Interracial Intimacies: Navigating Race and Culture in Heterosexual Racialized-White Relationships in Toronto

by

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Abstract

The number of mixed-race couples in Canada, especially in metropolitan cities such as Toronto, is on a steadfast rise, yet there is limited culturally relevant research and literature on interracial unions. This study was conducted in response to the critical need for Canadian-specific research on this demographic, since there is an over-reliance on antiquated, problem-focused and United States-based research to inform the field of counselling and psychotherapy in Canada. The present study aimed to address this paucity by asking the question: what are the lived experiences of heterosexual, Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto with regards to issues of race and culture? A constructivist grounded theory methodology explored the lived experiences of 12 heterosexual Racialized-White couples in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Four key themes emerged from the findings – lived experiences of race/culture prior to mixed-race relationships; lived experiences of race/culture in mixed-race relationships; critical reflections on lived experiences: negotiating differences, racism and privilege, and being in 'the middle' of two races and cultures; and lived experiences beyond race/culture. The themes illustrated the multifaceted, vastly diverse and dynamic experiences and processes evident in these unions. This research further postulated that the experiences of interracial couples cannot be fully ascertained without a critical consideration within the context of Canadian colonialism,

White supremacy, heteropatriarchy and endogamous discourse. A mid-level theory arose from this study, revealing the multilayered influences on and experiences of heterosexual interracial couples. Implications for education, research and counselling and psychotherapy are addressed, including contributions to intercultural counselling competencies and decolonial pedagogy for counselling psychology programs.

Key Words and Phrases: Mixed-Race Relationships, Racialized-White, Race, Culture, Canada

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Table of Contents

Abstract ii

Acknowledgements iv

Table of Contents v

List of Tables x

List of Figures xi

List of Appendices xii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1

Definition of Terms 4
Statement of the Research Problem 8
Research Question 9
Rationale and Significance of Research 10
Conclusion 10

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW 12

Colonialism and Racialization: History of Mixed-Race Relationships in Canada 14
- Race and Racism in Canada's History 14
- Regulation of Mixed-Race Intimacies: A Historical Overview 16

Mixed-Race Relationships: The Present 19
- The Rise in Interracial Relationships 20
- Demography of Mixed-Race Relationships 22
- *Race* in Mixed-Race Relationships 24

A Critical Analysis of Mixed-Race Relationships 28
- Locating Mixed-Race Relationships 28
- Conceptualizing Differences and Challenges 30
  - Social and Family Barriers 31
  - Racial Border Patrolling 32
  - Parenting and Relational Stress 34
- Framing Race and Culture for Relationship Success 37

Conclusion 43

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY 45

Introduction 45

Rationale for Using Qualitative Methodology....46
Rationale for Using Grounded Theory....48
Study Design....50
Sampling....50
Inclusion Criteria....52
Recruitment....53
Description of Sample....55
Procedure....59
Preparation for Interviews & Consent....59
Interviews....60
Instrument....60
Potential Benefits and Risks to Participants....61
Data Analysis....62
Memo Writing....62
Transcription....63
Analysis of Data....64
Social Location of Researcher....66
Summary....68

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS....70

Introduction....70

Core Theme 1....73
1.0 Lived Experiences of Race and Culture Prior to Mixed-Race Relationships....73
1.1 How I Found My Identity: Experiences with One's Own Racial & Cultural Identities....75
1.1.1 Defining One's Identities....75
1.1.1.1 Canadian Identity....75
1.1.1.2 Ancestral-Informed Identity....77
1.1.2 Influences on Identity Development....78
1.1.2.1 Exposure to Ancestral Homeland....79
1.1.2.2 Cultural Transmission through Family....80
1.1.2.3 Religion, Ceremonies and Celebrations....82
1.1.2.4 Exposure to Native Language....83
1.1.2.5 Exposure to Cultural Foods....84
1.1.3 Perception and Insights towards One's Own Racial & Cultural Identities....85
1.1.3.1 Racial and Cultural Demographics of Geographical Regions....85
1.1.3.2 Intergenerational Experiences....87
1.1.3.3 Personal Experiences of Prejudice, Racism and/or Privilege....88
1.2 How I Developed Cross Racial and Cultural Awareness and Insightful Understanding....90
1.2.1 Cross Racial and Cultural Experiences....90
1.2.1.1 Diversity of Geographical Regions....91
1.2.1.2 Diversity amongst Peers and in School....92
1.2.2 Attitudes, Beliefs and Insights on Diverse Races and Cultures....94
1.2.2.1 Awareness of Racism and/or Privilege....94

1.2.2.2 Family's Attitudes and Beliefs towards Diverse Races and Cultures.....95
1.3 How I Conceptualize Mixing of Races and Cultures in Relationships:
Influences, Beliefs and Experiences 96
1.3.1 Factors Influencing my Insights and Perception of Mixed-Race Relationships.....97
1.3.1.1 Mixed-Race Relationships in Geographical Regions 97
1.3.1.2 Family's Perception of Mixed-Race Relationships 99
1.3.1.2.1 Positive and Supported 99
1.3.1.2.2 Negative and Race/Culture Dependent.....100
1.3.1.3 Mixed-Race Relationships in School and amongst Peers.....101
1.3.1.4 Personal Values and Beliefs on Mixed-Race Relationships.....101
1.3.2 Experiences and Insights on Dating Inside and Outside Racial and Cultural Groups.....102
1.3.2.1 Dating In and Out of Racial/Cultural Group.....103
1.3.2.2 Dating only Out of Racial/Cultural Group.....104
1.3.2.3 Critical Reflections of Race and Culture on Partner Preference.....105
Summary of Core Theme One 106

Core Theme 2 108
2.0 Lived Experiences of Race and Culture in Mixed-Race Relationships.....108
2.1 Meeting and Attraction: Race and Culture on Attraction and the
Pursuit of a Relationship.....110
2.1.1 How We Met and Factors Influencing Attraction.....110
2.1.2 Influence of Race and Culture on Attraction and the Pursuit of a Relationship.....112
2.1.2.1 No Influence of Race and Culture 112
2.1.2.2 Influence of Race and Culture 114
2.2 'Mixing' Race and Culture in Mixed-Race Relationships.....115
2.2.1 What is Being 'Mixed' in Mixed-Race Relationships.....116
2.2.1.1 Elements of Race and Culture.....116
2.2.1.2 Children: Racial/Cultural Experiences and Identity 118
2.2.2 How is Race and Culture 'Mixed' in Mixed-Race Relationships.....120
2.2.2.1 Degrees of 'Mixing' Race and Culture.....120
2.2.2.1.1 Mixing Both Races and Cultures 121
2.2.2.1.2 Mixing Both Races and Cultures and Individual Maintenance 122
2.2.2.1.3 Incorporating One Race and Culture 122
2.2.2.1.4 Mixing Elements from Other Cultures 123
2.2.2.2 Racial and Cultural Identities of Mixed-Race Couples 125
2.3 Strengths of Mixed-Race Relationships.....127
2.3.1 Mixing of Race and Culture on Growth and Development 127
2.3.1.1 Individual Growth and Development.....127
2.3.1.1.1 Influence on Identity 130
2.3.1.2 Relationship Enrichment.....131
2.3.2 Children of Mixed-Race Relationships.....132
2.3.3 Development of Racial and Cultural Empathy 133
2.4 Challenges Experienced by Mixed-Race Couples.....135
2.4.1 Racial and Cultural Differences.....136
2.4.2 Discrimination, Racism and Prejudice.....138
2.4.2.1 Experiences in Family.....138

2.4.2.2 Experiences in Society 141
2.4.2.2.1 Experiences in Toronto 144
Summary of Core Theme Two 145

Core Theme 3 147
3.0 Critical Reflections on Lived Experiences: Negotiating Differences, Racism and Privilege, and Being in 'The Middle' of Two Races and Cultures 147
3.1 Negotiating Racial and Cultural Differences in Mixed-Race Relationships 148
3.1.1 Racial and Cultural Differences and Nuances 149
3.1.1.1 Racial and Cultural Factors 149
3.1.1.2 Interacting and Socializing with Family 152
3.1.1.3 Race and Culture Informed Parenting Practices 154
3.1.2 Strategies Used in Managing Racial and Cultural Differences 155
3.1.2.1 Communicate, Embrace, Learn and Negotiate 155
3.1.2.2 Identify Similarities Between Races and Cultures 157
3.1.2.3 Use of Humour 159
3.2 Coping with Discrimination, Racism and Prejudice 160
3.2.1 Acknowledge and Support Partner 160
3.2.2 Educate Partner and Others 162
3.2.3 Advocate and Execute Change 163
3.3 Racism, Privilege, Social Location, and Crossing Over Racial/Cultural Borders 165
3.3.1 Reflections on Racism, Privilege and Social Location 165
3.3.2 Crossing Over Racial and Cultural Borders 167
3.3.2.1 Crossing Racial and Cultural Borders as Mixed-Race Couples 168
3.3.2.2 Racial and Cultural Border Crossing of Mixed-Race Children 169
3.4 Commentaries and Recommendations on Navigating a Mixed-Race Relationship 171
Summary of Core Theme Three 173

Core Theme 4 175
4.0 Lived Experiences of Mixed-Race Couples Beyond Race and Culture 175
4.1 Beyond Race and Culture: Intersectional Identities and Experiences in Mixed-Race Relationships 175
4.1.1 Race/Culture and Geographical Region of Residence 176
4.1.2 Race/Culture and Country of Birth and Immigration 178
4.1.3 Race/Culture and Native Language 179
4.1.4 Race/Culture and Religion 181
4.1.5 Race/Culture and Gender 182
4.1.6 Race/Culture and Age 183
4.1.7 Race/Culture and (Dis)Abilities 184
4.1.8 Race/Culture and Socio-Economic Status 186
4.1.9 Race/Culture and Socio-Political Climate 187
4.2 Shared Values in Mixed-Race Relationships 189
Summary of Core Theme Four 191

Conclusion 192

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION 196

Introduction....196
Before Mixed-Race Couples Meet: Lived Experiences of Race and Culture....197
Once Couples Meet: Key Relationship Experiences of Race and Culture....205
A Deeper Dive: Critical Experiences of Race and Culture....217
Lived Experiences Beyond Race and Culture....228
Conclusion....233

Mid-Level Theory of Understanding the Lived Experiences of Heterosexual Racialized-White Mixed-Race Couples....234

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION....241
Strengths and Unique Contributions....241
Implications for Counselling Psychology....244
Limitations of the Study....245
Recommendations for Future Research....247
A Personal Reflection on Conducting This Research....249
Concluding Summary....250

References....252

List of Tables

Table 1: Participant Demographics at the Time of Research Interviews.....56

Table 2: Comparison between Seshadri and Knudson-Martin's Structure of Organization (2013) and the Integration of Race and Culture in the Present Study.....209

List of Figures

Figure 1: Lived Experiences of Race and Culture Prior to Mixed-Race Relationships 74

Figure 2: Lived Experiences of Race and Culture in Mixed-Race Relationships 109

Figure 3: Critical Reflections on Lived Experiences: Negotiating Differences, Racism and Privilege, and Being in 'The Middle' of Two Races and Cultures 150

Figure 4: Lived Experiences of Mixed-Race Couples Beyond Race and Culture.....177

Figure 5: Mid-Level Theory of Understanding the Lived Experiences of Heterosexual Racialized-White Mixed-Race Couples 235

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Advertisement of Research 268

Appendix B: Research Information Letter.....269

Appendix C: Demographic Screener for Study Inclusion 272

Appendix D: Informed Consent to Participate in the Research Study 273

Appendix E: Informed Consent for Online Interviews via MS Teams 276

Appendix F: Demographic Questionnaire 278

Appendix G: Navigating Mixed-Race Relationships Interview Guide 280

Appendix H: Referral Resources for Counselling 282

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The number of Canadian couples navigating the intricacies and richness of race and culture in their relationships is constantly growing as mixed-race relationships increase. The most recent data available, from the Canadian census of 2011, indicated that of all married and common-law relationships, 4.6% (360,045) were mixed-race. They defined mixed-race unions as both heterosexual and same-sex couples who do not share the same ethnicity/race, religion, language and birthplace. This demographic is steadfastly increasing as indicated by a 2% rise in mixed-union marriages and common-law partnerships between 1999 and 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2014). More specifically, Milan et al. (2010) state that in Canada, between 2001 and 2006, heterosexual and same-sex mixed-race unions, defined as either a Racialized-White or a Racialized-Racialized union where both Racialized partners belong to different racial/ethnic groups, increased by 33% compared to a 6% growth in all romantic unions. Furthermore, the number of mixed-race couples in metropolitan cities including Toronto is growing even more exponentially (Statistics Canada, 2014). Wong (2010) proclaimed that when compared to the rest of Canada, twice as many couples in Toronto identify as being in mixed-race unions.

Other countries with diverse multiracial and multiethnic populations (e.g., United States, Britain and South Africa) have also documented similar trends in heterosexual and/or same-sex mixed-race relationships (Adeagbo, 2019; Brooks & Ogolsky, 2017; Buggs, 2017; Dalmage, 2018; Kenney & Kenney, 2009; Savage, 2012; Singh et al., 2020; Song, 2010). For example, a South African census report confirmed that between 1996 and 2011, the ratio of intraracial heterosexual marriages to interracial heterosexual marriages increased from 303:1 to 95:1 (Dalmage, 2018). In the United States, it is estimated that mixed-race peoples are the fastest

growing demographic group (Townsend et al., 2012): Black-White heterosexual interracial marriages increased from 65,000 to 363, 000 between 1970 to 2000 and intermarriages between Racialized non-Blacks and Whites increased from 233, 000 to 1.1 million between 1970 and 2000 (Lin & Lundquist, 2013; Qian & Lichter, 2007). Additionally, the young, multiethnic population in the United States (50% are under 24 years of age) is further indicative of an increase in mixed-race partnerships (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2013). A 2010 census report in the United States showed that 21% of same-sex cohabitating couples were interracial (Jayson, 2012).

A cross sample comparative analysis of a 2016 report on racial configuration and sexual orientation in mixed-race couples in Canada showed that in Racialized-White partnerships, 98% of couples identified as heterosexual and 2% identified as same-sex, whereas in Racialized-Racialized mixed-race relationships, 98.9% of couples identified as heterosexual while 1.1% identified as same-sex (Aathavan, 2019). The disproportionate numbers of same-sex relationships may be attributed to ongoing social prejudice and discrimination towards same-sex couples, resulting in underreporting. The increase in mixed-race relationships, particularly heterosexual mixed-race partnerships, especially in metropolitan cities, is attributed to greater racial, cultural and ethnic diversity; this is predicted to "weaken ethnic attachment," resulting in more racial and ethnic socialization (Houston et al., 2005, p. 709). Obfuscation of racial boundaries or "social distance" (Lee & Boyd, 2008, p. 312) between groups is further bolstered by (some) racial progress towards equitable access to resources and opportunities (e.g., education, employment, neighbourhoods) – an impetus for racial mixing (Heaton & Jacobson, 2000; Iceland & Nelson, 2010).

Though mixed-race relationships are on the rise in Canada, there is insufficient research on these unions within a Canadian context (Hamplova & Le Bourdais, 2010; Lee & Boyd, 2008;

Oriola, 2008). Scarcity of data contributes to this, as it is not customary for Statistics Canada to collect data on race (Hamplova & Le Bourdais, 2010). The omission of race-based data in Canada stems from colour-blind philosophies and policies, as well as concerns around the possible misuse of race-based data (Rizvic, 2020). During this study, the primary researcher consulted with Statistics Canada and was informed that there will be no examinations of mixed-race unions in the Canada 2021 census report, with the most recent census data on mixed-race relationships dating back to 2011[1] (David Sierra, Statistics Canada, personal communication, July 30, 2020). Since little is known on interracial marriages within a Canadian context, researchers and clinicians may be inclined to generalize findings, particularly from the United States; however, circumspection is recommended, since mixed-race research in the United States has predominantly focused on Black-White relationships within an American-specific, politicized framework (Nuttgens, 2010). Generalization from American-centric research repudiates the heterogeneity of mixed-race relationships, particularly the geo-political and socio-cultural contextualization of these relationships within a Canadian framework. Moreover, in the past, research on interracial relationships often conceptualized these unions from a problem perspective, with a focus on race-based and cultural challenges. The over-problematization of mixed-race relationships in research contributes to borderism and stigmatization, which overshadows the strengths inherent to these unions (Kenney & Kenney, 2009; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013; Wehrly et al., 1999; Wright et al., 2013). Moreover, parochial research on exogamous relationships may adversely inform education, theories and interventions relevant to counselling and psychotherapy in ways that are culturally insensitive, unethical and detrimental.

[1]It should be noted that the most recent census data on mixed-race relationships in Canada came from the National Household Survey of 2011, which was later published in 2014 (Statistics Canada, 2014).

The increase in this demographic and gap in research, education and culturally-informed clinical theories and practices, calls for an immediate response. It should be noted that heterosexual Racialized-White couples were the target sample because of a greater increase in this demographic compared to heterosexual Racialized-Racialized mixed-race couples and mixed-race couples of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Statistics Canada, 2014). To begin, a definition of terminologies used in this study will be explained in order to ensure clarity and comprehensibility. Next, the statement of the research problem prompting this inquiry and the research question will be established. Finally, the rationale and significance of this research will be discussed.

