absolute neutrality is impossible. Also, being neutral may not be helpful when working with marginalized populations. In Dong Mei & Andrew's fighting, I feel the need to validate Dong Mei's racialized experiences as a way to empower her since Andrew has dismissed her for a long time. Moreover, as an interviewer, I am committed to conducting interviews ethically. That means, I need to monitor the tension in the room to ensure the interview is not creating extra stress in their relationship. Thus, when I witness a couple fight, I spontaneously start checking the temperature by asking, "do you want to pause to process for a minute?" Then, I discuss with the couple whether to continue the interview based on the stress they are experiencing at that moment.

Fouth, this study has shown the advantages and challenges of conducting dyadic couple interviews. Due to the purpose of exploring how couples have co-constructed their stories regarding race-related topics and how that has affected their relationships, a dyadic couple interview is a suitable option in the current study. By using dyadic interviews, I am able to facilitate couples' conversations, specifically about their interactions and dynamics. For instance,

during the interviews, Sarah & James talked about how they were bonded over God who guided them through all their communication difficulties, including the argument about voting for Trump or not. Xiu & David talked with each other and agreed that they had a long and hard communication journey regarding how to talk about race-based topics over the years. Dong Mei & Andrew have replayed the conflict communicating process regarding race-based topics. Besides these advantages, conducting dyadic couple interviews can raise unique ethical challenges that can happen before the interviews (e.g., coercion to participate [Wittenborn et al., 2013]), during the interviews (e.g., one partner dominates the interview [Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018]), and after the interviews (e.g., feeling closer or inducing more conflict [Margolin et al., 2005; Sakellariou et al., 2013]). In the current study, I took steps to reduce those ethical risks, such as requesting a signed consent form from each partner instead of from only one partner to avoid coercion participation, setting up ground rules at the beginning of the interview to avoid one partner talking over the other, and so forth. However, several ethical issues still happened before and during the interviews. For instance, Dong Mei & Andrew fought over race-based topics. I had to pause several times to check to see if they wanted to take a break or stop the interview in order not to create more stress in their relationships. Another example is that one couple did not pass the IPV screening due to concurrent IPV experiences. The ethical I grappled with was how to convey the message that they were no longer qualified for the study but still try to provide the relevant resources. After I discussed this with my co-advisor, Dr. Wieling, I called the partner (i.e., IPV victim partner). I explained to them that our research team thought it might be risky for them to continue participating since a dyadic interview can jeopardize their safety; and asked if they needed the resources to address IPV issues that had arisen during the screening. The partner expressed understanding of my explanation but did not want any resources. In both

ethical situations, my responses reflected my ethical commitment to research design: prioritizing couples' safety and relationship well-being. In brief, dyadic couple interviews can be a promising way to collect dyadic data when the research focus is on couple dyads. However, it is an ongoing process to navigate ethical and design challenges that may arise, and it could be helpful to reach out to experienced researchers, in my case, my advisors, to brainstorm ideas and respond ethically.

Finally, I am aware of the limitations of composite narrative. One of the limitations of using composite narratives to combine several couples into one composite couple with assigned social locations is that not all the details can be seamlessly transferred into one composite. For instance, one White male participant shared stories regarding how he felt privileged to do social justice work as a White male in academia. He shared that he was often perceived as less threatening and more acceptable when he addressed social justice issues compared to other people of color colleagues; and he also shared that he was given research opportunities or credits that he thought he might not be the most appropriate candidate. This participant was proactive in advocating for social justice. However, his occupation and gender did not fit any of the three composites, and so these stories were left out of the final composites as I chose to highlight experiences that more explicitly addressed my research questions. However, I did address this as a future direction in the limitations and future directions section. Moreover, it may also be fruitful to use a case study method to zoom in and focus on a specific couple's stories to illuminate certain research areas. For instance, it might be beneficial for informing couple interventions to explore the trajectory of how a couple grows together in terms of raising racial awareness and developing dyadic coping strategies in navigating racialized incidents and talking about race-related topics.

Limitations and Future Directions

In this section, the discussion addresses the limitations of the current project and proposes future research directions. In what follows, I identify five major limitations and propose directions for future exploration.

First, all the couples briefly mentioned the necessity of having race-based conversations with their children and felt unequipped with the knowledge and resources to navigate parental ERS. As the focus of the study was on couple dyads, the current study did not explore this further. However, couples' struggles with this topic centered around three areas: 1) It is novel and challenging to be a monoracial parent who has a biracial child; 2) How to integrate discussions of biracial identity and racialization in an age-appropriate manner; and 3) Identifying resources for guiding these conversations with biracial children. The current literature regarding ESR is extensive among Black/African American families but lacks ERS studies on Latinx, Asian American, and White American families (see the review, Simon, 2021). Moreover, the ESR process might be unique for monoracial parents to raise an Asian-White biracial child. For example, MultiCrit has illustrated the uniqueness of ERS with biracial children (Atkin & Yoo, 2019; 2021), although it is not exclusively about Asian-White biracial children. Another recent study found that Asian-White interracial couples are less likely to initiate ERS conversations with their biracial children regarding race and racial issues than Black-White interracial couples (Kim-Breunig & Vittrup, 2024). Thus, it might be more fruitful for researchers to specifically explore what unique challenges monoracial parents face in the ESR process with their Asian-White biracial children and what explore resources they need to empower and assist them.