Definition of Terms

Race. In this research, race is defined as the phenotype or physical characteristics—including skin and hair colour—that socially identifies and categorizes people who are considered members of a Racialized group (Seshadri & Kundson-Martin, 2013). However, an understanding of the colonial and social construction of race is necessary for the purpose of this research. Backhouse (1999) states that "Europeans began to exploit the idea of 'race' as a convenient justification for their right to rule over 'uncivilized' peoples, a rationale for the creation of colonial hierarchies" (p. 5), where they used Racialized peoples to locate and maintain the White status quo (Paragg, 2015). Backhouse (1999) also states that "race is not a biological or transhistorical feature" but "is shaped and moulded by economic, political, and cultural forces as well as resistances and challenges" (p. 147). The colonial classification of race is used to justify inequitable access to resources, power and privilege by White Europeans and race was used to justify colonization and the establishment of Black slavery (Backhouse, 1999; Dalmage, 2018; Nuttgens, 2010). The attribution of race to Racialized peoples aims to sequester

them from White people and prevent access to unearned privileges bequeathed to White people (Rousseau, 2013; Seshadri & Kundson-Martin, 2013).

Racism. Racism is the use of socially constructed racial categories to create, justify and perpetuate prejudice, discrimination and systemic inequities and injustices that impede racial progress of Racialized peoples (Backhouse, 1999; Rousseau, 2013). It is a system of learned beliefs that justifies the social positioning of White people as superior and Racialized people as inferior (Brookfield, 2019). There are two primary forms of racism: individual racism and systemic racism. Individual racism is defined as conscious or unconscious prejudicial beliefs or discriminatory behaviours directed towards Racialized peoples (Calgary Anti-Racism Education, 2021). Individual racism may take the form of racial microaggressions, which is defined as "everyday behaviors that enact the ideology of white supremacy" (Brookfield, 2019, p. 5), such as asking a Racialized Canadian, 'where are you *really* from?' On the other hand, systemic racism is defined as practices and policies that are deeply embedded in institutions and systems that promote and maintain White supremacy and preferential treatment of some racial groups over others (Calgary Anti-Racism Education, 2021).

Ethnicity. Ethnicity is often used to describe a group of people who share common nationality, regional culture, language and ancestry (Yinger, 1976). For example, people who identify as Asian might belong to different ethnicities, such as Filipino, Japanese, Korean or Chinese. The concept of ethnicity was introduced in response to the ambiguities and social complexities associated with race, where some scholars believed that "human differences were better explained by social, political, economic, and geographic factors than by biology" (Backhouse 1999, p. 6).

Culture. Culture is defined as groups of people "who share particular interpretations of the world because of reasons of geography, gender, religion, and other contingencies that play a role in lending a degree of homogeneity to their perspectives" (Pare, 1996, p. 24). Individuals belonging to a culture often share (some) similar traditions, customs, beliefs and practices that arise from analogous histories and experiences resulting in similar "interpretations of the world" (Seshadri & Kundson-Martin, 2013, p. 44). There may be immense heterogeneity present in specific cultural groups. For example, Indo-Guyanese people may share some cultural similarities; however vast intersectional differences/identities may be present including religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, education, socio-economic status, age and physical and mental abilities.

Mixed-Race Relationship. A mixed-race relationship is defined as an intimate relationship (dating, cohabitation, common-law and marriage) where the racial composition is such that both partners self-identify as holding membership in a different racial group. Since the social and political construction of race, culture and ethnicity is fluid, complex and interchangeable within a Canadian context, this research will use the terms mixed-race and interracial interchangeably to refer to mixed-race couples (Paragg, 2015; Seshadri & Kundson-Martin, 2013). The terms exogamy, intermarriage and mixed-unions will also be used to refer to mixed-race relationships. The decision to use mixed-race as opposed to mixed-ethnicity or mixed-culture is intentional, as skin colour/pigmentation (shadeism) has substantial influence and potency in society (Houston et al., 2005).

Racialized-White Mixed-Race Relationship. Racialized-White mixed-race relationship will be used to describe the racial composition of an intimate relationship where one partner self-

identifies as Racialized or a Person of Colour or Racial Minority or Racialized Minority and the other partner self identifies as White or Caucasian with European descent.

(Anti-) Miscegenation. The term miscegenation was coined in 1863 in the United States and defined as racial mixing in romantic and/or sexual partnerships. However, anti-miscegenation legislations date back to the 1600s in the United States, where interracial sexual relations were considered a punishable offense (Thompson, 2009). Anti-miscegenation laws, which remained effective in some States until 1967 (Singh et al., 2020; Townsend et al., 2012), regulated sexual/romantic relationships in an effort to maintain colonial and racist ideologies related to racial hierarchies. Anti-miscegenation legislations are often attributed to the United States since there were no equivalent legislations in Canada. However, historically, interracial relationships in Canada were not free from scrutiny, physical and psychological threats and imprisonment. The White Women's Labour Law, the Indian Act and the hate imposed by the Ku Klux Klan in Canada are believed to bear vast parallels to anti-miscegenation laws in the United States (Backhouse, 1999; Chin & Ormonde, 2018; Mixed Race Studies, 2011; Thompson, 2009).

Lived Experience. This study adhered to Dilthey's (1985) conceptualization of lived experience, who defined this phenomenon as "our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflexive or self-given awareness which is, as awareness, unaware of itself" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 35). Simply put, lived experiences are seen as the autobiographical accounts procured throughout a person's life and are believed to be situationally/contextually influenced and evolve through time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Obtaining the lived experiences of participants in research is said to require "reflexive reliving" and "reflective appropriation of something meaningful" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 36). Thus, in this research, lived experience refers to the autobiographical experiences related to race and culture, and the phenomenological meaning

ascribed to race and culture through self-awareness, reflection and interpretation (Van Manen, 2016).

Statement of the Research Problem

The number of mixed-race relationships in Canada continues to rise with a 31% increase in Racialized-White mixed-race relationships between 2001 and 2006 (Milan et al., 2010). More specifically, metropolitan cities including Toronto (dubbed the mixed-marriage capital of Canada) show a steadfast increase in mixed-unions (Mahoney & Alphonso, 2005; Milan et al., 2010; Statistics Canada, 2014). This is indicated by the 45% of second-generation and 68% of third-generation Canadians in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) who are in mixed-race marriages or common-law partnerships (Wong, 2010). Though more recent statistics are unavailable, these numbers, particularly on heterosexual interracial relationships, are projected to have increased due to growth in immigration and an increase in individuals who identify as mixed-race due to interracial parentage. And yet, there is a paucity in research and education on interracial relationships within a Canadian-specific politicized and racialized framework (Hamplova & Le Bourdais, 2010; Lee & Boyd, 2008; Oriola, 2008). Researchers, educators and clinicians may therefore extrapolate and generalize findings, particularly from the United States, to inform clinical interventions for mixed-race couples.

The field of counselling and psychotherapy in Canada continues to know very little about interracial relationships and there have been limited clinical contributions for supporting the welfare of this under- and misrepresented demographic. Furthermore, counselling and psychotherapy may be influenced by antiquated research that pathologizes these unions. Clinicians may conceptualize these relationships grounded in racist discourse and sexual and psychological stereotypes that have inundated past scholarly literature and research on mixed-

race couples (Kenney & Kenney, 2009; Wehrly et al., 1999). An overemphasis on the negative psychological, emotional and social implications of these unions may result in perpetual stigmatization, borderism and racist, and unscrupulous interventions for this demographic.

Research Question

To respond to the gap in intercultural literacy, education and counselling and psychotherapy for mixed-race couples, this research will focus on heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples, guided by the following research question: *What are the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto with regards to issues of race and culture?* The following semi-structured questions will supplement the primary research question: (1) What are the race and culture-related issues faced by mixed-race couples? (2) What are the unique strengths of being in a mixed-race relationship? (3) How do couples integrate their race and culture to build resiliency, new traditions and identity? (Seshadri & Kundson-Martin, 2013) (4) How do couples frame their racial and cultural differences, and what challenges do they pose? (5) How do couples navigate, support and resolve issues of race and culture in their relationship?

A qualitative Grounded Theory methodology situated within a strengths-based constructivist paradigm (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1965) was implemented. Moreover, this research inquiry was guided by three key theories/paradigms: (1) Critical Race Theory, which identifies race/racism as central in understanding privilege and oppression (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019), (2) Feminist Theory, which identifies patriarchy as key in understanding sexism, heterosexism and racism (Allen, 2018), and (3) Post-structuralism, which posits that 'knowing' is contextual and challenges binary ways of thinking (Gannon & Davies, 2014). This

methodological framework will address the research question with intentionality to preserve and impart integrity and acceptance of mixed-race relationships.

Rationale and Significance of Research

The scarcity and gap in scholarly literature, education and culturally-informed counselling and psychotherapy for mixed-race couples is incredulous, particularly as this demographic continues to grow (Hamplova & Le Bourdais, 2010; Lee & Boyd, 2008; Mahoney & Alphonso, 2005; Milan et al., 2010; Oriola, 2008). Mental health clinicians may therefore see an increase in this population in their practice, relying on interventions grounded in White Eurocentric psychotherapies as well as antiquated, stigmatizing and pathologizing theories, conceptualizations and interventions grounded in racist discourse–particularly racial stratification and socio-cultural hierarchies (Kenney & Kenney, 2009; Wehrly et el., 1999). Clinicians may also be inclined to adopt broad generalities extrapolated from simplification of multicultural competencies (Sue et al., 1992) that are typically applied to all forms of diversity.

This study responded to the paucity in research, education and culturally-informed practices in counselling and psychotherapy for this demographic. It has the potential to critically contribute to theories and interventions relevant to this population from an empowerment-focused, anti-racist and decolonial framework. This research also holds the capacity to dismantle colonial and racist discourses by raising awareness, inclusion and credence for heterosexual mixed-race couples. On an individual level, the narration of participants' lived experiences may empower, deepen self-awareness and identity, and reduce social isolation (Opsal et al., 2016).

Conclusion

The increase in mixed-race relationships and the existing gap in literature, research and culturally-informed counselling and psychotherapy practice warrant immediate action. This

study implemented a qualitative grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1965) to explore the lived experiences with regards to race and culture of heterosexual, Racialized-White interracial couples in Toronto. The need for culturally-informed theories and interventions for this mis- and underrepresented population is essential.

It is important to note that, though the issues of race and culture may be similar for interracial couples regardless of sexual orientation, it is critical to acknowledge the racist and heterosexist discourses that affect other demographics of interracial couples, including couples where both partners identify as a Racialized person, same-sex and/or other Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, 2-Spirited (LGBTTIQQ2S) interracial couples. Similar to heterosexual exogamous couples, same-sex, mixed-race couples are on the rise (Savage, 2012), yet there is limited literature and research on same-sex interracial unions. Though the inquiry into these demographics is beyond the scope of this study, critical consideration and focus on other interracial populations is highly recommended.

The following chapter elaborates on the existing scholarly literature relevant to heterosexual mixed-race relationships, followed by the methodology implemented to execute this research. Next, the research results are presented, followed by a critical analysis of the research findings and a presentation of the mid-level theory grounded in the lived experiences of participants. A conclusion chapter will follow, offering final reflections of this study including strengths, unique contributions, implications and limitations, as well as recommendations for future research and a personal reflection by the primary researcher.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The racial and ethnocultural demographics of Canada continue to change as a result of immigration, where 1 in 5 people in Canada are foreign-born (Statistics Canada, 2014). Statistics Canada reported that in 2016, 7,674,580 people in Canada identified as members of a Racialized group (Statistics Canada, 2017b). In 2011, 4.6% (360,045) of all married and common-law couples in Canada were mixed-race couples and of that percentage, 3.9% (305, 075) of couples identified as belonging to a Racialized-White partnership and 0.7% (54, 970) identified as belonging to a Racialized-Racialized mixed-race partnership. Furthermore, census data showed that certain ethnic and Racialized groups have a higher propensity of being in mixed-race relationships. In 2011, Japanese people (78.7%) were most likely to be in mixed-race relationships, followed by Latin Americans (48.2%) and Black people (40.2%), whereas, Chinese (19.4%) and South Asians (13.0%) made up the smallest proportions of mixed-race relationships in Canada. Within these Racialized groups, people in mixed-race relationships tend to be younger, with 30.8% of mixed-race unions belonging to the 35-44 age group and 25.8% belonging to the 25-34 age group. Furthermore, census data indicate that mixed-race couples are concentrated in metropolitan areas, with Toronto and Vancouver having the largest number of mixed-race unions (Statistics Canada, 2014).

The increase in interracial relationships may be attributed to immigration, globalization and post-colonialism, as well as shifts in societal beliefs and attitudes towards mixed-race couples, pervasiveness of technology and social media, and greater economic equity (Boratav et al., 2021; Buggs, 2017; Fernbrant et al., 2017; Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2013; McFadden, 2001; Nuttgens, 2010; Singh et al., 2020; Song, 2010; Stillwell & Lowery, 2020). Slight progression

towards socio-economic justice and equity for Racialized people has shifted access to neighbourhoods once dominated by White people, including access to education and lucrative employment opportunities. Moreover, some American studies have found that having similar socioeconomic standings contributed to a decrease in segregation among native-born and foreign-born groups (Heaton & Jacobson, 2000; Iceland & Nelson, 2010). Racial socialization and mixing are further reinforced by technological advancements and social media (e.g., online dating platforms), where individuals are no longer limited to the confines of what was once familiar but can challenge previous racial stereotypes and prejudices (Houston et al., 2005). Wright et al. (2013) cited in their research, "martial assimilation was seen as the final stage of assimilation in America" (p. 398).

Though the research on interracial relationships in Canada and the United States indicates greater acceptance, there is insufficient research-based inquiry into the actual lived experiences relevant to race and culture of mixed-race couples within a Canadian context. This section will present a summary and critique of the literature relevant to the research question outlined in this study. First, the literature review will be organized within a past and present framework, as the lived experiences related to race and culture in interracial relationships cannot be fully contextualized without a historical understanding of race/racism in Canada. A historical overview of mixed-race relationships in Canada will be presented followed by a critical discussion around the increase in mixed-race unions. A closer look will be made of the demographic trends in interracial relationships, followed by the implications of 'race' in mixed-race unions. A discussion on the social location of mixed-race relationships will be presented, followed by a critical analysis of the challenges and strengths evident in these partnerships.

Colonialism and Racialization: History of Mixed-Race Relationships in Canada

Prior to examining the history of interracial relationships in Canada, a preliminary overview of race and racism in Canada is paramount for two reasons: (1) many Canadians negate racism as part of Canada's history, and (2) a transhistorical contextualization and analysis of race and racism will deepen the understanding of past colonial and political regulation of intimacy in Canada.

Race and Racism in Canada's History. Racism in Canada was (is) not promulgated and is often overshadowed by the much-publicized racism in the United States, resulting in ubiquitous belief of Canada as being exceptionally multicultural and with "no place for race" (Thompson, 2009, p. 355). Dionne Brand, a Black Canadian historian, was asked if racism exists in Canada, and she responded that "unlike the United States, where there is at least an admission of the fact that racism exists and has a history, in this country one is faced with a stupefying innocence" (Backhouse, 1999, p. 14). Canada's Racialized minorities experienced similar oppressive histories to that in the United States. For example, Indigenous, Black and Racialized Canadians were denied equal access to opportunities including employment, land grants and jury service. They experienced segregation in military service, public transportation and education and were even denied burial rites (Backhouse, 1999; Thompson, 2009). The institution of the White Women's Labour Law established in 1912 is another evincive example of the pervasiveness of racism in Canada. This law prevented Asian men from employing White women – a sentiment to anti-Asian racism, anti-immigration and racism in Canada (Backhouse, 1999). For example, White unions heavily protested Chinese restaurants on economic and moral grounds, and according to Chin and Ormonde (2018), they were defamed as "fronts for opioid dens" (p. 699) and "moral contagion for young white women" (p. 702). The White Women's

Labour Law instituted in the United States and Saskatchewan was not only a measure to prevent racial mixing, but also a reverberation of White patriarchy, where White women's reproductive faculties were valued as "guardians of the race" and were to "be protected at all costs from the encroachment of other races" (Backhouse, 1999, p. 141; Chin & Ormonde, 2018). Furthermore, sexuality was often correlated with racism, where darker skin pigmentation was attributed to exorbitant and insuppressible sexuality. However, White racist ideologies were ambiguous about the sexuality of Asian men, where Asian men were seen as asexual, but on the other hand their asexuality was also feared and believed to be able to "lure white women to their ruin" (Backhouse, 1999, p. 141).

Racism in Canada remains clandestine, influencing a (partial) global belief of Canada as a country of acceptance, inclusivity and justice. In fact, as a country, Canada was founded through colonization and racialization (Thobani, 2000; Thompson, 2009). There are numerous additional historic events in Canada's history that demonstrate the pervasive colonial racism and appropriation prevalent in Canadian society. One need only examine the history of Canada's Indigenous peoples to grasp the dehumanizing experiences of imposed sedenterization through forced dislocation, the establishment of residential schools where Indigenous children were forcibly assimilated into 'the ideal' White Christian prototypes of civilization, and the Sixties Scoop where children were forcibly removed from their family homes and placed in western child welfare systems. These cruel colonial practices were implemented as measures to control, assimilate, 'civilize' and obliterate the Indigenous peoples, who were seen as 'primitive' and a threat to White European colonial regime (Nelson & Wilson, 2017; Reeves & Stewart, 2014; Thobani, 2000; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Following the colonization of Indigenous land, Canada attempted to build a nation through a racialization process, where immigration policies targeted "immigrants of preferred races," which first included British and French migrants followed by immigrants from other European nations (Thobani, 2000, p. 36). Immigration policies towards migrants from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean were racist, sexist and discriminatory, and women in particular were purposefully excluded while men were targeted for their cheap labour. Women from non-preferred countries were excluded as a measure to ensure the men would return to their native countries, and Racialized women were seen as reproductive threats to the purity of White Canada (Thobani, 2000).

Post-war economy and policies affected changes to immigration laws and influenced The Immigration Act in 1976-1977, which was based on a points system. This resulted in increased immigration from Asia, Africa, Central and South America and the Middle East, where the once 'non-favoured' migrants from these nations comprised 78.67% of immigrants by 1993, compared to 18.19% of immigrants from Europe. The influx of immigration from economically developing nations resulted in enormous economic advancements in Canada as well as racial and cultural diversity and social changes (Thobani, 2000). The racial and cultural diversity thus engendered increased opportunities for racial and cultural mixing and socialization.

Regulation of Mixed-Race Intimacies: A Historical Overview. An examination of the regulation of mixed-race intimacies in Canada necessitates an acknowledgement of the Métis people of Canada. Métis are one of three recognized Indigenous peoples of Canada (LeMay Media, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2017a) who have both Indigenous and French ancestry, dating back to the 1700s during the period of Canada's fur trade. French settlers involved in the fur trade developed relationships with Indigenous women, marking the ethnogenesis of the Métis

people – Canada's first mixed-race population to be constitutionally recognized in 1982. Métis have a distinct culture, including the Michif language, which is a synthesis of both French and Indigenous languages. Historically, Métis were ostracized by both French and Indigenous communities (Eshet, 2015; Gaudry, 2019) and they are recognized as descendants of Canada's first mixed-race relationships.

Historically, there were no Canadian anti-miscegenation legislations that barred mixed-race relationships and marriages, unlike the United States where mixed-race marriages remained a crime in several states until decriminalization in 1967 (Greif & Saviet, 2020; Townsend et al., 2012). However, though mixed-race relationships were not deemed a crime in Canada, there were numerous barriers and threats to mixed-race unions. Thompson (2009) affirmed that a cross-examination of the anti-miscegenation laws in the United States and Canada's Indian Act exposes numerous similarities where they both regulated and prohibited mixed-race intimacies and marriages.

Mixed-race couples in Canada were often denied marriage ceremonies, imprisoned and even threatened with lynching. A news reporter in 1904 stated "white brides who married Asian grooms were better off in their coffins" (Backhouse, 1999, p. 145). The Ku Klux Klan of Canada played a central role in policing the segregation of interracial mixing. In 1927, the Klan gathered in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan to lecture a large crowd on the risks of mixed-race relationships and demanded immediate legislations to ban intermarriages (Backhouse, 1999; Mixed Race Studies, 2011). On February 28 1930, the Klan was summoned by the mother of Isabel Jones, a White woman in Oakville, Ontario to intervene in Jones' decision to marry a Racialized man. The Klan threatened and kidnapped Jones as a measure of intimidation. They nailed a large cross to Ira Johnson's door (he was Jones' partner) and threatened him. Ira

Johnson was told that if he was "ever seen walking down the street with a white girl again" they "would attend to him" (Backhouse, 1999, p. 174; Bielski & Chambers, 2017; Mixed Race Studies, 2011). The Klan and other right-wing extremist groups damaged property, threatened and inflicted physical and psychological injury, and carried out acts (e.g., arson, beatings) that resulted in the death of Racialized Canadians (Backhouse, 1999; Parent & Ellis, 2014; Pitsula, 2013). The Klan's Constitution and Laws of the Invisible Empire proclaimed interracial mixing a "major offence," as it was "responsible for polluting of Caucasian blood through miscegenation" (Backhouse, 1999, p. 186).

Another prominent example is the case of Velma Demerson, a White woman who in 1939 was incarcerated and deemed mentally ill because of her interracial relationship with her Chinese male partner with whom she was cohabitating. Demerson was imprisoned while pregnant at the Toronto's Mercer Reformatory for Females for ten months. She was considered "wayward," and according to the Females Refuge Act in Ontario, Demerson was imprisoned for being "incorrigible" (Demerson, 2004, p. 162). While imprisoned, Demerson was subjected to unconsented experimentation and was used as a participant in a drug study (Demerson, 2004; Mixed Race Studies, 2011). Demerson (2004) recounted that her father's racists beliefs were bolstered by the police, including sentiments such as, "once a girl gets into Chinatown she's finished" and "all manner of evils would be laid at the feet of Chinese men" (p. 47). Demerson's story exemplifies the eugenics movement of preserving the 'pure' White Anglo-European race from being soiled by Racialized 'non-Whites.'

The governance over mixed-race unions stemmed from colonial racist politics, ideologies and discourse (Thompson, 2009). White supremacist beliefs aimed to preserve the 'pure' White race which was regarded as superior. Racialized peoples were not seen as "emotional equals or

as capable of sharing the same human emotions" (Buggs, 2017, p. 3) and as one clergyman stated: "I know the possible dangers of social intercourses between the races" (Chin & Ormonde, 2018, p. 705). Racist discourse and ideologies used deep-seated beliefs about racial inferiority to promote segregation and deterrence of miscegenation resulting in stigmatization of interracial relationships (Thompson, 2009). How did racism in Canada, particularly regarding miscegenation, shape current trajectories and assumptions about mixed-race relationships? This is a question that requires attention, and the next section will provide an overview of the literature on interracial relationships as it relates to present-day evolving social, cultural and political landscape of Canada.

Mixed Race Relationships: The Present

Progression towards diversity, inclusion and equity in Canada has influenced the course of interracial relationships. However, the internalization of colonial racism and White supremacy has bequeathed "racial rules" that serves as a "guide for doing race properly" (Dalmage, 2018, p. 403). This includes the normalization of endogamous relationships and the stigmatization of interracial relationships. Antagonism towards interracial couples is evident in "border patrolling" of racial boundaries by outsiders (Dalmage, 2018, p. 403) and aggressive and covert policing of these socially sanctioned boundaries (Steyn et al., 2019). Deviation from monoracial relationships continue to be met with violence, antagonism and/or contested gazes from others. In June 2020, residents in the Kitchener-Waterloo region in Ontario received flyers in the mail cautioning them on the dangers and negative consequences associated with interracial relationships. It cited higher rates of domestic violence in intermarriages and lower IQ and self-esteem and increase social isolation in mixed-race children. The contents of these flyers were entrenched in scientific racism, particularly anti-Black racism, since they depicted a stock photo

of a Black male-White female couple. The authors of these flyers used highly erroneous and racist pseudo-science to maintain colonial justification of racial superiority of White people over Racialized people (Duhatscheck, 2020). An exception to racial mixing, according to these post-colonial and racist philosophies, is the adoption of Black and/or Racialized children by White women and families (Dalmage, 2018). In these circumstances, White women and families are usually deemed martyrs and exalted as symbols of 'goodness.'

Though societal normalization of endogamous relationships remains pervasive, interracial relationships are on the rise, particularly in metropolitan cities including Toronto (Hamplova & Le Bourdais, 2010). One need only conduct an eyeball estimation of interracial couples in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) to observe a growing trend.

The Rise in Interracial Relationships. Changes to immigration policies have resulted in an increase in racial, ethnic and cultural diversity in Canada. Canada documented an annual average of 229, 000 immigrants between 1991 and 2006, making this time period one of the longest uninterrupted immigration timeframes in Canada's history since 1871 (Statistics Canada, 2014). A racial and ethnic heterogeneous demographic increases interracial and interethnic socialization, including engagement and membership in diverse social and professional networks (e.g., friendships, schoolmates, professional associates, etc.). Interracial and interethnic contact and engagement were found to be associated with decreased intergroup anxiety and prejudices, a decrease in ethnic identification, denormalization of endogamy, and bridging greater contact between racially and ethnically diverse groups. Furthermore, an increase in interracial socializations was found to be positively correlated to the likelihood of entering into interracial unions including relationships, cohabitations and marriages (Heaton & Jacobson, 2000; Merlino et al., 2019; Van Zantvliet & Kalmijn, 2013). The increase in diversity and between-group

socialization ‘gives permission’ to Racialized and White people who may feel a sense of dissonance with their in-group to seek partners from outside their group (Foeman & Nance, 2002). On the contrary, some studies show that an increase in racial and ethnic diversity may in fact decrease exogamy for some Racialized groups, since diversity may increase options for in-group partnerships (Heaton & Jacobson, 2000).

Interracial marriages increased from 2.6% in 1991 to 4.6% in 2011 in Canada, analogous to the time period in Canada that saw one of the largest influxes of racially and ethnically diverse peoples (Statistics Canada, 2014). Assimilation and acculturation are often credited for the increase in interracial relationships and marriages (Hamplova & Le Bourdais, 2010; Lee & Boyd, 2008; Qian et al., 2018). Traditional assimilation and acculturation theories state that minoritized peoples become socially, culturally, economically and politically integrated into the mainstream culture. However, classical assimilation and acculturation theories have been criticized for being ethnocentric for discounting the bi-directionality of integration (Qian et al., 2018). Interracial marriages have been deemed “the ultimate indicator of social integration and reduced racial stratification” (Lin & Lundquist, 2013, p. 184). Even more so, mixed-nativity (foreign-born and native-born) mixed-race relationships are considered to be an even greater indicator of the disintegration of racial barriers and boundaries, since mixed-nativity mixed-race couples undergo greater degrees of “structural assimilation along multiple dimensions,” including but not limited to nativity status, race, ethnicity and culture (Iceland & Nelson, 2010, p. 869). Couples in mixed-race relationships and marriages are thought to engage in cultural and structural assimilation processes involving some degree of racial, ethnic and cultural adjustment, integration and amalgamation (Blau et al., 1984).

Other sociologists have applied the status-caste exchange theory, formulated by Merton (1941) to account for the increase in interracial relationships. The status-caste exchange theory, modelled from the Hindu caste system, states that interracial couples may be motivated by the implicit bi-directional exchanges of racial (caste) status and socio-economic status (Rosenfeld, 2005). For example, a low-income White female may exchange her privilege for socio-economic security with a Black male of higher socio-economic status, and the Black male may exchange his high socio-economic status for racial acceptance (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2017; Heaton & Jacobson, 2000; Rosenfeld, 2005). This theory has received criticisms since mixed-race relationships are found to be "status homogamous" thus lending little credibility to the status-caste exchange theory (Aathavan, 2019; Rosenfeld, 2005, p. 1286). In addition, this theory discounts the mutuality and relational bond incentivized by love in mixed-race unions.

Though the rise in mixed-race relationships may indicate greater cultural and structural assimilation, socialization and acceptance, an in-depth look at the demography of mixed-race relationships in Canada will offer further insights into race and culture in interracial relationships.

Demography of Mixed-Race Relationships. Mixed-race relationships are heterogeneous and expansively diverse. The racial, ethnic and cultural composition, in addition to multiple intersectional identities, present in Racialized-White and Racialized-Racialized mixed-race relationships is multitudinous. Sexual orientation, gender identity, physical and mental ability, class and socio-economic status, nationality, citizenship, native language, religious affiliation and political association are a few socio-cultural identity markers present in interracial relationships. Statistics Canada (2014) ascribes the diverse composition in Canada's mixed-race relationships, for example, to population size and ethnocultural composition,

geographical distribution, number of years living in Canada and acculturation of racialize and ethnic groups.

Partners in heterosexual interracial relationships were found to bear similarities in several areas, including socio-economic status, religion and language (Blau et al., 1984; Iceland & Nelson, 2010; Lee & Boyd, 2008). Contrary to research indicating that mixed-race couples had lower education attainment (Fryer Jr., 2007), another United States-based research by Chan and Wethington (1998) highlighted that interracial couples tended to be more educated with higher income, which may contribute to relationship success. Socio-economic and education homophily were found to be prevalent among online daters, with a small variance of men who chose female partners with lower formal education achievements (Iceland & Nelson, 2010; Skopek et al., 2011). The attainment of higher education credentials and an increase in socio-economic status was found to be a predictor for an increase in Racialized-White interracial marriages (Qian & Lichter, 2007).

Furthermore, similar religious involvement was found to be positively correlated with intermarriages (Blau et al., 1984). Canadian census data in 2011 showed that 52.8% of mixed-race partners had similar religious affiliations, 20.4% of couples had no religious affiliations, 17.3% of couples had one partner with a religious affiliation and one partner with no religious affiliation, and 9.5% of mixed-race couples had partners with different religious affiliations. In reference to native language, 45.4% of mixed-race couples had one or more native language in common whereas 54.6% of couples did not share a common native language. On the contrary, having a similar country of birth does not seem to be correlated with a greater number of intermarriages. For example, census data in 2011 showed that 49.2% of all mixed-race unions were comprised of a partner that was foreign-born and a partner that was Canadian-born, 19.4%

of mixed-race relationships were comprised of two foreign-born partners from different countries and 25.3% consisted of two Canadian-born partners (Statistics Canada, 2014). Interracial marriages were predicted to increase even more when native-born Racialized peoples were culturally and socially disengaged from their racial, ethnic and cultural in-group (Qian & Lichter, 2007). The degree of assimilation and acculturation may therefore be a greater predictor of intermarriages than country of birth. Blau et al. (1984) found that the rate of intermarriages increases even more when there were multiple parallel intersectional identities present (i.e., religion, language and socioeconomic status).

Research on interracial relationships has focused on factors that are readily distinguishable (i.e., race, religion, language, socio-economic status). However, there is limited research on other fundamental variables pertinent to (interracial) relationship successes such as personal values, ethics, interests and beliefs. Some credible assumptions can be made from existing data such as in the case of high religious homophily in mixed-race relationships. Census data in 2011 reported 73.2% religious homophily (couples with similar religious affiliations and couples with no religious affiliation) in mixed-race relationships (Statistics Canada, 2014). This is a possible indicator of shared values and beliefs intrinsic to similar religious membership. Further research is warranted in the areas of shared values, ethics and beliefs as an overemphasis on race and ethnicity in counselling psychology and research may contribute to the stigmatization and pigeonholing of mixed-race couples.

***Race* in Mixed-Race Relationships.** The presence of *race* in interracial relationships is complex. *Race* may play a substantial role and become operative both within the borders of interracial dating and relationships as well as outside the boundaries of mixed-race unions.

The effects of *race* in interracial relationships may be externally influenced and determined. For example, race in mixed-race unions has been found to play a deterministic role in where mixed-race couples choose to live. Mixed-race couples were found to reside in racially and ethnically diverse communities compared to monoracial couples (Wright et al., 2013). Canadian census data in 2011 showed that Canada's most racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse cities – Vancouver and Toronto – had the largest numbers of mixed-race couples, 9.6% and 8.2% respectively (Statistics Canada, 2014). Additionally, census data in 2016 showed that Toronto and Vancouver were among the top five cities in Canada with the highest percentage of university graduates (Statistics Canada, 2017c), and high education attainment has been correlated with an increase in interracial relationships (Qian & Lichter, 2007). This may correspond to increased opportunities for interracial mixing and socialization as well as acceptance, reduced stigmatization and a sense of belonging that is readily present in more diverse communities (Aathavan, 2019). However, concessions afforded to privileged White partners of mixed-race unions may facilitate entry into communities implicitly reserved for the dominant group. Iceland and Nelson (2010) state that in Racialized-White mixed-race relationships, White partners are believed to be the antecedent for access into neighbourhoods with higher socio-economic status. This is believed to be facilitated by the racialization of economic access, which creates racial stratification of geographical spaces, as well as the privilege intrinsic to 'whiteness,' enabling access to communities that may be surreptitiously off-limits to Racialized people.

In addition, there is a common misconception that because couples in mixed-race relationships have 'transcended' racial boundaries, *race* is irrelevant and/or non-existent through egalitarianism and acceptance inherent within the borders of interracial partnerships. However,

Buggs (2017) states, “race does not disappear in relationships that traverse racial lines” (p. 3) and one such example is exemplified in sexual racism. Sexual racism is defined as “prioritizing an individual as a possible romantic, intimate partner on account of their race in a way that reinforces extant racial hierarchy or stereotypes” (Bedi, 2015, p. 998). Sexual racism could be understood using the triracial hierarchy theory, which states that there is a hierarchical preference of certain Racialized groups by the dominant White group. This hierarchical ranking puts certain Racialized groups at the top of the hierarchy, where White people are situated, by means of colonial racism and stereotypes, shadeism, employment and education, and access to resources (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Lin & Lundquist, 2013). On the other hand, the gendered racial formulation theory argues that the intersection of racial hierarchies and societal ideals of masculinity and femininity better explains the gender asymmetries evident in interracial partnerships (Lin & Lundquist, 2013; Wright et al. 2013). Wright et al. (2013) state, “the most striking aspects of racial mixing in the United States are the gender asymmetries associated with heterosexual mixed-race partnerships” (p. 394).