Second, aligning with the above ERS, I also asked each partner to briefly share how their own parents engaged in the ERS process. The reason for collecting this information was to

investigate how their parents were engaging in the ERS process and how it may affect the couple in terms of recognizing and navigating the impact of racial stratification on their relationships. Thus, I only received a general picture instead of detailed stories. However, Ryan highlighted how he struggled with identifying and honoring his racial identity and figuring out how to understand and handle racism by himself as a 2nd- generation Chinese American when he grew up. He believed it was because his parents were 1st-genration of Asian Americans who were not familiar with the racial stratification in the U.S. and considered racism as part of the immigration process. He also realized his parents came from a monoracial society and did not know RES was supposed to be part of their parenting tasks. Ryan's experiences are reflected in the literature stating that some 1st-generation immigrant parents were usually so busy with adjusting to new cultures and did not have enough opportunities to learn racial stratification in the U.S. (Inman et al., 2015) or some of them tried to justify the negative impact of encountering racism as something they have to pay as an immigrant (Chung et al., 2008). Moreover, Ryan's experiences also echoed the literature that 2nd-generation Chinese American parents are more upfront, proactive, and vocal about race and racism than their 1st-generation Chinese American parents (e.g., Juan et al., 2018; Wang & He, 2023). However, future researchers could take a systemic perspective to examine intergenerational influences, such as using the Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response Model (i.e., emphasizes how a family as a system handles stress; Patterson, 1988) to explore how racial stratification may affect immigrant families differently across generations and the impact on the RES, parent-child relationship as well as the mental health and well-being of individuals within the family.

Third, two couples shared how cultural and intergenerational differences caused stress in their couple relationships and parenting. For instance, couple's shared that the Chinese partner's

parents would expect the White daughter-in-law to help in the kitchen without being asked, or told the couple that they were being too soft on their children, etc. Those incidents caused tension between the couple, as well as between the couple and the Chinese parents. As the focus of the study was race-related impact; and couples who shared those stories confirmed those experiences were more culture-related than race-related, I did not explore their stories in detail. However, future research could explore how interracial couples are navigating intergenerational parenting differences that are rooted in cultural differences and how that may affect couple relationships.

Fourth, there might be a change in ethnic/racial commitment among Chinese Americans after COVID-19. One participant mentioned she felt less proud of her Chinese cultural heritage compared to pre-COVID. Specifically, she used to proudly tell others she is from China. Now, she feels hesitant when being asked where she is from. Her experiences have been partly reflected in the literature stating that ethnic/racial commitment (i.e., developing ethnic pride and a sense of belonging) was found to be a buffer (Choi et al., 2017) or an amplifier (Choi et al., 2020) to the positive link between racism and adverse effect on mental health distress. That was because identifying with one's own ethnicity was linked to reducing the adverse effects of racism via having a sense of belonging to one's own ethnic group or amplify the negative effect of racism by emphasizing how one's own ethnic group was different from the dominant group based on social identity theory (Phinney, 1991). More importantly, this participant's experiences may open the door for future researchers to explore how and why ethnic/racial commitment may change over time, and how social-political incidents can affect ethnic/racial commitment in order to better understand the coping process in navigating racialized structure and enhance ethnic pride.

Fifth, regarding the research purpose and sample, the current project was limited in several ways. Firstly, due to the exploratory nature of the study, it is outside of the scope of the data to make claims about differences in how social locations, such as gender, Chinese American partner's immigration, etc., may have a significant effect on couples' perception of race and racial stratification and ways of responding to it. This may be conducted by a large-scale quantitative study or by a qualitative study that specifically asks about or explores differences in/by education level, lengths of marriage, etc. Secondly, due to using composite analysis, some stories were left out that might be a promising direction for future research. For example, as previously noted, one White male professor shared how he was aware of his privileges of doing social justice work in academia compared to his colleagues of color. This may inform future researchers to explore the privileges and challenges of conducting social justice work in academia. Finally, all the couples in the current sample were economically stable with an annual household income of at least over 71k, had stable jobs, and were highly educated (i.e., six out of eight couples hold a graduate degree). Thus, I was careful not to generalize the results to other samples with low socioeconomic status and education levels.

Post-Reflexivity

In this section, I reflect on how conducting this project has shaped my professional and personal identity. I identify myself as a systemic family researcher and practitioner with a social-justice orientation as well as a female, racial minority, and an alien in the U.S. Those two identities are intertwined to form who I am scholarly and personally.

First, I felt proud of my social-justice focus on my scholarship; and gradually, I realized the challenges of conducting social justice work. Specifically, I feel proud to center my scholarship around promoting the mental health and relational well-being of Asian Americans

with ancestral ties to countries or regions in East Asia. This is because this population's needs have been ignored for so long due to the Model Minority myth perceiving them as "honorary whites" and problem-free. My targeted population includes diverse Asian families, such as interracial couples with one partner who has East Asian heritage.

Regarding the challenges of doing social justice research, I realized not all scholars may acknowledge or believe that Asian Americans' have marginalized experiences. For instance, my dissertation proposal has received two similar "reminders" from peer-review groups to remind me not to assume interracial couples (i.e., Chinese American partners with White Euro-Americans) encounter racial discrimination or the incidents have influenced their relationship. The first group wrote,

> "There is an assumption that the couple has experienced marginalization and discrimination. It is possible that given specific buffers, they may not be aware of or have such experiences."

The second piece wrote,

> "First, be sure that there is a way to capture the fact that not all couples (individual members or both members) similarly perceive the impact of race and/or racism on their relationship."

To respond to the feedback, I clarified,

> "Thank you for the suggestion. Grounded in AsianCrit and Ecological model, the current study situates couples' interpretations in contexts: the historical sanctions on interracial unions and contemporary racial stratification and exacerbated anti-Asian racism in the U.S. There is an assumption that marginalization is part of the context, but couple's perceptions of this will depend on their interpretations. We reframed the purpose of the study to whether and how they perceive the impact of race, stratification in the U.S. and intersectionality on their couple relationships."