Past studies (non-Canadian) on racial distribution in interracial relationships and marriages have yielded varying data. An American study by Lin and Lundquist (2013) showed that Asian and White women consistently received online dating messages from men both inside and outside their racial/ethnic group, whereas Asian men received messages primarily from Asian women. Furthermore, White men received messages from all Racialized groups as they were among the top preferences for White, Asian and Hispanic women. Black men received messages primarily from Black women or other Racialized groups, and contrary to popular beliefs, they found that among male online daters, Black men showed the strongest homophily tendency. They also found that online daters tend to respond to messages from dominant racial

groups and reject messages from more racially marginalized groups. Other studies have shown that among online daters who indicated racial preference, Black women and Asian men were the most excluded demographic groups even in comparison to Black men and Asian women (Feliciano et al., 2009; Robnett & Feliciano, 2011). Furthermore, in heterosexual relationships, Asian women and Black men were more likely to be in mixed-race partnerships with White men and women respectively (Wright et al., 2013). A study by Heaton and Jacobson (2000) found lower rates of exogamy between Black people and White people in the United States and higher rates of Asian-White and Hispanic-White exogamous relationships. More specifically, one of the few Canadian studies, conducted by Hamplova and Le Bourdais (2010), showed that in Toronto and Vancouver, the highest Racialized-White interracial pairing are between Black people and White people followed by Asian people and White people. This finding is vastly different from research from the United States regarding lower numbers of Black-White partnerships but parallels research from the United Kingdom that indicated higher numbers of Black Caribbean-White couples. The variance in racial distribution in exogamous unions, according to Jonahs (2021) "should give us pause" (p. 1), as they may be indicative of existing and pervasive colonial racial hierarchies.

Racial hierarchies and stereotypes, coupled with distorted White patriarchal views on masculinity, femininity and sexuality, may account for the varying racial, cultural and ethnic distribution in mixed-race relationships (Buggs, 2017; Jonahs, 2021). For example, Asian men are often stereotyped as feminine and Asian women are perceived as exotic, submissive and hyper-feminine, while Black men are seen as hypermasculine and hypersexual and Black women are seen as aggressive (Fernbrant et al., 2017; Lin & Lundquist, 2013; Wright et al., 2013). Research has indicated that sexual racism may show up in mixed-race dating and relationships

by way of fetishistic preferences, power differences, “colour blindness” (i.e., “race not mattering,”) “color-boundness” (i.e., “race mattering”) (Jonahs, 2021, p. 2), racial microaggressions, and racist attitudes and beliefs (Bedi, 2015; Buggs, 2017; Song, 2010). Contextualizing the racial and gender asymmetries using only the triracial hierarchy theory and the gendered racial formulation theory are cautioned, since these theories are grounded in the assumption that interracial relationships solely depend on the preferences of White people and neglect the preferences of Racialized people (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Lin & Lundquist, 2013). Furthermore, while these variables may manifest in mixed-race relationships, the centrality of sexual racism in mixed-race unions stigmatizes interracial partnerships, creating common misconceptions and stereotypes that these relationships are solely rooted in superficial sexual and exotic desires.

A Critical Analysis of Mixed-Race Relationships

Though the prevalence of mixed-race couples in Canada (Milan et al., 2010; Statistics Canada, 2014) may symbolize greater acceptance of exogamy, mixed-couples continue to navigate a marginalized status, situated within a dominant endogamous discourse **(**Dalmage, 2018; Killian, 2003; Singh et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2013). An elaboration of their social location will be presented next, followed by a critical exploration of the challenges faced by mixed-couples and strengths inherent to these unions.

Locating Mixed-Race Relationships. Though there has been an increase in interracial relationships and an immense shift towards acceptance of exogamous relationships, colonial and racist ideologies continue to place mixed-race relationships at the borders of endogamous norms (Singh et al., 2020). By and large, in Canada, multiculturalism positions White people at the centre of “Canadian-ness” and positions Racialized ‘others’ at the borders (Dalmage, 2018, p.

403). However, though overt discriminatory immigration policies were eliminated in the 1960s, whiteness is still hegemonically considered to be 'Canadian,' while Racialized Canadians are often ethnically placed. For example, Racialized Canadians are frequently asked, 'where are you *really* from?' insinuating an 'otherness' to Racialized Canadians compared to White European-descended Canadians (Paragg, 2015). This establishes a binary system of "white Canadian" and "non-white Other" – a classification that is also applied to Racialized-White partnerships (Paragg, 2015, p. 28).

Images of interracial couples and mixed-race peoples are often used to showcase the alleged acceptance of diversity and intolerance of racism in Canada. However, the experiences of Racialized peoples and mixed-race couples may vary significantly based on social and geographical location and context. The experiences of Racialized peoples and mixed-race couples in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) may differ from the experiences of interracial couples living in a racially/ethnically homogenous community. For example, a Racialized mother of mixed-race children may be mislabeled as a child care provider or domestic help based on geographical location and the socio-economic status of the neighbourhood in which they are located. Another example to highlight how socio-geographical location influences the experiences of mixed-race couples is taken from South Africa, where a Black woman with a White man may be assumed to be a sex trade worker in one context/community, but construed to be a wealthy woman in another social location/context (Dalmage, 2018).

Interracial relationships are often scrutinized through the lens of White colonial endogamy, which perceives White heterosexual intraracial relationships as the epitome of the 'ideal' romantic relationship. The marginalization of mixed-race relationships creates a bias by framing interracial relationships as 'other.' In addition, some studies have found that "the

presence of a racial 'other' in the household, 'others' all members" in a mixed-race relationship and family (Wright et al., 2013, p. 399). For example, in Black and White mixed-race partnerships, couples may often experience "borderism" where they are seen as neither Black nor White in Black or White neighbourhoods, but as "something else" (Wright et al., 2013, p. 399). Both Racialized and White partners may therefore have to face, navigate and negotiate the socially constructed 'othering' of their exogamous relationships. Foeman and Nance (2002) highlighted that both couples may have some access to "in-group talk" by virtue of their respective racial/ethnic group membership, however, membership status may have altered due to crossing of racial boundaries (p. 240). The bordering of individuals in mixed-race relationships and mixed-race unions may result in feelings of loss related to perceived changes to their racial/cultural group membership.

Conceptualizing Differences and Challenges. Research on relationship satisfaction in mixed-race relationships has been inconsistent. Some studies have found that interracial couples are often faced with several challenges primarily stemming from the systemic, psychological and socio-cultural positioning of miscegenation at the margins of (normalized) endogamous relationships (Brooks & Ogolsky, 2017; Chan & Wethington, 1998; Henderson & Brantley, 2019; Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008; Van Zantvliet & Kalmijn, 2013). Several American studies found higher rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) in exogamous relationships (Chartier & Caetano, 2012; Martin et al., 2013). Similarly, a Canadian study found a higher prevalence of IPV in mixed-race relationships relative to monoracial relationships, attributable to characteristics of interracial partners, including younger age, substance use and feelings of jealousy (Brownridge et al., 2021). Furthermore, research by Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) found that interracial couples in the United States reported less relationship satisfaction

and greater relational conflict and instability compared to same-race couples. They reported that the ethnic composition of mixed-race couples may determine relationship success. For instance, they found that Hispanic-White couples reported more relationship success than Black-White couples and they attributed this to less social distance between Hispanic and White people compared to Black people. This study did not consider racial hierarchies and the colonial positioning of certain Racialized groups closer to the top of the hierarchy (where White people are situated) and the repercussions on 'lower-ranked' mixed-race unions. Low relationship satisfaction reported by mixed-race couples may also be attributed to more complex relationship histories (e.g., prior cohabitation, marriages and children, parental divorce in family of origin), more heterogeneous factors (e.g., age, religion), fewer shared values and limited family supports (Henderson & Brantley, 2019; Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008). Couples are therefore confronted with navigating and negotiating multiple variables, including social and familial acceptance, border patrolling, relational stress and parenting which will be examined next.

Social and Family Barriers. The growth in interracial relationships is not necessarily indicative of a post-racial society, including social and family support and acceptance. Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) state "interethnic unions face their greatest challenges from forces outside their current relationship" (p. 848). Studies have shown that compared to same-race relationships, interracial partnerships have higher rates of dissolution, lower commitment and lower relationship quality, which is often attributed to inadequate social and family supports (Brooks & Ogolsky, 2017; Chan & Wethington, 1998; Greif & Saviet, 2020; Henderson & Brantley, 2019; Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008; Van Zantvliet & Kalmijn, 2013). Interracial relationships are subjected to scrutiny, condemnation and rejection (Oriola, 2008). Some studies have found that adolescents in the United States were less likely to

introduce their mixed-race partners to their families, while other research has found that parents actively discouraged their children from entering into mixed-race relationships (Foeman & Nance, 2002; Qian & Lichter, 2007). Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) indicate that disapproving parents may have grown up in periods fraught with greater degrees of racism, where interracial unions were considered problematic and were even prohibited on religious, cultural and legal grounds. Interracial couples may be faced with dissension and loss of identity, status and privilege on a familial and societal level (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2017; Foeman & Nance, 2002; Greif & Saviet, 2020; Oriola, 2008). These challenges may have social and psychological implications on the individual and/or relationship (Fernbrant et al., 2017; Usita & Poulsen, 2013) and hinder the natural progression of these relationships, where couples may delay or forfeit marriage and instead choose a cohabitation arrangement or end their partnership. Some studies have found that there is an increase in the number of interracial and interethnic cohabitation, since this option may be considered a "highly adaptive alternative to traditional marriages," as it has the capacity to maintain racial and ethnic boundaries and evade familial and societal conflicts and challenges (Qian & Lichter, 2007, p. 72). Furthermore, other studies have found that couples may even renounce cohabitation or longer-term relationship arrangements by maintaining a dating relationship so as to conceal their relationship from family and protect against scrutiny and rejection (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2017).

Racial Border Patrolling. Interracial couples may also experience racial border patrolling and policing (Dalmage, 2018; Steyn et al., 2019), requiring couples to justify their relationship to external others, confront negative stereotypes and prejudices, and manage emotional distress. For example, in a Black-male and White-female partnership, the Black male may be labelled as a "sell-out" and the White female partner may be seen as a "trophy wife"

(Foeman & Nance, 2002, p. 241). Furthermore, the Black male partner may be criticized for rebuffing Black sexuality, undervaluing the femininity of Black women and labelled as a "self-hater" with internalized anti-Black racism (Smith & Jones, 2011, p. 1571). If this Black male-White female relationship was conceptualized from the status caste exchange theory, it may result in injurious and discriminatory assumptions; this means a relationship based on racial status and socio-economic exchanges and upgrades rather than love and mutual romantic attraction (Rosenfeld, 2005). Though most interracial relationships are motivated by love, this couple may be further pigeonholed as motivated by sexual desires and exoticism, self-hatred, rebellion against family and racism (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2017; Chan & Wethington, 1998; Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008; Kenney & Kenney, 2009; Wehrly et al., 1999). For instance, racial motivation theories posits that partners in mixed-unions are primarily motivated by defiance against societal norms and racial differences, such as exotic desires and sexual interests (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993). Thus, unlike same-race couples, mixed-race couples are burdened with having to substantiate and justify their unions.

The act of patrolling racial borders aims to discriminate against those who cross racial boundaries and may result in interracial harassment. Wehrly et al. (1999) state, "interracial unions in general draw societal concern because they encapsulate all of our unresolved feelings about race" (p. 35) resulting in border patrolling. Borderism may manifest as explicit physical and verbal assaults and harassments or implicit exclusions, ostracizations, interrogating stares and stereotyping. Interracial couples may be confronted with the daunting task of negotiating racial rules imposed by borderism (Smith & Jones, 2011). For example, a couple may have to contemplate public displays of affection based on the social and geographical context (Dalmage, 2018). The act of hand holding may require consideration, since it may draw attention to the

couple's perceived racial boundary violation. Couples may experience border patrolling from both the dominant group and the Racialized group since, in some cultures, handholding may be considered an intimate behaviour, resulting in labelling Racialized partners as "coconuts or sell outs" (Dalmage, 2018, p. 406).

Ostracization and border patrolling of exogamous relationships may result in relational stress, as well as emotional and psychological effects including depression and anxiety (Gomez-Lopez et al., 2019; Kenney & Kenney, 2009; Wehrly et al., 1999). Research shows that stigmatization of mixed-race partnerships may contribute to social and emotional isolation, which may result in higher rates of dissolution (Seshadri & Kundson-Martin, 2013). Mixed-race couples may experience losses of various dimensions, including loss of their personal, partners', bi-racial children's and/or couples' identity, since interracial identities are often marginalized. Couples may also be faced with managing grief from loss of family and social supports (Tubbs & Rosenblatt, 2013). In addition, some Racialized partners may have to bear the burden of managing and navigating racism and loss alone, since their (well-intentioned) White partners may ascribe to a colour-blind frame of reference, resulting in feelings of isolation in the relationship (Foeman & Nance, 2002).

Parenting and Relational Stress. Mixed-race couples who parent may find themselves navigating even more complex racial, cultural and systemic structures. Children of interracial couples inherently challenge racial hierarchies to an even greater extent because of their multiracial identities (Houston et al., 2005). Multiracial children are often "bequeathed a third racial status that does not match either parents" (Nuttgens, 2010, p. 357) and may not share any physical and/or ethnic characteristics similar to either parent (Iceland & Nelson, 2010). These children may therefore face challenges in navigating and negotiating membership to one or all

racial identity groups in which they hold membership. Mixed-race children are often 'othered' by both racial groups and are often forced to choose the identity of one racial group, leading to feelings of isolation and challenges in identity formation (McFadden, 2001; Nuttgens, 2010). In Canada, mixed-race children and people are often asked to locate themselves within the White and non-White binary context prevalent in the Canadian multicultural society i.e., "what are you"? (Paragg, 2015, p. 29). This non-binary identity challenges the social construction of race, particularly the racial hierarchy that places White people at the top.

Some researchers have indicated that mixed-race children may be at a higher risk of mental, physical and behavioural challenges compared to monoracial children (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2013). In the United States, the "one drop rule" was historically and is presently used to exclude mixed-race individuals from membership into the dominant group, thus endorsing a system of whiteness, as is evident in Black-White mixed-race individuals in the United States (Dalmage, 2018, p. 403; Song, 2010; Thompson, 2009). In South Africa, children of Black-White interracial couples are unavoidably categorized as "Coloured" without the liberty of choosing their own racial or cultural identity. The racial categorization of Coloured is an apartheid-constructed identity that was "imposed to build and protect privilege and power for whites" and an attempt to deprive mixed-race people of a sense of identity (Dalmage, 2018, p. 401).

In Canada and the United States, mixed-race children, particularly adolescents, may renounce one racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity, while others may choose a mixed identity (Song, 2010). Research by Paragg (2015) showed that mixed-race children in Canada identified as "Canadian-first" (p. 31) and expressed a secondary identity stemming from their parents' racial identities when asked. Societal pressure may influence the decision to elect a

singular versus a mixed identity, which may result in feelings of shame and guilt (Nuttgens, 2010; Song, 2010). In addition to societal factors, parenting style, neighbourhood and school demographics and culture, extended family unit, phenotype (skin tone and facial features) and siblings' interactions and dynamics may influence mixed-race children's identity claims and formation (Boratav et al., 2021; Song, 2010; Townsend et al., 2012). Some studies have also found that Racialized groups that are hierarchically more privileged and mixed-race individuals from higher socio-economic class may claim bi-racial identity more often compared to less advantaged Racialized groups and mixed-race individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Schwartzman, 2007; Townsend et al., 2012). The decision to choose a singular identity may mean, "divorcing themselves to some degree from the other part of their heritage," including religion, culture and customs (Song, 2010, p. 278).

Parents of mixed-race children may therefore be confronted with unique challenges to parenting, including addressing and navigating issues related to racism and identity. Some studies have found that claiming a mixed identity is often viewed as psychologically adaptive and healthy, and found to be associated with positive psychological functioning, whereas denial of a mixed-race identity may be associated with lower motivational outcomes and lower self-esteem (Bures, 2020; Townsend et al., 2012). Interracial parents are a principal influence in navigating this multiracial identity with the potential of fostering "resiliency, adaptability, and creativity" in their children (Nuttgens, 2010, p. 358). Parents play an integral role in promoting self-esteem and identity formation and socialization (Bures, 2020; Kenney & Kenney, 2009; McFadden, 2001; Song, 2010; Wehrly et al., 1999).

McFadden (2001) also posits that children of interracial couples may experience less identity conflict and feelings of uncertainty, and are better prepared to navigate racial group

marginalization, when interracial couples support their children's identity formation and development. However, parents may have limited understanding of a mixed-race identity because of limited research and support on parenting multiracial children (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2013). In addition, since parenting practices are deeply influenced by culture, mixed-race couples may be faced with an added layer of complexity requiring them to bridge their child-rearing styles to parent their mixed-race children (Boratav et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2020; Usita & Poulsen, 2013). Mothers of mixed-race children are particularly affected because of patriarchal expectations of the mothers' responsibility to transmit cultural and religious practices and customs (Dalmage, 2018; Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2013).