At first, I thought both comments were legitimate because they tried to remind me not to hold

any presumptions. Later on, I started to question those comments after I read more about Asian Americans' realized history and listened to various Chinese Americans' racialized stories. Specifically, Shih et al. (2019) mentioned that Asian Americans are perceived as fully integrated into U.S. society and exempted from experiences of racial discrimination and other forms of oppression because some Asian Americans achieved high socioeconomic status (e.g., educational and income achievements), which somehow proved Asian Americans have "made it" in U.S. society. Moreover, Asians have been pitted against African/black Americans to mostly oppress black (Kim, 1999). Additionally, participants from my current and previous research projects shared that racism against Asian people, to some degree, was accepted compared to racism against African American people, although it should not be compared. Then, I started reflecting on the feedback and wondered why they felt the need to remind me that interracial couples may not encounter discrimination, or those incidents did not affect couple relationships, although the whole study aimed to explore whether and how interracial couples perceive and respond to the marginalized contexts. What did they try to imply? I could not help but wonder: What if my participants were Black-White interracial couples or black couples? Would I receive the same reminders? Why was it my responsibility to re-state the marginalized contexts just because they lacked knowledge of Asian Americans and interracial couples' marginalized history or still had some doubts about the marginalized contexts even after reading my proposal? Was that a process for social-justice researchers that they had to educate their peers at the beginning to make them believe their claims were legitimate? This still baffles me.

Another challenge is the heaviness and loneliness of doing social justice research, which was echoed by one couples who were actively advocating social justice via their work and daily lives. They encouraged me not to give up and to continue speaking up for this population. They also

reminded me of the significance of finding my own like-minded professional network to get more support and avoid burnout. When they gave me those suggestions, I realized how lonely I had been. Although my co-advisors have been supporting me, I have not found or built my professional community yet. After a while, I started reaching out. For instance, I have been running as co-chair of the Asian American focus group from NCFR. This is the first step. I plan to get plugged into more groups. After all, social justice work cannot be a one-person job.

Second, there are still challenges in conducting qualitative studies in the Family Science discipline. I felt the pressure to provide extra explanation and proof to prove the rigor of my study. For instance, before the dissertation project, I published two papers using a phenomenological approach. The peer review process was harsh regarding the methods section. I was asked by one journal questions about generalizability and validity which came from a positivist, quantitative mindset, and I had to explain why these are not the standards to evaluate the quality of a qualitative study. Another journal simply told me that they were not familiar with the qualitative methods. Then, the reviewers made comments on every sentence in my literature review. As frustrating as it was, the process motivated me to want to do better in using qualitative approaches to prove there is value in qualitative methodology. As a result, I approached my dissertation (i.e., narrative inquiry) more maturely and vigorously compared to approaching the previous project. I started thinking about the vigor of my dissertation since the conceptualization; and I took all the necessary steps to improve the rigor, including using an initial phone-call assessment to strengthen the recruitment, interviewing each couple twice, being very transparent in my coding analysis and the results generating, etc. Additionally, as I am on the job market now, it is very clear having advanced statistical skills is generally preferred among academic positions. This makes me realize that as much as I enjoy doing qualitative

studies, I also need to acknowledge the necessity of equipping myself with advanced statistical skills to better study and understand Asian family dynamics due to the diverse and complex nature of current society. Thus, in the future, I plan to incorporate advanced statistical training into my career development agenda.

Third, being a couple and family clinician has enhanced my research process and raised some challenges in role shifting as well. For my dissertation interviews, all eight couples came back for the second interview. I may think my clinical training has helped the interview process, from drafting an interview protocol to applying them, which reduced the participants' attrition. Also, as mentioned earlier, there were ethical challenges in conducting dyadic couple interviews. The awareness of ethical issues and being able to discuss them with my advisor and come up with plans to handle them delicately may also be rooted in my clinical training background. Meanwhile, role shifting between a researcher and a clinician can be challenging due to different goals and processes. Specifically, as a couple therapist, I have been trained to maintain a balanced alliance with each partner to assess and identify the negative cycle and apply appropriate systemic dyadic models to intervene and improve couple relationships. However, as a researcher, especially one guided by postmodernism and social justice frameworks, my role is much more involved and part of the constructing of their stories. My positionality has informed every phase of this project, from taking an interest in this research topic, to engaging in data collection and analysis, to writing it up. Therefore, there were several times where I actively resisted positivist stances of researcher neutrality during the interviews. In addition, throughout, I considered myself engaging in the process of co-constructing knowledge with couples because I believe there is no absolute truth waiting to be discovered but truth is always a process of becoming. For example, at the end of an interview with couple 4 (this couple's stories were used

to compose Sarah & James's stories), they shared that they never gave much thought to race-related topics. However, the two interviews had made them start thinking that it might be necessary to initiate a conversation with their child to assist his racial identity development. Moreover, with the social-justice orientation in my scholarly work, I feel the need to amplify the marginalized voices and not shy away from addressing issues of injustice in order to facilitate social change. This framework may explain my interactions with Dong Mei& Andrew during the interviews. Specifically, I expressed my agreement with Dong Mei's claim that race is not comparable to thermodynamics because that is part of her identity and lived experience. Also, I pointed out that it might be possible that racial privilege may have played a role in their argument when Dong Mei and Andrew were fighting about whether the "do-you-work" question was racist or not. I did not have to say anything about those comments, but I did. When I reflected on my conduct, I realized I agreed with Dong Mei because I wanted to center Dong Mei's voice since she had been "dismissed" and unheard for a long time. I brought up the concept of "racial privileges" to raise their awareness regarding the negative impact of marginalized discourses on their relationship. I hoped that action could facilitate positive changes in their relationship by raising awareness that it was neither partners fault to perceive the do-you-work question in either way. It is the racialized discourse that was at the center of the problem. Thus, they could adopt ways to reject the marginalized discourse together as a couple.

Fourth, my professional identity and personal identity are shaping one another. The reason that my scholarship centers around the Asian community with a social-justice focus is triggered by my friends and my own personal experiences. All my Chinese friends have encountered various marginalized experiences, including racism, culturalism, and languagism from being asked, "Where are you really from?" to being called China doll or being belittled

because of their staggered English. Moreover, most of my Chinese friends are either dating or married to a White Euro-American partner. They shared challenges about communicating race and culture-related topics with their partners. Those experiences motivated my research topics. Meanwhile, as I value the translational nature of family science research, I am always glad to share and explain my research to my friends because I want them to feel their identities and experiences are valued and being seen.

Regardless of those challenges in conducting social justice research or using qualitative approaches, I keep in mind this is not all about me or how I feel. It is worth the challenge if I can make the corner around me a slightly better place.

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Table 1 The Demographics

	Couple 1		**Couple 2**		**Couple 3**		**Couple 4**		**Couple 5**		**Couple 6**		**Couple 7**		**Couple 8**	
Current location in the U.S.	South		South		Midwestern		Northwest		South		West		Midwestern		West	
Annual household income in 2022 ($)	71k~100k		Above 100K		Above 100K		Above 100K		71k~100k		Above 100K		Above 100K		71k~100k	
Length of relationship	10		10		10		13		13		14		7		19	
Number of children together	1		1		2		1		1		>2		2		>2	
Immigration status of the Chinese American partner	1st generation		1st generation		1st generation		2nd generation		2nd generation		1.5 generation		1st generation		2nd generation	
	CA	**WEA**	**CA**	**WEA**	**CA**	**WEA**	**CA**	**WEA**	**CA**	**WEA**	**CA**	**WEA**	**CA**	**WEA**	**CA**	**WEA**
Gender	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Woman	Man	Woman	Man
Education	Grad	Grad	Grad	Grad	Grad	Grad	Bachelor	Bachelor	Grad	Grad	Grad	Grad	Grad	Bachelor	Grad	Grad
Occupation	Academic	Non-academic	Academic	Non-academic	Academic	Academic	Non-academic	Non-academic	Non-profit	Non-profit	Academic	Non-academic	Academic	Non-academic	Non-profit	Non-profit
Political Position	Democrat	No Position	Democrat	Republican	Democrat	Democrat	Democrat	Democrat	Independent	Democrat	Democrat	Democrat	Democrat	Republican	Democrat	Democrat
Religious Identity	Not religious	Christian	Not religious	Catholic	Catholic	Catholic	Protestant	Protestant	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian

Note:
CA---Chinese American partner
WEA---White European-American partner

Figure1 Racial Triangulation

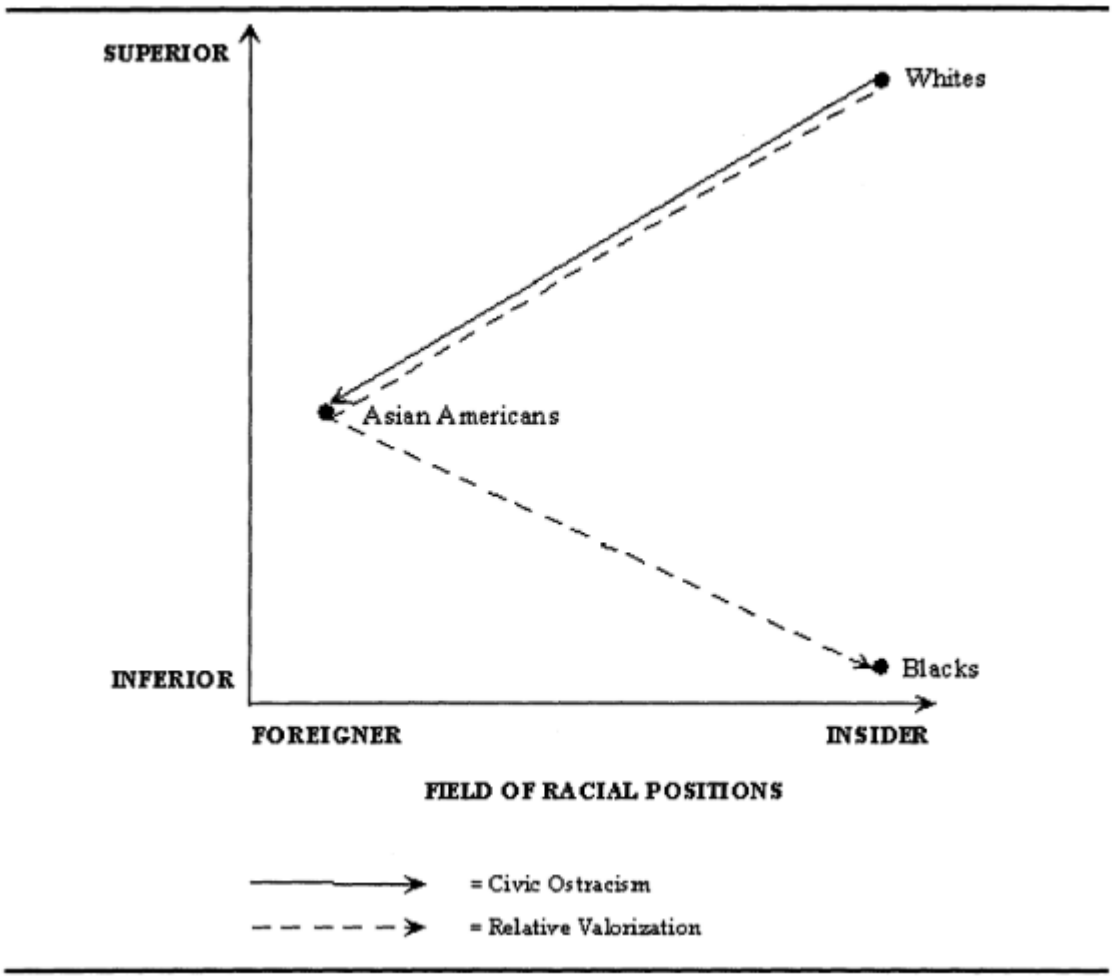
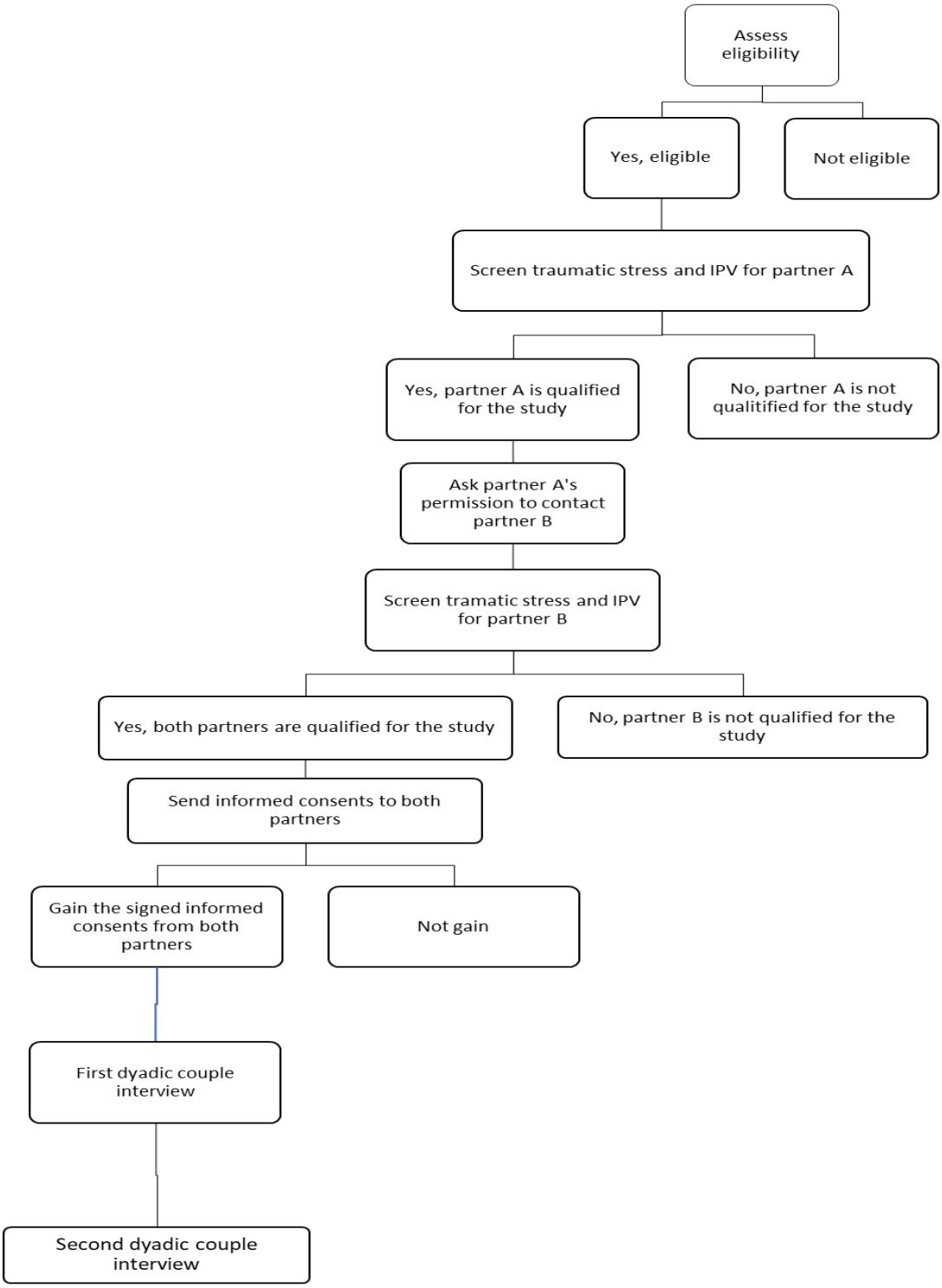