It is critical to recognize that these challenges often stem from systemic, racist and socio-cultural constructions of race rather than the relational dynamics present in interracial unions. Research, education and support services relevant to relationships and family dynamics have been predominantly Eurocentric with a focus on the White middle-class nuclear family. Mixed-race couples and families therefore have not benefitted from the services that support problem solving and resiliency building as much as endogamous couples and their families. The next section will explore how race and culture in mixed-race relationships can be sources of relationship strengths and success.

Framing Race and Culture for Relationship Success. Romantic relationships are considered a source of emotional and psychological well-being **(**Gomez-Lopez et al., 2019). However, the over-problematization of race and culture in mixed-race relationships and the minimization of the impact of external variables (e.g., racism, lack of family and social support) overshadows its strengths. Research, education and psychology have hastily focused on race and culture as the primary and sometimes only causes of distress and dissolution, often

overshadowing other multifaceted variables inherent in these romantic unions (Kenney & Kenney, 2009; Wehrly et al., 1999). While race, culture and ethnicity are critical considerations in understanding both challenges and strengths in interracial relationships, other non-race and culture variables (e.g., communication, sexuality, finances, relationship responsibilities, trust and insecurity, growth) should be equally deliberated in the same manner as in monoracial relationships. It should be noted that some of these variables in mixed-race unions may be interwoven into issues related to race and culture.

Similar to endogamous relationships, in mixed-race unions confronting and negotiating differences can positively foster intimacy and attachment, and can strengthen relationship commitment. Some studies have found that negotiating differences related to race, culture and ethnicity enables resiliency-building and also strengthens engagement, commitment and security (Boratav et al., 2021; Kenney & Kenney, 2009; Seshadri & Kundson-Martin, 2013; Wehrly et al., 1999). McFadden (2001) state that mixed-race couples are often "confronted with finding ways to capture and maintain a sense of empowerment and cultural dignity" (p. 41) in the face of an endogamous-centric society. In doing so, couples are believed to engage in processes of "insulation and negotiation," (Foeman & Nance, 2002, p. 246) where they manage external and internal influences and contentions around race, thus creating a structure to frame their racial and cultural differences, leading to increased self and relationship self-esteem and the development of a collective relationship identity (Wehrly et al., 1999). Moreover, through racial/cultural literacy, couples may cultivate "culturally conscious" and "culturally inclusive" mentalities and frameworks for their relationships (Singh et al., 2020, p. 167). Seshadri and Kundson-Martin (2013) adapted Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 2005) to examine how couples organize and manage differences and cultivate a

relationship identity. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986, 2005) identified five interrelated ecological systems or environments that influence human development through bi-directional interactions between these ecological systems. They include: (1) immediate environments, such as family, peer groups and school *(microsystem),* (2) interactions between microsystems, such as interactions between family and school *(mesosystem),* (3) social contexts that indirectly influence development, such as neighbourhood and media *(exosystem),* (4) established social structures and cultures in which development occurs, such as socioeconomic status, geographic location and ethnicity *(macrosystem),* and (5) development over time or life course *(chronosystem)* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 2005; Tudge et al., 2009). Seshadri and Kundson-Martin (2013) applied this model to interracial couples as the developmental unit to highlight that interracial couples create a "we" through their interactions with each other (microsystem), a "we and us" through their interactions with extended family (mesosystem), "we and them" through interactions with the community (exosystem), "we and the world" through their interactions with society (macrosystem), and "we and life" through their interactions over time (chronosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 2005; Seshadri & Kundson-Martin, 2013, p. 49).

According to Seshadri and Kundson-Martin (2013), the evolution of a joint relationship identity is one indicator of success in mixed-race unions. This may be dependent on whether both partner's cultural and racial identities are equally celebrated and maintained, referred to as an *integrated* structure. However, they also found that *coexisting* structures where partners maintain separate cultures which are seldom integrated but are respected and honoured as well as *singularly assimilated* structures, where one partner is more assimilated into the other partner's culture without resentment, are also indicative of successful framing/negotiating of racial and cultural differences. Contrary to popular egalitarian conceptualization, which proposes that both

partner's culture and race should be equally integrated to ensure success, Seshadri and Kundson-Martin (2013) postulate that mixed-race couples may (successfully) navigate, frame and negotiate their differences quite uniquely, which may resemble an egalitarian framework (i.e., integrative) or a coexisting or singularly assimilated structure. An exemption to successful framing is an *unresolved* structure where partners are believed to be confounded by racial/cultural differences, resulting in conflict and relationship rupture. In short, navigating and negotiating (framing) racial, ethnic and cultural differences enable mixed-race couples to honour similarities, admire, respect and celebrate differences, create new relationship narratives including new traditions, as well as strengthen their individual identity and facilitate the development of a joint relationship identity.

Research by Seshadri and Kundson-Martin (2013) also found that interracial couples utilize four strategies to navigate and manage racial and cultural differences regardless of how race/culture is successfully framed in their relationship (i.e., integrative, co-existing or singularly assimilated). They include: (1) constructing a "we" which involves co-creating a relationship narrative that surpasses differences and brings about a shared relationship identity. This co-constructed narrative may include developing a friendship, preserving similar core goals and values, and committing to working together in the long-term, (2) framing differences which focuses on not conceptualizing racial differences as a relationship foci but instead framing racial differences as attractive, being flexible and respectful of cultural rules, celebrating and learning about each partner's cultural, ethnic and racial differences, (3) emotional maintenance, which includes communicating insecurities and discussing emotions emanating from differences, acclimatizing and adjusting to differences, and seeking external supports, and (4) positioning the relationship in relation to societal and familial context, which includes constructively responding

to discrimination from family and society, protecting and establishing boundaries, using humour when appropriate and giving external family members time and space to accept a partner's cultural and racial differences. Mixed-race partners may engage in these strategies either partially or in its entirety; however, each couple may negotiate and manage their differences uniquely and in a non-prescriptive manner.

Similar to Seshadri and Kundson-Martin's (2013) theory on how mixed-race couples organize and manage their racial and cultural differences, Foeman and Nance (2002) identified four stages of interracial development: (1) racial awareness, which includes framing attraction and 'coming out' to others, awareness of each partner's social (race) location and awareness of the role of race in their lives, (2) coping, which involves integrating new (race, culture) information into their lives, protecting selves from negative and harmful outsiders, negotiating harmful situations, depending on each other for new insights and utilizing coping and problem solving strategies, (3) identity emergence, which involves contextualizing the couple's unique racial configuration as a source of relationship strength, identifying race as one aspect of their relationship/family identity, challenging frames imposed by others, developing skills that may benefit/challenge the social and systemic construction of race, and (4) maintenance, which requires ongoing awareness of race and the utilization of coping strategies through various stages of the relationship.

The theories proposed by Seshadri and Kundson-Martin (2013) and Foeman and Nance (2002) share many parallels, including racial awareness and social location of selves, conceptualizing differences from a strength-based framework, decentralizing race as the primary focus of the relationship, and responding to border patrollers and long-term maintenance. The rich processes involved in framing, navigating and negotiating racial and cultural differences has

the capacity to foster cohesion, enhance individual and relationship well-being and improve relationship satisfaction. Neither of the theories specifically address how framing and managing racial and cultural variances may be different based on the racial/cultural configuration of the couple, since systemic racial hierarchies may impose varying degrees of discrimination, complexities and challenges. Chan and Wethington (1998) postulate that some racial configurations may experience more racism and discrimination, and they indicate the significance of skin colour. For example, the experience of an Asian-White versus a Black-White mixed-race couple may be different because of how systemic racism positions Asian people closer to the top of the hierarchy and the adverse prevalence of anti-Black racism and shadeism. Therefore, racial configuration is a key consideration in understanding how mixed-race couples frame and manage racial and cultural differences to effectuate relationship strengths and success.

The reconceptualization of the challenges of mixed-race relationships from a stress-based framework to a resilience-based model reveals the psychological benefits of these unions (Chan & Wethington, 1998; Usita & Poulsen, 2013). Mixed-race couples identify personal enrichment and growth, psychological and social development, intersecting cultures, shared values (honesty, trust, faithfulness, respect for diversity) and tackling systemic racism as some of the privileges and benefits intrinsic to their unions (Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Usita & Poulsen, 2013; Wehrly et al., 1999). Research by Rosenblatt et al. (1995) showed that mixed-race couples in the United States viewed the benefits of their relationships as outweighing the challenges, and they identified their bi-racial children and connection with each other as some of the strengths. One participant in their research identified the prevailing degree of openness in her relationship as setting it apart from same-race relationships. Another participant identified the safe boundaries

of their mixed-race relationship as a space for healing from systemic and race-based trauma. In addition, there are several American studies that deviate from a deficit-based framework of mixed-race relationships. Some found greater relationship satisfaction in interracial relationships (Brooks et al., 2018; Troy et al., 2006) and no difference in relationship commitment (Brooks et al., 2018; Stevenson, 1995), relationship quality, efficacy, conflict, coping styles (Troy et al., 2006) and love (Stevenson, 1995) between inter- and intra- racial relationships. A study by Gaines Jr. et al. (1999) found that there were more securely attached partners in exogamous unions than insecurely attached partners.

The challenges that are therefore emphasized in mixed-race relationships are disproportionately influenced by external factors and limited supports for these couples and their families. A question that requires consideration is: How are framing and negotiating racial and cultural differences in mixed-race unions a microcosmic reflection of the greater society? Interracial relationships are often regarded as the epitome of racial integration and disintegration of colonial racism in society, which may reflect a positive socio-political and cultural shift (Lin & Lundquist, 2013). However, caution is recommended in overly 'poster-childing' mixed-race couples as a symbolic representation of the collapse of systemic racism, since this may rob couples of the other rich and complex relational dynamics afforded to endogamous couples.

Conclusion

This literature review first provided a historical and colonial understanding of race and racism in Canada and explored how race and culture in interracial relationships are systemically and socio-culturally influenced. The increase in mixed-race unions as well as the demographic trends of these unions was explored. An understanding of race in interracial relationships and the social location of these unions set the necessary foundation to understand the barriers and

challenges experienced by couples. The strengths and benefits of these relationships were then examined.

Past scholarly and intercultural literature on mixed-race relationships have been influenced by American-centric research, with a focus on Black-White unions framed within a problematization paradigm. Given Canada's unique colonial and racialized history and the increase in this demographic, this study aimed to contribute to research and education in counselling and psychotherapy for heterosexual mixed-race couples in Toronto, by exploring their lived experiences relevant to race and culture. The next section will discuss the theoretical orientations and methodologies that were implemented to conduct this research.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

This study implemented a qualitative grounded theory methodology to investigate the following research question: *What are the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto with regards to issues of race and culture?* Since both research and theories on interracial couples in Canada are lacking, a grounded theory inquiry (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1965) offered a pragmatic and flexible approach (El Hussein et al., 2014) to explore the multifaceted processes and experiences evident in these partnerships, relevant to race and culture. This chapter will elaborate on the research methodology that guided this study. First, a rationale for the implementation of a qualitative and grounded theory approach will be explicated, followed by an explanation of the study design where details of sampling, the inclusion criteria, recruitment process and detailed demographics of the participants will be provided. Next, a systematic account of the procedure will be provided, including preparation for the interviews and the consent process, data collection/interviews, description of the instrument used, and potential benefits and risks to participants. The process of data analysis using a grounded theory constant comparative analysis (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Thomas, 2006) including coding will then be presented. Finally, this chapter concludes by presenting the social location of the primary researcher, which adheres to the transparency and reflexivity inherent to a grounded theory approach to research (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Haverkamp, 2005; Morrow, 2005).

Rationale for Using Qualitative Methodology

The understanding of race and culture in interracial relationships called for a comprehensive and rigorous exploration of race and culture. The complexities of race and culture could not be ascertained through quantitative measures since race/culture are influenced and determined by the social context of participants' lives and are subjective, complex, dynamic and fluid (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Hoyt & Bhati, 2007; Morrow, 2007). Closed-ended and numerical-based inquiries would truncate the ability to acquire thick descriptive data. Thus, to obtain a deep understanding of the multidimensional and complex lived experiences of mixed-race couples pertinent to race and culture, a qualitative methodology was an appropriate design for this research.

Qualitative research is defined as an "iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied" (Aspers & Corte, 2019, p. 155). The aim of qualitative research is to obtain emic and idiographic data (Hoyt & Bhati, 2007; Morrow, 2005, 2007). Emic signifies the "constructs or behaviours that are unique to an individual, sociocultural context that are not generalizable" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128) and an idiographic approach focuses on participants' unique and subjective understanding and interpretations (Haverkamp, 2005). Through qualitative procedures such as interviews, researchers are able to obtain in-depth understanding of participants' thoughts, feelings and subjective interpretations (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019; Morrow, 2007). Interviews also allow for clarification of narratives and capture culture-specific nuances not attainable through quantitative measures (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Morrow, 2005).

Qualitative methods have been extensively used in counselling psychology research, as it is deemed an appropriate approach for exploring processes and phenomena relevant to psychotherapy (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). Counselling psychology researchers have highlighted the benefits of qualitative methodologies in the areas of social justice, culturally-informed inquiry and decolonial approaches to research and academia (Morrow, 2007; Prosek & Gibson, 2021). Thus, the non-pathologizing tenet of culturally-informed counselling psychology (Morrow, 2007) corresponds to the non-problematization and strengths-based approach of the present study, making it a fitting design for this research topic. Moreover, qualitative methodologies have also been found to be particularly effective in exploring subject areas that have been minimally investigated and those with limited theories and hypotheses (Hoyt & Bhati, 2007). Since mixed-race couples have been underrepresented in counselling psychology research in Canada, the investigation of race and culture through qualitative measures was predicted to have the capacity to catalyze rich data pertinent to the research question. This prediction was based on the success of past studies that implemented qualitative methodologies. One such example is research conducted by Rosenblatt et al., (1995) who investigated the lived experiences of Black-White interracial couples in the United States. Their research illustrated how qualitative inquiry allowed for the acquisition of rich emic data, which also "left plenty of room for what people said to be clarified, explored, spelled out in detail, and heard accurately" (p. 22), otherwise not attainable through quantitative measures.

Additionally, the crux of 'trustworthiness' in qualitative methodologies positioned it as an exemplar design for the current research (Haverkamp, 2005; Nyirenda et al., 2020; Prosek & Gibson, 2021). Investigating race and culture in intimate relationships necessitated an atmosphere of trustworthiness, thus this methodological process ensured that "participants can be

vulnerable and that researchers carry a responsibility to promote their welfare and guard against harm" (Haverkamp, 2005, p. 146). This ideology is key, since the present study required substantial degrees of self-disclosures, requiring a sensitive and trustworthy approach to data collection. The qualitative design that was implemented in this research is grounded theory.

Rationale for Using Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is one of the most widely used qualitative methodologies in counselling psychology and social sciences as it is both flexible and systematic (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1965) and focuses on theory development, which emerges directly from the narratives of participants. Since its development, there have been several types of grounded theory approaches, such as classical grounded theory, interpretive grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory (Sebastian, 2019). Constructivist grounded theory stipulates that multiple meaning and realities are created through social and interpersonal interactions, resulting in emic and idiographic data and the subsequent formation of theories through inductive analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Chun Tie et al., 2019; El Hussein et al., 2014; Fassinger, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). A grounded theory methodology situated within a constructivist paradigm was chosen as an exemplary approach for this study. This facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of interracial couples pertinent to race and culture by uncovering how their experiences are socially influenced and created, with an active and interpretive role of the researcher (Sebastian, 2019).

In grounded theory, an inductive approach to data analysis allows for data to be exhaustively examined, revealing repetitive themes, categories and relationships (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Fernbrant et al., 2017; Parry, 1998). Through the methodical processes of data analysis, "grounded theorists move beyond the description of overt data, and pay attention to

psychological and social assumptions inherent in the data" (El Hussein et al., 2014, p. 10). Emerging theories and interpretations are organically generated from the lived narratives of participants rather than from preconceived literature and assumptions (Charmaz, 2006; El Hussein et al., 2014; Parry, 1998). A study conducted by Fernbrant et al. (2017) demonstrates how grounded theory can result in the theoretical understanding of a complex phenomenon; they examined the lived experiences of Thai women who were in international/interracial relationships with Swedish and Danish men. Henceforth, a grounded theory inquiry was predicted to generate similar depth of insights into the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White couples in Toronto.

Moreover, researchers in grounded theory are often actively engaged with participants and the data in a "transactional and subjectivist stance" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131), in order to describe, stimulate and co-create deeper meaning, insights and realities of the lived experiences of participants (Fassinger, 2005). Grounded theory posits that researchers must be reflexive, authentic and engaged throughout the data collection, analysis and interpretation phases (Fassinger, 2005; Fernbrant et al., 2017). This close and transparent involvement fosters a collaborative process with participants, which is critical when investigating sensitive and complex constructs such as race and culture. Furthermore, researchers are encouraged to engage in self-reflection and consultation as a safeguard against "power, influence, coercion, and manipulation" (Haverkamp, 2005, p. 152). The aforementioned principles of grounded theory are congruent with the ethical principles of counselling psychology, which made it an ideal methodological approach for the present study. Morrow (2007) states, "designs based on an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm are particularly appropriate to counseling psychology because of the constructivist nature of psychotherapy" (p. 213). Additionally, a fundamental

goal of grounded theory is to influence social change from the ground up by giving voice to and empowering marginalized peoples and communities. The integration of critical race and feminist paradigms in a constructivist grounded theory methodology was philosophically, ethically and methodologically appropriate for this research, as this study aimed to give voice to an under-researched population (Fassinger, 2005). Furthermore, since the experiences of mixed-raced couples are constructed through their social interactions with each other, their extended families, communities and society, a constructivist grounded theory approach emphasized and legitimized the socially-influenced experiences and realities of exogamous couples (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). This is a group that has been unreached and sidelined in research and counselling psychology.