Figure 2 Flow Chart



Appendix A Eligibility Survey

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. This study is investigating to investigate Chinese American/White Euro-American couples' overtime experiences of navigating marginalization and discrimination. The following questions will be used to determine your eligibility for participating in this study. In answering this short survey, you provide consent to be contacted by the researcher if you are determined to be eligible to participate.

1. Do you provide consent for the researcher to contact you if you are determined to be eligible for participating in this study?
   Yes, I grant the researcher permission to contact me
   No, I don't grant the researcher permission to contact me
2. Are you comfortable being contacted by the researcher via email from the study?
   - Yes
   - No, thank you
3. My active email address is _____ (*if the answer to Q2 is yes*)
4. What year were you born? _____ (yyyy)
5. Which sex was assigned to you at your birth certificate?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Prefer not to say
6. Are you in a committed relationship or marriage now?
   - Yes
   - No
7. How long have you been in this committed relationship or marriage? (*if the answer to Q7 is yes*)
   - Before 2020
   - After 2020
   - None of above
8. What type of a committed relationship or marriage now that you are in? (*if the answer to Q7 is yes, and the answer to Q8 is 2 or more than 2 years*)
   - Heterosexual relationship/marriage
   - Same-sex relationship/marriage
   - Prefer not to say
9. How would you identify yourself?
   - I am a Chinese American and a Green card holder
   - I am a Chinese American with U.S. citizenship
   - I am a Euro-White American citizen, born and raised in the U.S.
   - None of the above
10. What is your immigration status? (*if the answer to Q11 is Chinese American)*
    - I identify myself as a 1st-generation Chinese American (i.e., born in China but migrated to the U.S. when I was over 18 years old)
    - I identify myself as a 1.5-generation Chinese American (i.e., born in China but migrated to the U.S. when I was under the age of 18)

- I identify myself as a 2nd-generation Chinese American or beyond (i.e., born and raised in the U.S.)
- None above

11. How many years have you been in the United States? (*if the answer to Q12 is 1st and 1.5 generation Chinese American*)
    - Under 10 years
    - 10 or more than 10 years
    - None of above
12. What is your preferred language for communication in the future interviews?
    - Mandarin
    - English
    - None of above

Appendix B Screeners

Screener 1---Brief Mental Health Screener for Racialized Experiences

Assigned ID number: _____
Gender: □male □female
Current date: _____
I'm going to ask you a few questions related to the level of stress you might be experiencing because of the race-based violence or discrimination. I ask these questions because it could place you at elevated risk and distress to participate in the study if you are experiencing severe stress. I will ask you about emotions, thoughts and feelings related to your life experiences. Please listen as I read each one aloud and carefully decide how much each bothered you in the past month.

Statement	**0 never**	**1 rarely**	**2 sometimes**	**3 often**
In the past month, how often had you had strong negative feelings such as fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame because of what happened in the past?				
In the past month, have had experiences of avoiding going to certain places, meeting certain people, or doing certain things because of what happened in the past?				
In the past month, have you experienced problems because of what happened in the past that kept you from being involved with your family or friends?				
In the past month, how much are you unable to do things that you need to do on a daily basis (e.g., cooking, bathing, working, taking care of children, going to appointments, etc.)				
In the past month, have you been unable to concentrate, remember things, or make decisions (e.g., drifting in and out of conversations, losing tack of a story, forgetting what you read?)				
Total Score (out of 15) =	0	0-5	0-10	0-15

- moderate to high stress level (i.e., total score >= 10): given your level of stress, part of my ethical commitment is that I can't move forward without compromising your mental or relational health. But thank you so much you are interested in this study! I really appreciated your interest in this study!
- low to moderate stress level (i.e., total scores 0~9)

Screener 2---IPV Screener

Assigned ID number: _____
Gender: □male □female
Current date: _____

I'm going to ask you a few questions related to the intimate partner violence that you might be experiencing with your current partner. I ask these questions because it could place you at elevated risk and distress to participate in the study if you are experiencing these stressors. Please listen as I read each one aloud and carefully decide how much each bothered you in the last 12 months.

Statement	1 never	2 rarely	3 sometimes	4 fairly often	5 frequently
1. Has your partner ever physically hurt you in the past 12 months?					
2. Has your partner ever insulted you in the past 12 months?					
3. Has your partner ever threatened to harm you in the past 12 months?					
4. Has your partner ever screamed or cursed at you in the past 12 months?					
5. *Has your partner ever forced you to have sexual activities in the past 12 months?					
Total Score					

- The cut-off score is 10.5 of the original 4-item version. Meaning >= 11 indicates IPV

  Sherin, K. M., Sinacore, J. M., Li, X. Q., Zitter, R. E., & Shakil, A. (1998). HITS: a short domestic violence screening tool for use in a family practice setting. *Family medicine, 30*, 508-512.
- The cut-off score is 8.5 of Hong Kong 5-item version. Meaning >= 9 indicates IPV
  - Chan, C. C., Chan, Y. C., Au, A., & Cheung, G. O. C. (2010). Reliability and validity of the "Extended-Hurt, Insult, Threaten, Scream" (E-HITS) screening tool in detecting intimate partner violence in hospital emergency departments in Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Journal of Emergency Medicine, 17*(2), 109-117.

Appendix C Demographic Survey

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. This study is investigating to investigate Chinese American/White Euro-American couples' overtime experiences of navigating marginalization and discrimination. The following brief questions will be used to collect demographic information from ***both*** you and your partner.

1. In which state do you and your partner currently reside?

   The name of the State: Click or tap here to enter text.

   ☐ We are currently in a long-distance relationship, not reside in the same state.

2. How many years have been together in this committed relationship or marriage?

   Around Click or tap here to enter text. years

3. How many children are living with you and your current partner? This may include biological or adopted children as well as children from previous partnerships?

   ☐ 0
   ☐ 1
   ☐ 2
   ☐ More than 2

4. How much total combined pre-tax money did all members of your household earn in 2022?

   ☐ Less than $20,000
   ☐ $21,000 to $40,000
   ☐ $41,000 to $70,000
   ☐ $71,000 to $100,000
   ☐ Above $100,000

5. If your partner or you self-identifies as Chinese American and immigrated to the U.S. at some point, please specify your or your partner's immigration status.

   ☐ My partner or I self-identify as a 1st-generation Chinese American (i.e., born in China but migrated to the U.S. as an adult [i.e., 18 years old or older]).
   ☐ My partner or I self-identify as a 1.5-generation Chinese American (i.e., born in China but migrated to the U.S. as a minor [i.e., under 18 years old]).
   ☐ My partner or I self-identify as 2nd-generation Chinese American or beyond (i.e., born and raised in the U.S.).

☐ Not applicable.

6. What gender do you and your partner self-identify as?

I identify myself as	My partner identifies himself/herself/themselves as
☐ Man	☐ Man
☐ Woman	☐ Woman
☐ Non-binary	☐ Non-binary
☐ Prefer not to say	☐ Prefer not to say

7. What is the highest level of education you and your partner have completed?

My highest level of education is	My partner's highest level of education is
☐ Graduate (master's, doctoral) degree	☐ Graduate (master's, doctoral) degree
☐ Bachelor's (4-year) college degree	☐ Bachelor's (4-year) college degree
☐ Associate (2-year) college degree	☐ Associate (2-year) college degree
☐ Some college but no degree	☐ Some college but no degree
☐ High school diploma or equivalent	☐ High school diploma or equivalent
☐ Less than high school diploma	☐ Less than high school diploma

8. What are your and your partner's current occupations?

My occupation		My partner's occupation
Click or tap here to enter text.		Click or tap here to enter text.

9. In terms of a political stand, most of the time (in alphabetic order):

I think of myself as or leaning towards	My partner thinks of themselves as or leaning towards
☐ Democrat	☐ Democrat
☐ Independent	☐ Independent
☐ Not having a clear stand	☐ Not having a clear stand
☐ Other Click or tap here to enter text.	☐ Other Click or tap here to enter text.
☐ Republican	☐ Republican

☐ *Prefer not to say* ☐ *Prefer not to say*

10. Do you and your partner identify with the following religions (in alphabetic order)? [*Select all that apply*]

I identify with	My partner identifies with
☐ Buddhism	☐ Buddhism
☐ Catholicism	☐ Catholicism
☐ Christianity	☐ Christianity
☐ Hinduism	☐ Hinduism
☐ Inter/Non-denominational	☐ Inter/Non-denominational
☐ Islam	☐ Islam
☐ Judaism	☐ Judaism
☐ Protestantism	☐ Protestantism
☐ *Not religious*	☐ *Not religious*

Appendix D Interview Protocols

First Dyadic Couple Interview Protocol

Instructions

This is the first of the two dyadic couple interviews. Today, we will focus on collecting your stories in terms of whether and how you perceive the impact of race, stratification and intersectionality on your couple relationship dynamics and wellbeing.