Study Design

In accordance with grounded theory inquiry, this study implemented an interview method of data collection to explore the lived experiences of Racialized-White heterosexual couples in Toronto. Information pertaining to their lived experiences was obtained by interviewing each couple together so as to access their relational and joint experiences. Research interviews followed a conversational approach where questions were open-ended, organically generated based on the responses of participants, and were loosely steered by a semi-structured interview guide. Further details of the study design including sampling, inclusion criterion, recruitment and description of the sample are presented below.

Sampling. Three types of sampling were implemented in this research: purposeful, theoretical and snowball. The racial, ethnic and cultural diversity of Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) was conducive to the aforementioned sampling techniques. First, purposeful/criterion-based sampling was implemented to intentionally select participants who

met the inclusion criteria and those who provided rich, elaborate data relevant to the research question. In addition, since concurrent data collection and analysis is foundational to grounded theory, purposeful sampling allowed for an initial set of data collection and analysis to be undertaken (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Morrow, 2005). Next, theoretical sampling was initiated from the codes and themes identified from the first set of interviews/data. Theoretical sampling was implemented to "identify and follow clues from analysis, fill gaps, clarify uncertainties, check hunches and test interpretations" as the study progressed (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 3). The researcher therefore returned to the data collection process (i.e., additional interviews) to verify, scrutinize and expand on the initial emerging themes (Charmaz & Bryant, 2010). Both purposeful and theoretical sampling were facilitated partly through snowball sampling, where existing couples recommended additional couples who met the inclusion criteria (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Morrow, 2005). Snowball sampling is deemed a culturally relevant sampling process, as it gives the researcher "the advantage of being considered an insider within the study population" (Shedlin et al., 2011, p. 353).

The sample size for this research was guided by both informational redundancy and data saturation (Morrow, 2005, 2007; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Vasileiou et al. (2018) posit that there are no "clear-cut guidelines" regarding appropriate sample size, but instead sample size is dependent on the "methodological, theoretical, epistemological and ideological pluralism that characterizes qualitative inquiry" (p. 2). Informational redundancy postulates that sampling additional participants will not elicit new data, and data saturation posits that additional data will not generate new theoretical insights relevant to the phenomenon being investigated and primary theory being elicited (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Research by Morrow (2005, 2007) indicates that data saturation and theoretical saturation are attainable with a sample size of 12 participants. In

light of these considerations, in the present study, a sample size of 12 couples were recruited and interviewed.

Inclusion Criteria. Participants recruited for this study self-identified as belonging to a heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race relationship where they have been married, cohabitating or dating for a minimum of two years. Heterosexual Racialized-White couples were targeted because of a greater increase in heterosexual Racialized-White compared to heterosexual Racialized-Racialized mixed-race relationships in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2014). In addition, a greater contrast in marginalization and privilege, and thus lived experiences, between Racialized and White people was predicted to demonstrate at a greater degree the dynamics of race and culture in mixed-race unions within a predominantly White endogamous society.

Inclusion criteria relevant to the length of relationships have varied in past research from 1 to 3 years (Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Seshadri, 2010; Wu, 2014). In this research, a criteria of two years was chosen and informed by two considerations: (1) research has shown that it is typically in the second year of marriage that couples establish relationship patterns and identity (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999), and (2) in Ontario, a couple is considered common-law if they have been living together for three years, unless they have children through birth or adoption in which case their common-law status is established after one year of cohabitation (Common Law Relationships, 2020). A criterion of two years was therefore predicted to reveal not only relationship dynamics otherwise not attainable from relationships of less than two years, but also the voices of couples who would otherwise been excluded with a three-year duration criterion. Selection or survivorship bias (Mathews, 2015) relevant to the two-year inclusion criteria is discussed in the limitations section in Chapter 6. Additional inclusion criteria included: (1) 18

years or older (2) both partners identify as cisgender, (3) living in Toronto or the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), (4) proficient in English, (5) both partners individually consent to participate in the research, and (6) can commit to a 1 – 1 ½ hour interview. The inclusion criteria relevant to sexual orientation and gender identity ensured that confounders did not conflate the findings of the lived experiences of heterosexual mixed-race couples. Although the intersection of race and culture with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities would have yielded crucial findings, the intricacies of same-sex couples and couples with diverse gender identities were beyond the scope of this research and would have confounded the findings on race and culture as they relate to heterosexual interracial relationships. However, as was expected in each heterosexual Racialized-White partnership, there were multiple dimensions of individual differences including age, socio-economic status, (dis)abilities, religion, level of education, countries of origin, native language and naturalization status. There were no specific inclusion and exclusion criteria related to any of these aforementioned variables.

Recruitment. A systematic yet flexible approach to recruitment was implemented, which ensured transparency in the recruitment process, representativeness of the research sample and a non-hierarchical and culturally-informed approach to recruitment (Shedlin et al., 2011). Furthermore, recommendations by Toronto Public Health regarding the COVID-19 pandemic informed the recruitment process (City of Toronto, 2020). Components of a site-based approach to recruitment developed by Arcury and Quandt (1999) were applied.

First, the characteristics, demographics and inclusion criteria of the sample were specified. Second, sites and platforms that permitted participant recruitment were identified and targeted (Arcury & Quandt, 1999). In this research, participants were targeted through the following sites and platforms: (a) social-media: Facebook, Instagram (b) community centres'

electronic and site-based bulletin in Toronto and GTA: Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto, Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (c) colleges and universities in Toronto: Humber College, University of Toronto, (d) word-of-mouth advertising, and (e) snowball recruitment. Social media, including Facebook and Instagram, is widely used in research for communicating research objectives and recruiting targeted and "hard-to-reach" populations due to high usage and prevalence of information and communication technology (Close et al., 2013; Reagan et al., 2019, p. 430). Additionally, the implementation of multiple modes of advertising (i.e., social media and in-person) adhered to the principle of distributive justice, which allowed for greater reach to potential participants (Holden et al., 1993). Third, for in-person sites that expressed interest in advertising the study, a liaison person was identified and briefed via email on the purpose of the research study (Arcury& Quandt, 1999). The role of the liaison was to provide guidance on site-specific policies on advertising and served as an arbiter between the primary researcher and in-person organizations. Fourth, advertisement of the research *(Appendix A)* was electronically distributed which outlined the purpose of the research, participant inclusion criteria and the primary researcher's phone number, email address and affiliation with the University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). Fifth, a research information letter/email *(Appendix B)* was distributed to potential participants and sites who requested additional information about the study. The information letter/email provided potential participants with the following: objective and purpose of the research study, inclusion criteria, procedure and time required from participants, potential benefits and risks to participants, participants' rights including right to withdraw, confidentiality and how research findings will be disseminated. Information letters also highlighted that interviews would be conducted via

Microsoft Teams in accordance with the strictest guidelines set forth by Toronto Public Health in management of the COVID-19 pandemic (City of Toronto, 2020).

Participants/couples who expressed interest and contacted the primary researcher underwent a brief telephone assessment using a demographic screener which assessed for inclusion eligibility *(Appendix C)*. Once eligibility was determined, a copy of the informed consent *(Appendix D)* and the informed consent for online interviews *(Appendix E)* were emailed to each partner of a heterosexual Racialized-White relationship. Finally, once participants were recruited, a spreadsheet of their demographics, characteristics and recruitment source was maintained (Arcury& Quandt, 1999).

Description of Sample. Participants were 12 heterosexual mixed-race couples where one partner self-identified as Racialized and the other partner self-identified as White. All participants/partners self-identified as cis-gender and resided in Toronto or the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Six participants were born outside of Canada. Participants identified English as their primary language, with the exception of 3 participants who identified French as their primary language. Participants' ages ranged between 28 years and 78 years and the number of years in their relationship, inclusive of courtship/dating, ranged from 2 years to 53 years. Eleven couples were married and 1 couple was in a common-law partnership. Eight couples reported having children. All participants reported having obtained a minimum post-secondary diploma or degree; 10 couples reported a joint income of greater than $100, 000, 1 couple chose not to disclose their income, and 1 couple indicated that they were retired. Further details of each participant and couple are provided in *Table 1*. In order to maintain anonymity, participants are identified by the pseudonyms they chose.

Table 1: Participant Demographics at the Time of Research Interviews

Names/ Couples (F/M)	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Birth Place	Years in Canada	Parents Country of Birth	Primary & Additional Languages	Religion	Relationship Status	Years Together	Children/ Ages
Cassandra	53	South Asian (Pakistani/Goan)	Pakistan	51	Pakistan & Pakistan	English	Roman Catholic	Married	26	2 (22 yrs & 20 yrs)
Wendel	58	White (English)	Canada	N/A	Canada & Canada	English	None (grew up Protestant)			
Curly	41	Middle Eastern (Persian/Iranian)	Iran	30	Iran & Iran	French (English)	None	Married	18	2 (9 yrs & 7 yrs)
Randy	42	White (French, Italian)	Canada	N/A	Canada & Canada	English	None (grew up Catholic)			
Firehawk	78	White (Welsh)	Wales	50	Wales & Wales	English	None	Married	53	2 (48 yrs & 44 yrs)
Wolf	78	South Asian (Sri Lankan)	Sri Lanka	65	Sri Lanka & Sri Lanka	English	None			
Jill	36	South Asian (Bangladeshi)	Bangladesh	18	Bangladesh & Bangladesh	English (Bangla)	Muslim	Married	12	1 (2 ½ yrs)
Jack	41	White (Israeli, Russian)	Canada	N/A	Israel & Canada	English (understands some Hebrew)	Jewish			

Note: Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of participants.

Names/ Couples (F/M)	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Birth Place	Years in Canada	Parents Country of Birth	Primary & Additional Languages	Religion	Relationship Status	Years Together	Children/ Ages
Jolanda	41	Asian (Chinese)	Canada	N/A	Canada & China	English (French)	Christian (non-practicing)	Married	5	1 (10 mnts)
Luca	39	White (Irish, Scottish, Ukrainian)	Canada	N/A	Canada & Canada	English	None			
Joy	34	Black (African Nigerian)	Nigeria	30	Nigeria & Nigeria	English	Catholic	Married	2	None
Sam	39	White (French Canadian)	Canada	N/A	Canada & Canada	French (English)	Catholic			
Lexie	40	White (Italian)	Canada	N/A	Italy & Italy	English (Italian)	Catholic	Married	18	None
Reggie	41	Black (Jamaican)	Canada	N/A	Jamaica & Jamaica	English	Christian			
Lydia	28	Black (Ethiopian, Habesha)	Canada	N/A	Ethiopia & Ethiopia	English (Amharic)	Catholic	Common-Law	5	None
Robert	28	White (Italian)	Canada	N/A	Canada & Canada	English	Catholic			

Note: Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of participants.

Names/ Couples (F/M)	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Birth Place	Years in Canada	Parents Country of Birth	Primary & Additional Languages	Religion	Relationship Status	Years Together	Children/ Ages
Margriet	39	White (Dutch, Italian)	Canada	N/A	Canada & Netherlands	English (French)	Catholic	Married	20	2 (8 yrs & 6 yrs)
Elias	41	Arab/Middle Eastern (Lebanese)	Canada	N/A	Lebanon & Egypt	French (English)	Catholic (Maronite)			
Sophia	35	Asian (Korean)	Canada	N/A	South Korea & South Korea	English	Christian	Married	9	1 (2 yrs)
George	34	White (English, Scottish, German)	Canada	N/A	Canada & Canada	English	None			
Susan	34	White (French, German)	Canada	N/A	Canada & Canada	English	Christian	Married	11	1 (1 yr)
Henry	36	Asian (Filipino)	Canada	N/A	Philippines & Philippines	English	Christian			
Tania	30	Asian/Hispanic (Filipino, Chilean)	Canada	N/A	Philippines & Chile	English (French)	None	Married	6	None
Alexander	37	White (Scottish)	Canada	N/A	Canada & Canada	English (French)	None			

Note: Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of participants.

Procedure

The following procedures were implemented to execute this research study and were in compliance with the ethics guidelines from the University of Toronto, Research Ethics Board (REB). Details of informed consent, data collection/interviews, instrument and potential benefits and risks to participants are presented below.

Preparation for Interviews and Consent. Couples who met the inclusion criteria through the brief telephone assessment *(Appendix C)* and those who expressed further interest in the study were emailed copies of the informed consent *(Appendix D)* and informed consent for online interviews *(Appendix E)*. Information and initial questions regarding informed consent were first addressed at the time of eligibility screening. In addition, participants were emailed copies of a demographic questionnaire *(Appendix F)* and were instructed to also individually complete and email *Appendices C*, *D* and *E* to the researcher prior to the interviews. A date and time for the interviews were mutually determined and scheduled.

Prior to the interviews, participants emailed individually signed copies of the consent forms *(Appendix D* and *Appendix E)* and completed demographic questionnaires *(Appendix F)* to the researcher. At the time of the interviews, informed consent was once again reviewed and discussed, including the objective and purpose of the research, time commitment required from participants, participants' right to withdraw without penalty, potential benefits and risks, and how data will be used and disseminated. Additionally, in compliance with the crux of grounded theory, the primary research shared with participants her personal and professional interests and goals for the research.

Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, an online platform that was approved by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board (Centre for Research and Innovation

Support, 2020). The decision to conduct interviews via a video communication platform was in accordance with the guidelines of Toronto Public Health regarding COVID-19 and the University of Toronto recommendations on conducting research during the pandemic (Toronto Public Health, 2020).

Interviews. Since this research focused on the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples, couples were interviewed together so as to obtain both individual and collective/relational data reflecting their experiences relevant to race and culture. Interviews were guided by the principles of a grounded theory inquiry, and thus open-ended questions that organically evolved throughout the interview process were key to data collection. However, interviews were also loosely guided by a semi-structured interview guide *(Appendix G)*, and its implementation was largely dependent on participants' responses and levels of engagement. Though the interviews were conducted in a conversational manner, the researcher aimed to provide equitable opportunities for engagement from both partners. Interviews were conducted in English and lasted for approximately 1 – 1½ hours. Interviews were video recorded and the researcher also took brief notes. Interviews were transcribed. The researcher followed-up with participants to confirm clarify of narratives and to ensure accuracy, which maintained integrity of the participants and trustworthiness in the research process (Fassinger, 2005; Haverkamp, 2005).

Instrument. The development of the *Navigating Mixed-Race Relationships Interview Guide (Appendix G)* was informed by the research question, literature and guidance from the secondary researcher/thesis advisor. The interview guide was intended to be flexible and was modified according to the responses and level of engagement from participants, as well as the interpersonal dynamics between the researcher and participants (Ponterotto, 2005). In addition

to an emphasis on rapport building, open-ended questions were central to this guide so as to obtain emic perspectives, which are considered "more relevant in the interpretation of a culture and in the understanding of cultural experiences within a particular group" (Olive, 2014, p. 4). The interview guide was pilot tested and practiced to ensure clarity of questions and elaboration of responses. Practicing and pilot testing the interview guide also safeguarded against engaging in clinical interviews with participants as opposed to research interviews for the purpose of data collection (Fassinger, 2005).

Potential Benefits and Risks to Participants. There were several potential benefits of this research. First, the constructivist grounded theory approach gave voice to and had the capacity to empower heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples to narrate their lived experiences. Narrating their lived experiences had the potential to deepen self-reflection and self-understanding, minimize feelings of social-isolation and stigma, facilitate "reconstitution/self-acceptance of one's identity" and foster self-actualization (Opsal et al., 2016, p. 1142). Second, gaining a comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences had practical applications in culturally-informed counselling and psychotherapy, particularly in the field of couple's and family therapy. Third, in accordance with the social benefits principle, the findings have the capacity to contribute to the welfare and well-being of mixed-race couples and their families by presenting mixed-race relationships through a strength-based, anti-oppressive and anti-racist lens (Opsal et al., 2016; Resnik, 2018).

With regards to possible risks to participants, the degree of self-disclosures had the potential of compromising anonymity, making participants identifiable (Opsal et al., 2016). Second, the depth of self-disclosures could have resulted in emotional discomfort and dysregulation, as participants reflected on their lived experiences of race and culture.

Additionally, interviewing couples together had the potential of triggering relational challenges and ruptures. As a precaution against these potential risks, the researcher sensitively moderated interviews, and had available, culturally relevant mental health resources if needed *(Appendix H)*. However, at the end of the interviews, no participants and/or couples indicated a need for support resources.

Data Analysis

This research adopted a grounded theory constant comparative analysis and inductive approach to data analytics (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Thomas, 2006). A constant comparative approach is an iterative technique that continuously compares new and existing data to uncover congruence and divergence in the data. The inductive process allows for "research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies" (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). It allows the researcher to summarize raw data, bridge the research question to the results in a manner that is transparent and valid. In addition, an inductive analytic approach has the capacity to explain and interpret findings emanating from participants' narratives, which is attainable through various coding techniques (Thomas, 2006). A comprehensive review of the data analytic process of the present study including memo writing, transcription and detailed account of data analysis (i.e., coding) are presented below. It is important to note that the linear presentation of the analytic process is for the purpose of clarity and comprehension, since this process was non-linear and recursive.

Memo Writing. In adherence with a grounded theory methodology that emphasizes transparency, trustworthiness and an iterative process of data collection and analysis, the researcher engaged in memo writing following interviews with each couple (Haverkamp, 2005;

Morrow, 2005). Charmaz (2015) defines memo writing as "private conversations grounded theorists have with themselves as they take their codes apart and analyze what they might mean" (p. 1617). Charmaz further postulates that memo writing is particularly advantageous to students as it "frees students to explore their ideas, scrutinize and improve their codes, make conjectures, examine their assumptions, and express doubts—all without the watchful eye of a supervisor" (Charmaz, 2015, p. 1617). Through memo writing, the primary researcher engaged in constant comparison between new and existing data throughout the data collection and analysis process, resulting in the organic emergence of initial codes, clusters, categories and themes. The "deconstruction and reconstructive" (Montgomery & Bailey, 2007, p.78) of the data as well as initial hunches, thoughts and feelings documented in the memos were discussed throughout the data collection and analysis process with the secondary researcher/thesis advisor, which safeguarded against potential bias.

Transcription. Prior to transcribing the interviews, the researcher listened to the video recordings of each interview with an approach of active listening, openness and curiosity. During this initial phase of active listening, similarities, divergences and unique narratives were mentally noted. Next, the video recordings were transcribed verbatim within 1-3 weeks of the interviews, which allowed the researcher to consolidate the preliminary emerging categories/themes with the initial insights and hunches that were documented in the memos. All participants were offered a copy of their transcript during the informed consent process and at the end of the interviews. Six of the twelve couples requested copies. Transcripts were emailed and couples were given two weeks to review them for accuracy and to offer elaborations and/or deletions. Revisions to the transcripts included clarifications, elaborations and deletions of potentially identifying information. This process further enhanced the transparency and validity

of the data, as well as the research ethics by altering any researcher-interviewee power imbalance (Mero-Jaffe, 2011).

Analysis of Data. Data analysis was manually conducted by the principal researcher in consultation with the secondary researcher/thesis advisor and the University of Toronto's Research Design and Analysis Services. In grounded theory, coding is the crux of data analysis and allows for the formulation of an analytic framework in which further analysis is possible. Coding facilitates the construction of linkages between participants' narratives and the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2006). Coding is defined as "an analytic process used to identify concepts, similarities and conceptual occurrences in data" (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 4). Through coding, narratives/data is multidimensionally categorized, allowing for meaning-making and interpretation (Charmaz, 2006; Fassinger, 2005; Khandkar, 2019). In this research, three coding techniques (i.e., open, axial and theoretical) were utilized to analyze the data (Charmaz, 2006). First, in the initial phase of coding, transcripts were content analyzed through open-coding, which simply meant that transcripts were read line by line in a rigorous and systematic manner so as to dissect the data to identify patterns, similarities and differences. Through this process, significant words, lines and/or phrases were identified, highlighted and labelled (i.e., coded) so as to precisely (i.e., in vivo codes) or closely resemble the narratives of participants (Khandkar, 2019). Open coding of transcripts allowed the researcher to engage in ongoing comparisons between data/transcripts (Chun Tie et al., 2019) and to stay "close to the data" and "preserve the fluidity" of the experiences of participants (Charmaz, 2006, p. 49). It also identified gaps in the data and ensured that initial codes or concepts identified through the initial set of data/interviews underwent continuous comparisons and modifications when new data/interviews were added (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Charmaz, 2006; Fassinger, 2005; Parry, 1998). At the culmination of

open-coding, the researcher identified numerous codes which began to organically fall into various clusters or categories (Noble & Mitchell, 2016).

Second, axial coding was implemented, where through continuous comparison of the codes identified in open coding, connections, linkages and relationships between the codes began to emerge (Noble & Mitchell, 2016; Rothgangel & Saup, 2017; Thomas, 2006). This constant and recursive comparison resulted in the categorization and emergence of themes, sub-themes, sub-sub themes, tertiary themes and in some cases quaternary themes, which are presented in the results chapter. Charmaz (2015) postulated that axial coding is a strategy implemented for "bringing data back together in a coherent whole" (p. 60). Chun Tie et al., (2019) stated that axial coding "transform basic data into more abstract concepts, allowing the theory to emerge from the data" (p. 5). Through axial coding, ongoing scrutiny, modification and expansion occurred on all levels of data categorization or thematization when new data was added. This process allowed for ongoing revelation of linkages and relationships between these categories/themes and further conceptualization of the data (Charmaz, 2006; Fassinger, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Finally, theoretical coding allowed for themes, sub-themes, sub-sub themes, tertiary themes and quaternary themes to be refined and analyzed for interrelatedness (Noble & Mitchell, 2016). Theoretical coding is deemed "essential to produce a theory that is grounded in the data and has explanatory power" (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 6). Therefore, through ongoing comparison and analyzing of the various themes by the primary researcher, four core themes emerged from this study (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Hernandez, 2009). These core themes provided a conceptual framework for answering the research question, which led to the formulation of an

integrative and explanatory mid-level theory on the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto.

Social Location of Researcher

Distinct from positivist and post-positivist research methodologies where researchers remain firmly objective, grounded theory situated within a constructivist paradigm considers "the transactional connection between participant and researcher" in constructing additional meanings and realities (Fassinger, 2005, p. 157). The researcher is authentically and transparently involved in the research process where they engage in self-reflective practices (e.g., reflective journaling, memo writing, participants feedback, and consultation with thesis supervisor), which are incorporated in the analytic process and data. A perspective subjectivity stance is recommended, where researchers are recommended to draw on their own knowledge and personal experiences to guide the research process (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Haverkamp, 2005; Morrow, 2005). However, Fassinger (2005) state that researchers of grounded theory "must strike a delicate balance" (p. 158) between 'knowing and not knowing' in that they must possess adequate knowledge to guide sampling and data analysis but also assume a 'not knowing' attitude so as to avert their preconceived experiences and knowledge from influencing the research process and outcomes. Researchers are recommended to identify and acknowledge their values, biases and implicit assumptions; however at the same time bracketing is recommended to avoid excessively influencing the research process and participants' responses (Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). As the primary researcher of this study, I wholeheartedly committed to the recommendations summarized above in order to execute an ethical grounded theory research. I will now elaborate on my social location as a researcher.

I identify as a Racialized woman of Indo-Guyanese racial and cultural heritage and I am in a heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-raced marriage with my partner who identifies as a White Canadian with Scottish and French heritage. I also identify as cis-gender, physically and mentally able, educated, English-speaking and settler/immigrant. I was born in Guyana, immigrated to Jamaica at age 9 and later immigrated to Canada at age 16. My social location shifted following my immigration to Jamaica and Canada. For example, although my Indo-Caribbean identity was a minority demographic in Jamaica, I possessed privileges that stemmed from having South Asian ancestry, being Brown skinned with 'Indian hair' and having a middle-upper class socio-economic status. I held privileges because of the pervasiveness of colonial racism and White supremacy's racial hierarchies. Subsequently, my immigration to Canada resulted in (some) loss of privileges evinced in my parents' change in employment status, my accent and my race/ethnicity. However, I retained some of my privileges as an English speaker, educated person, and stereotypes that stemmed from the 'model minority' status imposed on me.

However, I was not free from racist ideologies and beliefs, as I was born in Guyana, land of the First peoples that was colonized by the British. The repercussions of colonization, slavery and indentureship are evident in high rates of poverty, suicide and racial discontent. Guyana is racially, ethnically and culturally diverse, with a majority of its population identifying as Afro-Guyanese (descendants from Africa during slavery) and Indo-Guyanese (descendants from India during indentureship). Racism is pervasive in Indo-Guyanese communities with limited intermarriages, prevalence of shadeism and some affinity to the caste system. My immigration to Jamaica challenged my own racism, which was often latent and disowned. I was influenced by White supremacy, colonialization and the internalizations of these beliefs by my ancestors.

My interests in feminism and anti-oppression, crystallized during my undergraduate degree where I minored in Women's Studies, compelled me to acknowledge my own (historic) oppression and colonial and racist discourse. I was also faced with my own privileges as a cis-gender, heterosexual, Brown, educated, English-speaking and able-bodied female in a society that was ferociously anti-Black, heterosexist and ableist. I perpetually strive to decolonize my personal and professional philosophies and ideologies, which serves as a principal foundation in my role as a psychotherapist for the past 14 years.

In sum, my personal experiences of racism, my membership in a mixed-race marriage, my clinical interests as a psychotherapist in racial and cultural diversity and marginalization, the visible prevalence of mixed-race couples in Toronto as well as, the increased (invisible and overt) incidences of racism inspired this research pursuit. It was my hope that my personal lived experiences, along with my clinical experiences, would meaningfully contribute to this research on mixed-race relationships and yield findings that positively support the welfare and well-being of mixed-race couples and their families. Further reflections on my membership in a Racialized-White relationship and the potential impact on the research process is noted in Chapter 6 in the subsection, *A Personal Reflection on Conducting This Research*.

Summary

A qualitative, constructivist grounded theory inquiry was the methodology used to explore the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto. Since research and theories on this population is limited, a grounded theory approach was predicted to result in comprehensive emic data, leading to the emergence of themes and the development of a mid-level theory. This chapter described the design of the study and explicated on the process of sampling, criteria for inclusion, recruitment, and research sample. The

procedures of this study including informed consent, the interview process, and potential benefits and risks to participants were also discussed. This chapter concluded by outlining the data analytic process, including the various levels of coding as well as the social location of the primary researcher. The next chapter will present the research findings that emerged from this methodological approach.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

This study was conducted to obtain insights into the lived experiences relevant to race and culture of heterosexual mixed-race couples in Toronto. Twelve mixed-race couples who self-identified as being in a Racialized-White interracial partnership were interviewed *(Table 1)*, guided by a grounded theory inquiry. The couples who participated in this research were: Cassandra and Wendel, Curly and Randy, Firehawk and Wolf, Jill and Jack, Jolanda and Luca, Joy and Sam, Lexie and Reggie, Lydia and Robert, Margriet and Elias, Sophia and George, Susan and Henry, and Tania and Alexander (all pseudonyms chosen by participants). The qualitative narratives of these couples responded to the research question: *What are the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto with regards to issues of race and culture?*

The presentation of the research findings will follow the recommendations of a grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1965). In grounded theory, salient quotes from participants' narratives are essentially the data or results. Through coding and constant comparative analyses described in the previous chapter, these quotes are organically grouped into themes and categories. In the presentation of the results, these themes are often presented by first providing a description of them, followed by a few pertinent excerpts from participants' narratives to illustrate the theme being presented. Each excerpt is introduced with a few prefatory sentences. Furthermore, at the conclusion of each theme, a brief summary of the theme is presented (Singh, 2020; Urquhart, 2013). In accordance with a grounded theory methodology, the excerpts and themes presented are neither subjectively interpreted by the researcher nor juxtaposed with existing literature at this stage of the study. In addition,

illustrations are often employed to exemplify the evolution and linkages between the themes (Urquhart, 2013).

In this study, the data is organized and framed within four core themes. Each core theme has subsequent sub-themes, sub sub-themes, tertiary themes and in some instances, quaternary themes, which are visually illustrated in *Figures 1-4*. The core themes follow the progression and evolution of the relationship of 12 Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), specific to their experiences of race and culture. The four core themes include: (1) Lived Experiences of Race and Culture Prior to Mixed-Race Relationships, (2) Lived Experiences of Race and Culture in Mixed-Race Relationships, (3) Critical Reflections on Lived Experiences: Negotiating Differences, Racism and Privilege, and Being in 'The Middle' of Two Races and Cultures, and (4) Lived Experiences of Mixed-Race Couples Beyond Race and Culture.

The first core theme – *Lived Experiences of Race and Culture Prior to Mixed-Race Relationships (Figure 1)*, presents participants' understanding of their own racial and cultural identities, their understanding and acquisition of cross-racial and cultural awareness, and their perception of mixed-race relationships prior to their current partnerships. Participants also recounted personal experiences, insights and critical reflections on dating in and out of their racial and cultural groups prior to their current unions. The first core theme contextualized the presentation and comprehension of the second core theme.

The second core theme – *Lived Experiences of Race and Culture in Mixed-Race Relationships (Figure 2),* is dedicated to showcasing couples' lived experiences of race and culture since the commencement of their partnerships. This theme begins by presenting participants' narratives on meeting and courtship, specifically the roles of race and culture in

romantic attraction. It then details the 'mixing' of each partner's diverse races and cultures in their mixed unions by presenting the racial and cultural factors that are being 'mixed' or integrated in these unions, including degrees of 'mixing' or integration. The second core theme also captures the strengths of these partnerships, including influences on individual and relational growth and enhancement, inherent benefits procured to children of these unions, as well as the acquisition of cultural empathy. The second core theme concludes by presenting the challenges experienced by mixed-race couples, including challenges stemming from racial and cultural divergences and experiences of racism and discrimination incited by family members and general society.

The third core theme – *Critical Reflections on Lived Experiences: Negotiating Differences, Racism and Privilege, and Being in 'The Middle' of Two Races and cultures (Figure 3)* – builds on the second core theme, which provided further contextual foundation for the conception and presentation of core theme three. The third core theme is first dedicated to presenting the critical reflections and insights shared by couples on negotiating differences, which were not framed as challenges but as nuances, intrinsic to racial and cultural divergences that required certain degrees of management. Core theme three also presented strategies couples utilized to cope with racism, prejudice and discrimination. It presented their insights into their social location as interracial couples, and their experiences of being in 'the middle' of two races and cultures, and crossing racial and cultural borders. The third core theme concludes by presenting the recommendations and wisdom offered by couples on navigating a mixed-race relationship, specific to race and culture.

The fourth core theme – *Lived Experiences of Mixed-Race Couples Beyond Race and Culture (Figure 4),* presents the lived experiences of couples that extend beyond the confines of

race and culture. It was imperative to share these lived experiences as they demonstrated the intricacies and riches of these unions that surpassed race and culture. In this core theme, couples identified and elaborated on their intersectional identities and shared their lived experiences pertaining to their geographical region of residence, country of birth and immigration, native language, religion, gender, age, dis(abilities), socio-economic status and socio-political climate. While some of these aforementioned identities may be categorized as racial, ethnic and/or cultural factors, to ensure a clear, comprehensive and cohesive presentation of experiences of intersectionality all intersecting identities will be presented in this core theme. The fourth core theme concludes with the shared values identified by couples which they deemed fundamental to their relationship.

1.0 Lived Experiences of Race and Culture Prior to Mixed-Race Relationships

In the first core theme, *Lived Experiences of Race and Culture Prior to Mixed-Race Relationships (Figure 1),* participants shared their lived experiences of race and culture both within and outside their racial and cultural group prior to meeting their partner and commencement of their current mixed-race relationship. They elaborated on their racial and cultural identities, identified factors that influenced their identity development as well as acumens towards their own race and culture. These accounts generated the first sub-theme, *How I Found My Identity: Experiences with One's Own Racial and Cultural Identities*. Participants also elaborated on their experiences with races and cultures outside their own racial and cultural groups, as well as attitudes and beliefs held towards diverse groups. This led to the emergence of the second sub-theme, *How I Developed Cross Racial and Cultural Awareness and Insightful Understanding*. Participants also shared their experiences dating both inside and outside their

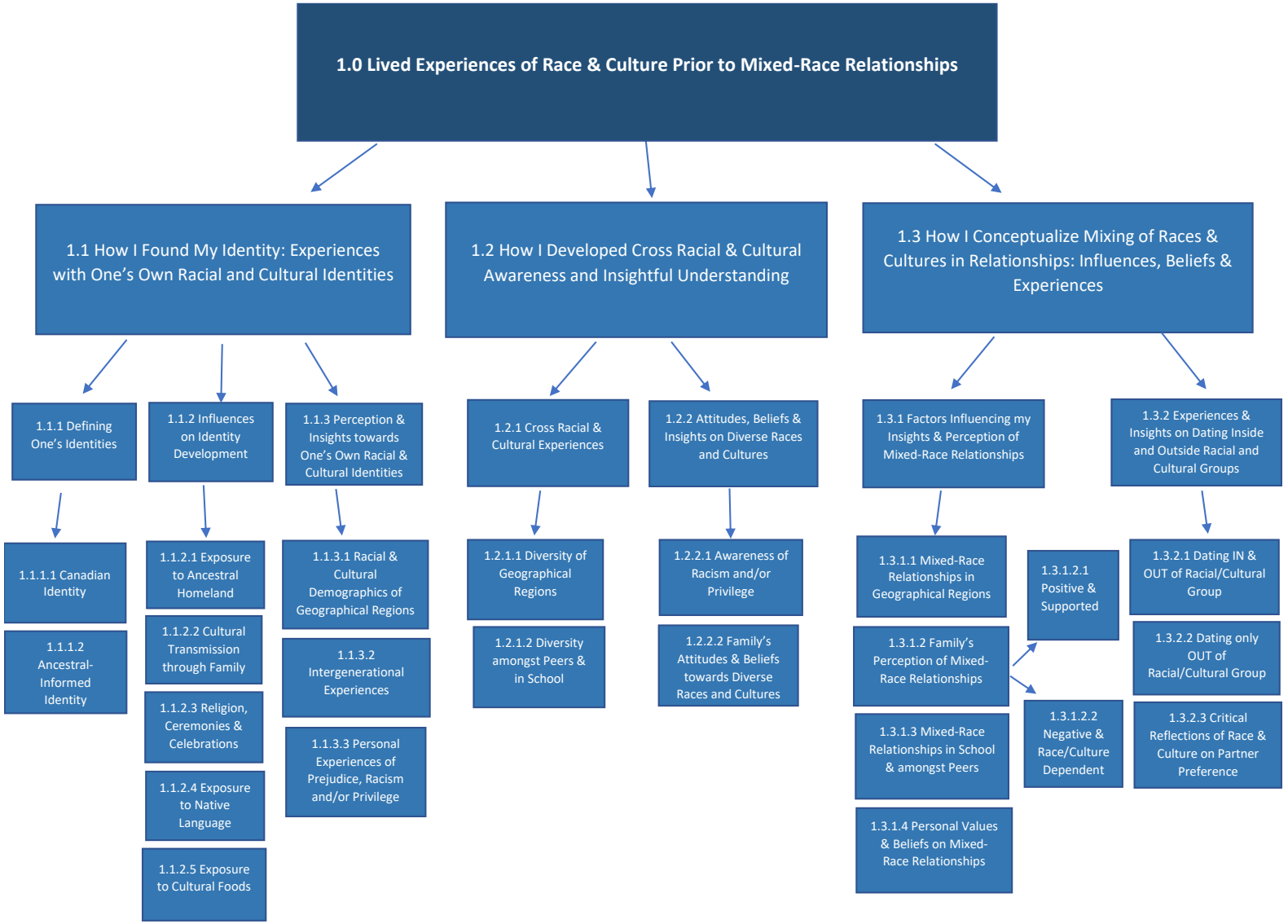

Figure 1: Lived Experiences of Race and Culture Prior to Mixed-Race Relationships

racial and cultural groups, as well as factors that influenced their perception of mixed-race relationships. The final sub-theme unfolded from these narratives, *How I Conceptualize Mixing of Races and Cultures in Relationships: Influences, Beliefs and Experiences*. These three sub-themes will be presented next.