Just as a reminder, you can share what stories feel meaningful to you, but in particular we want to focus on your stories regarding how you two as a couple think about race, racial stratification and its impact. And if there are racialized incidents that happened in the past to you or someone close to you, we will explore how you two navigate those negative incidents. For today, we will get into the depths of the stories. Also, you do not have to share anything you don't feel comfortable with, and you can pause or stop all together at any time.

Now, I'd like to emphasize three rules in order to create a safe space for us to talk about vulnerable thoughts and feelings:

Both of your perspectives are equally important to this study. Therefore, I will ask a question and invite each of you to take turns answering. Please hold your thoughts and share after your partner has had a chance to answer. I will gently stop you if you talk over your partner or do not let your partner finish their sentence.

I want to also acknowledge that it is common for partners to have different opinions and feelings about the same event. Differences are welcomed in this interview. So, please keep an open mind to your partner's different opinions. If interpersonal tension arises during our interview, I may gently intervene and ask if you are still comfortable continuing with the interview.

Regarding language, I invite you to use your preferred language – English or Mandarin - during the interview. I will take the responsibility of interpreting from Mandarin to English to ensure everything that is communicated during this interview is known to each other.

Warm-up questions

- Could you share some of the strengths that you see in your relationship?

Before COVID-19

Q1.1: Since you have been together for XXX years, how have your racial differences mattered in your relationship over time? *I'm interested in your couple dynamics. That means how you two handled specific situations as a couple. As we go deeper, how you talk through together as a couple. I like this to be a dialogue among us three.*

Prompts:

- *Could you share a moment you were pointed out or reminded that you are an interracial couple?*
- *Can you think of an event that created a discussion about racial or ethnic differences in your relationship? How has that discussion influenced your relationship?*
- *Based on your experiences, do you think having a race-based conversation with one another is needed? Why?*

Q1.2 Regarding the racial differences between you and your partner, did your family or friends comment about that? And how did you two navigate this process? How has this process influenced your relationship?

Prompts:

- *How about both of your parents'/close friends'/coworkers' reactions when you first started dating and later got married (and have children), in terms of racial differences?*

Q1.3 Intersectionality: race can interact with other factors to influence your experiences as an interracial couple. Those factors include age, gender, social class, religion, where you live, immigration status, language, sexual orientation, employment, and ability. (*For example, if you were an interracial couple living in a big city like New York, your experiences might be different from interracial couples living in a small town)*

Prompts:

- *Would you share the story about choosing a place, such as choose a residential area, a job place, or choose a school for your children, or travel places? Did any of those choices have something to do with race? How?*

Q1.4 Would you share the story of your surname changing and how you two decided to name your children including first name, given name and surname? Is there anything to do with race or ethnicity? Why?

During COVID-19

During COVID-19, there was an increase in racist incidents. Asians were harassed, verbally and physically attacked during COVID-19.

Q2.1: If a racialized incident happened to you, your partner, or someone close to you during COVID-19, could you share a story of how you two navigated the event as a couple?

Q2.2: If there wasn't a racialized incident that happened to you, your partner, or someone close to you during COVID-19, could you share a story of how you two, as a couple, responded to the general negative sociopolitical background against Asians in the U.S. during that time?

In general

Q3: Whether and how being in this interracial relationship has influenced your perspectives and feelings about race, racial diversity, and racial stratification in the U.S.?

Final Question:

I'd like to end our interview by asking about the strengths of your relationship again.

Based on the stories you addressed earlier, when you look back from now,

- What do you see the relationship strengths that have helped you and your partner navigate those difficult moments? Please be specific.
- Any resources that helped you and your partner or any resources you wish could be there? Anything you want to say to yourself and your partner?

Closing Remarks

Thank you so much for being open with me and for sharing your story with me. Is there anything else you would like to add or change before we end for today?

Just as a reminder, it would be normal for you to feel somewhat upset or closer to each other after sharing your couple stories with me. Do you need the contact information for any resources right now?

Next time we meet, we will talk about your reflections on today's interviews and perhaps deepen the shared understanding of your experiences. That interview will also allow you to provide feedback on how I am interpreting your experiences as a couple – we call it member checking. Shall we go ahead and schedule a time for your next interview?

Confirm preferred email address for receiving incentive (email gift card for participating this interview)

One Example of Second Dyadic Couple Interview Protocol---varied by couple

Instructions

Just a reminder that last time we focused on your stories regarding whether and how you perceive the impact of race, stratification and intersectionality on your couple relationship.

Today, we are going to build on the first interview and focus on the reflections of those experiences. It will be a conversation among the three of us.

Today's interview is composed of two parts. We are going to spend the first part of the interview briefly going over the stories you shared in the first interview in a reflective way. Also, I want to follow up on some specific stories you shared last time. For the second part, I have a few general questions to further explore and summarize your reflections on your shared stories.

We will hold the same ground rules as we did last time to continue facilitating a safe environment for us to talk about vulnerable feelings and thoughts.

Starter:

I am deeply touched. When you two share those stories, I relive your love story. I am amazed by your shared common values and strong bond. Also, I relive the process of navigating the impact of racism and general racialized structure on your relationship. It was a learning process for both of you: learning about racialized structure, racism, privileges, and its impact together and learning how to communicate those topics and navigate difficult situations as a couple.

Since our last dyadic couple interview, how have you been thinking about the stories you shared in that interview? Any reflections?

Part 1: Summary of the first interview

Uniqueness:

Thank you for both of your vulnerabilities and the stories you shared. When you two were sharing those stories, I felt like reliving those stories with you. I am amazed by your shared values, strong bonds, and vulnerabilities. Your stories highlighted the long and hard process of how you two went from being defensive at the beginning of your relationship to gradually being on the same page about race-related topics. You both made constant and substantial efforts. For J it is not easy for you to keep bringing up and explaining to R how that is a racialized incident to let R understand your reality. For R, it was not easy for you to put aside the reality you are familiar with and try to see a different reality via J's eyes. It started with both of you getting defensive, then moved to R's efforts of learning racial justice materials via Podcast, books, etc. Then, you started understanding J's racialized experiences and being able to connect to him at the emotional level. So far, you two are still learning and growing together via sharing an

interesting article, watching documentaries together, etc. I can see you two hold each other's hands and move forward as a strong interracial couple.

Since our last dyadic couple interview, how have you been thinking about the stories you shared in that interview? Any reflections?

Relationship Strengths

- Shared common values
- Honesty and effective communication skills enable them to navigate hard conversations with each other.
- Role of humor

It Is Necessary to Have Race-Based Conversations.

It is the reality.

- *"And if we don't talk about it, it's not going to be good for us. I don't think. Because it's a real thing… it still affects J. It still affects me. It affects me when people don't recognize XXX as my kid. That hurts"*
- *Go through or witness racialized incidents together and with their child*

Racism is systemic.

- *"Racism isn't just personal, but it's systemic… How do you bring that with you? You can only bring that about if you talk about it."*

Racism can be perpetuated throughout generations without being noticed and challenged.

- *"I think that's another reason to talk about it because you're not just thinking about racism now. I'm thinking about racism three generations from now. Like, what's this gonna be like for my grandson?"*

Shared values toward commitment and love for one another enabled them to hold a hard conversation without jeopardizing relationships.

- *"For us. I think we've gotten to a place where, again, we have a shared concept of race, too, and how it affects people negatively. So I do think we share that in common enough that we can talk about these things without it being super tense."*
- *"We have a shared value toward commitment and love for one another. And so we're gonna make that work."*

J's persistence and R's ability to connect him on an emotional level.

Navigate Racialized Incidents

Learn to raise racial awareness and grow together

- *"We would listen to it regularly for a while together and then talk about which I think was good."*

The difficulties

- *When it happens in a workplace where both partners are co-workers, they try to manage different roles and responsibilities and still want to support each other in difficult situations.*

Shared coping strategies and shared common values

- *Let the small incidents pass because they aren't worthy of time and energy, but it feels good to debrief with one another at some point later.*

Activism and solidarity

- *e.g., having a picnic at a park nearby Chinatown to stand in solitarily with the local Asian business and community and also a way for them to navigate the increased Asian hate at that time.*

Part 2: General Questions

Q1: Our upbringing shapes how we connect to others and the world. Could you share a moment when your parents talked with you about what it means to be a white/Asian in the U.S. when you grew up?

Q2: You may already mention it from different angles. Here, I would like to ask this question to summarize what we discussed.
How has being in this interracial relationship shaped each of your perceptions, feelings, and behaviors regarding race, racism, and the general racial stratification of the U.S. over time?

Q3: What suggestions would you like to give to other interracial couples like you to better navigate the possible impact of race, stratification, and intersectionality on their relationships?

Closure

What else might you want to share regarding whether and how you perceive the impact of race, stratification and intersectionality on your couple relationship dynamics that I have not asked you about and that you want others to know?

Thank you so much for participating in this project and sharing your story with me. Do you have any questions for me before we wrap up?

Confirm preferred email address for receiving incentive (email gift card for participating in this interview).

Appendix E The Recruitment Flyer

Human Development & Family Science
College of Family and Consumer Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

A Research Project Looking for Interracial Couples

Are you in a heterosexual interracial relationship (i.e., one is Chinese American, the other is White-Euro American)?

Tile of the Study	Understanding the Impact of Race, Stratification and Intersectionality in Chinese-American/White Euro-American Couples' Relationship Dynamics and Wellbeing.
Purpose of the study	Aims to investigate Chinese-American/White Euro-American couples' stories regarding the impact of race, stratification in the US, and intersectionality on their couple relationship dynamics and well-being.
Eligibility	• You are currently in a heterosexual interracial relationship where one partner self-identifies as a Chinese American and the other partner self-identifies as White Euro-American. • Chinese American partners who are not born and raised in the US need to have live in the US for at least ten years. • You and your current partner are in a committed relationship or marriage before March 2020. • Both you and your partner are between the ages of 20 and 65.
Incentives	You and your partner as a couple will receive a total of $120 Amazon eGift card for your household following the completion of **TWO online couple interviews** (i.e., a $60 eGift card for the first couple interview, and a $60 eGift card for the second couple interview). Each interview will last **1.5~2 hours**
The IRB approval ID	PROJECT00007063
For questions regarding eligibility	Please contact: **yabin.tang@uga.edu**

More information about the study, please scan this QR code

To assess your eligibility for the study, please scan this QR code

Appendix F Dyadic Zoom Interview Preparations

- According to the informed consent, both interviewers and interviewees are required to find confidential and quiet space for the interview.
- Since this is a conjoint couple interview, both partners need to be on the screen regardless he/she/they is talking or not. Thus, please use desktop or laptop or tablet with large screen that could ensure both partners are included in the screen. Do not use cellphone.
- Ensure your internet connection is stable. Hardwire your connection if possible.
- Leverage the video settings “Touch up my appearance” and “Adjust light.”
- Close your web browser tabs and pause notifications so you’re not tempted to check email or acknowledge any disruptions.
- Silence your phone and other devices, such as Alexia.
- Join your meeting a few minutes early to make sure your meeting link works and give yourself time to troubleshoot any possible issues.