1.1 How I Found My Identity: Experiences with One's Own Racial and Cultural Identities.

Many participants shared and elaborated on their racial and cultural identities at the early stages of the interviews. These dialogues were comprised of reflections on their racial and cultural identities, including: how they racially and culturally identify, as in the case of Alexander who stated, "I guess I'd be White, Caucasian and Canadian from a ways back"; factors that contributed to the development and preservation of their racial and cultural identities, as exemplified by Curly who remarked, "through my mom and my grandma essentially"; and discernments towards one's own race and culture, as shared by Sophia, who stated she "rejected the culture" earlier in her life but after living in Korea for a year, she began to "appreciate the Korean culture a lot more." The categorization of these narratives led to the emergence of the following sub sub-themes, respectively: (1) Defining One's Identities, (2) Influences on Identity Development and (3) Perception and Insights towards One's Own Racial and Cultural Identities.

1.1.1 Defining One's Identities. In the first sub sub-theme, participants described how they identify racially and culturally. Responses regarding their racial and cultural identity bracketed within a predominantly and exclusively Canadian identity or identification with their ancestral lineage, as well as their Canadian identity. These emerging tertiary themes were defined as Canadian Identity and Ancestral-Informed Identity.

1.1.1.1 Canadian Identity. Many participants who characterized their identity as primarily Canadian were White and traced their ancestry to Europe, with the exception of a few.

These participants maintained a general understanding of their heritage and shared some knowledge of their ancestors' early settlement in Canada. For example, Wendel shared that his interest in history afforded him further awareness of his heritage, however he identified as Canadian "first and foremost":

> "I'm Canadian first and foremost…it's Canadian, it's not English…if we go back several generations, I might identify myself as English…the Whites came over on the second ship after the Mayflower…my ancestors decided to be loyal to King George III…we had to leave or be tarred and feathered…we moved up into New Brunswick, the first official loyalists settlement in North America."

Similarly, George, who has European ancestry, also maintained a strong Canadian identity with minimal attachment to his ancestral roots. He remarked on his name as being the only remaining connection to his English heritage:

> "I'm very Canadian…my ancestors who came from like ballpark four generations back, they would have come from England…there's a bit of Scotland in there…might even be a bit of German…we had like early settlers…late 1800s in Ontario actually…if you've ever been to that town, I have a distant relationship with the actual person who is the founder of that town… I really don't have any significant connection other than my name…my first and last name are English and that's really about it."

A few participants who also identified as largely Canadian shared that some of their ancestors had recent immigration histories. One such participant is Jack, who said that his father emigrated from Israel, but similar to Wendel and George, he too identified as predominantly Canadian regardless of closer (partial) ties to his ancestral origins:

> "I am White Canadian…my dad was born in Israel and my [paternal] great grandfather and great grandmother were born in Russia, in Latvia…on my mom's side, I'm third generation Canadian and I guess first on my dad's side."

Contrasted with the participants above who all identified as White and Canadian-born, Wolf, a Racialized Canadian who immigrated to Canada at an early age, said that his dissimilarity with

people from Sri-Lanka in reference to ways of thinking, as well as having lived a majority of his life in Canada, affirmed a primarily Canadian identity:

> "I have been in Canada since 1955…my home is this country. I have lived longer here than the country of my birth…I look at myself more Canadian in my thinking and all that, than Sri Lankan. I don't have that much in common with people now from Sri Lanka…I was 13 years old and I'll be 79. I lived most of my life here."

Many participants who identified primarily as Canadian shared their ancestral connection to Europe with the exception of a few, as illustrated by Jack and Wolf. In these accounts, some reported an ancestral history of early settlement and immigration to Canada, some described a 'more Canadian way of thinking,' and some identified as having a stronger connection to Canada relative to their country of ancestry.

1.1.1.2 Ancestral-Informed Identity. Many participants who incorporated their racial and cultural heritage in the characterization of their identity were Racialized, with the exception of a few. They described various degrees of identification with both their ancestral and Canadian heritages. For example, Tania, a Canadian-born participant whose mother was born in Chile and whose father was born in the Philippines, equally consolidated her racial and cultural heritage in the classification of her identity. She stated:

> "I identify as Canadian, Filipino and Chilean."

Similarly, Lydia, who is also Canadian-born, further elaborated on various dimensions of her identities, where she specified her race, ethnic origins and nationality:

> "In terms of race, I identify as Black and ethnically, my family originates from East Africa from Ethiopia, so, in terms of ethnic identity, I would say Ethiopian or Habesha and in terms of nationality being Canadian born and raised, I identify as Canadian."

Another Canadian-born participant, Jolanda, articulated the evolution of her identity and conveyed that earlier in her life, she identified as predominantly Canadian and renounced her

Asian and Chinese identity. However, she disclosed that over time and having lived in Hong Kong, she began to integrate her Chinese heritage into the constituent of her identity:

> "I didn't actually identify very strongly with being Asian for most of my life…my primary identity was Canadian really up until I was in university and then I started to kind of think about it…I still really didn't think of myself as like really Chinese and Asian until I moved to Hong Kong for a while…living there…I felt more Chinese, connected to my like Chinese ancestry…that living abroad experience, I would say like it made me feel 'okay, I'm Chinese.'"

In contrast to the participants above, Lexie, a White Canadian-born participant whose parents emigrated from Italy, shared that at some points in her life, she considered herself "more Italian" than Canadian and felt a deep "philosophical" connection to her country of ancestry, since she spent a significant amount of time in Italy and even lived there:

> "We spent a lot of time back and forth between Canada and Italy…I lived there for a little bit of time…I felt more Italian than I did Canadian… such a deep connection to the land…that's where like my blood is…in a very philosophical sense…I do feel like deeply connected to the land and the people and the lifestyle…it has been difficult to sort of feel like you're deeply connected to some place really far away but also, love Toronto and…this is your home."

Many participants who consolidated their ancestral and Canadian heritages into the characterization of their identity were Racialized, with a few exceptions. Many of these participants also reported some degrees of connection and affiliation with their race/culture and country of ancestry. Of significance, Jolanda elaborated on the change and evolution to her identity, influenced by temporarily living in her country of ancestry.

1.1.2 Influences on Identity Development. In addition to defining their identity, participants described factors that contributed to the development of their identity. They proposed several determinants, including: familiarity with one's country of ancestry, as in the case of Tania, who remarked that several visits to Chile provided a "very rich cultural experience"; transmission of racial and cultural knowledge through family, as described by Elias,

who spoke of his father's efforts in upholding their "cultural connection to Lebanon"; involvement in religion, ceremonies and cultural celebrations, as exemplified by Robert, who regarded his attendance in church and at ceremonies as having had a "strong impact" on understanding his culture; exposure and familiarity with native language, as specified by Jack, who regarded being in "private Hebrew school" in his childhood as one determinant in his identity development; and knowledge of cultural foods, where Curly proclaimed "there's definitely a food component" on her identity formation. Subsequently, narratives pertaining to influences on identity development were clustered into the following tertiary themes: (1) Exposure to Ancestral Homeland, (2) Cultural Transmission through Family (3) Religion, Ceremonies and Celebrations, (4) Exposure to Native Language and (5) Exposure to Cultural Foods.

1.1.2.1 Exposure to Ancestral Homeland. Participants who proclaimed that exposure to their ancestral homeland contributed to their identity development were primarily Racialized, with the exception of a few. These participants discussed varying degrees of lived experiences in their countries of ancestry. For example, Curly, a Racialized Iranian-born Canadian who also lived in France prior to immigrating to Canada, characterized herself as "hybrid":

> "I was born there and I lived there for five years. I was five when we immigrated…we moved to France and then we came to Canada…it's complicated but I think I'm more of a hybrid. I also do identify a lot with the French culture quite a bit because I grew up there."

In contrast to Curly, Reggie, a Black Canadian-born participant described the significance of visiting his ancestral country numerous times as a child and how these immersive experiences in Jamaica influenced his Jamaican-Canadian identity:

> "I didn't live in Jamaica, but I've been to Jamaica a lot as a child. I went back about seven times…I really did get to immerse myself in the culture…as a kid, I enjoyed living down there, living the minimal life. There wasn't hot water, there

> wasn't cable TV but I got to wake up every morning and have fresh food and fresh fruit…see all kinds of different things that I wouldn't see here, like lizards…it was different but I really appreciated it...just hearing Patois all the time, instead of just straight-up English."

Though Lydia, another Black Canadian-born participant, did not visit her country of ancestry as frequently as Reggie, she too described the profound influence of visiting Ethiopia with her parents on her identity development:

> "Taking me to Ethiopia for the first time when I was about to graduate high school and taking me on a grand tour of all the major provinces in Ethiopia, visiting historic and sacred sites, ancient churches and attending events where I got to take part in cultural activities…I think that was hugely influential in terms of creating my identity and how I identify today as Canadian-Ethiopian and my racial background."

In contrast to the participants above, Elias, a Canadian-born Racialized male with Lebanese-born parents, said that the dissolution in his paternal relationship, in conjunction with a sense of feeling pressured to frequently visit Lebanon, resulted in a deliberate distancing of himself from Lebanon and to him feeling "less Lebanese":

> "I am less Lebanese…I think that's cause living in Canada, growing more distant with my father…not wanting to visit Lebanon…we would go every summer when we were young. And when I was a teenager, they forced me to go. And I just did not want to go. So that kind of gave me a bad impression where I was just like…stop forcing me to go back to Lebanon. And so I wanted to take a step back."

The narratives of Curly, Reggie, Lydia and Elias represent varying degrees of saliency in their lived experiences and connection to their country of ancestry, ranging from being born in their ancestral country to having had one visit. Elias shares an exception and he discussed the multifaceted dynamics in his identity formation.

1.1.2.2 Cultural Transmission through Family. Participants communicated the influence of their families on the transmission of racial/cultural knowledge. Influential family members included parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings and cousins. For example, Joy, a

Black Nigerian-born Canadian, said that being raised by her father established the foundations of her African Nigerian identity:

> "My father raised us…and really put in those roots of an African Nigerian home, so food, language, just kind of norms…my father has instilled in our lives… I feel like that really…structured me and was my main foundation."

Similarly, another participant, Margriet, a White Canadian with European ancestry, disclosed that both her parents influenced her identity in distinct ways, attributable to their unique European heritages:

> "I'm kind of mixed European descent. My dad was born in the Netherlands…of the cultures growing up…probably the Dutch culture had the most influence on me. We would celebrate Dutch holidays like Sinterklaas…Indonesian food is really popular in the Netherlands, so that's the style of food that my dad would know how to cook…my mom's family was predominantly Italian descent, but she was born in Canada. So I think some of the maybe emotional traits or like family connection traits and values in that way with her side of the family."

Furthermore, several participants shared how their racial and cultural identities were influenced by parents as well as extended family members. Grandparents were revered by several participants as key disseminators and conduits of cultural/racial knowledge and customs. Lydia shared how her grandparents were influential in instilling key aspects of her race and culture into her identity:

> "Having my grandparents be such a big part of my childhood, my upbringing…has been a huge influence…both my grandparents have lived with us and helped raised us…I learned a lot about different aspects of culture, religion, politics…whether it's music or ceremonies, and traditions and cooking and food, it's like almost ingrained in every aspect…having grandparents that didn't speak English as their first language also helped me learn Amharic…I wouldn't probably have been able to speak Amharic if it wasn't for them passing down that aspect of my culture."

In contrast to the participants noted above, Sophia, a Canadian-born Racialized woman with Korean-born parents described her mother as "White washed" and stated that in conjunction to

living in a region of Toronto with a small Asian population, she identified more with the White Canadian culture compared to her ancestral heritage:

> "My mom came here when she was like in her teens, so she is fairly what you can call 'White washed'…I feel like I rejected the culture, like right from the beginning…I grew up in downtown Toronto…there weren't a lot of Asians there at the time, so I think I just rejected the culture…'I am not Korean, I'm White' (laughs)."

The accounts of these participants reflect the role of family as conduits of racial and cultural knowledge. Participants shared varying degrees of cultural transmission by family. For example, Joy described her father as having a strong connection to Nigeria and thus her Nigerian culture became her "main foundation," whereas Sophia described her mother's disconnection from the Korean culture as contributing to the curtailment of her own connection to the Korean culture.

1.1.2.3 Religion, Ceremonies and Celebrations. Some participants elaborated on the influence of their religion as well as ceremonies and celebrations embedded in religious and/or cultural practices on their identity formation. For example, Robert, who is Canadian-born and identifies as White Italian-Canadian, described how religious and cultural traditions facilitated his understanding of his culture:

> "I would say like going to church and weddings and funerals…all those kinds of life events had a strong impact on my understanding of my culture growing up."

Similar to Robert, Lexie, who was also born in Canada and identifies as White Italian-Canadian, described how intimately her religion is connected to her Italian culture:

> "My religion, like being raised Catholic is definitely integrally connected to being Italian, at least for my family. And so a lot of things that we consider cultural have Catholic connections. So things like holidays and feast days or like expectations and rules."

Another participant, Jack, a White Jewish Canadian-born participant, distinguished between his religion and culture. He shared that his family observed and practiced various Jewish traditions but described them as "not very religious." He stated that he was exposed to numerous Jewish ceremonies and celebrations in his upbringing, which influenced his identity as a Jew:

> "My family is very Jewish, but not very religious, if that makes sense…had the bar mitzvah …we celebrated Friday night dinners…we celebrate some of the Jewish traditions…it's not the God or the synagogue parts…it's getting together for tradition, just sitting down and eating…maybe for Purim…or for Passover."

Robert, Lexie and Jack shared how participation in religion, ceremonies and cultural celebrations facilitated a greater understanding and connection to their cultures. Lexie also expounded on the amalgamation between her ethnicity and religion, where she highlighted the "integral" connection between her religion, culture and/or ethnicity.

1.1.2.4 Exposure to Native Language. The influence of native language on racial and cultural identity were shared by participants who grew up in either a non-English speaking home or a multilingual home. The degree of transmission of native languages varied where participants shared that they either learned their ancestral language entirely, partially or to no degree. Lexie, for example, shared that even though she was born in Canada, she spoke only Italian until she started kindergarten, where she then learned English:

> "I didn't speak English until I went to kindergarten…Italian is actually technically my first language…so my mom didn't speak very much English and so I was kind of the go-between between her world and the Canadian world."

Some participants also shared that their exposure to French in the Canadian school system contributed to some degree to their Canadian identity. Furthermore, Sam, a White French-Canadian participant, elaborated on the importance of maintaining his French language, particularly within a predominantly English-speaking Canada:

> "The only thing that's been instilled very strong in my family and especially with my mom is the French language…the importance of maintaining the French language and how important it is within Canada and especially in Quebec."

On the other hand, some participants shared partial or no acquisition of their ancestral language. For example, Sophia shared that she identifies primarily as Canadian and did not learn her ancestral language even though her grandparents and her father spoke very little English:

> "So like grandparents on both sides…didn't speak the language and I didn't speak Korean, I wasn't able to really connect with them. It's a bit of a shame though cause now, I'm so interested…about their stories but they are not around for me to ask…and even my dad, his English isn't very good either."

The preceding commentaries highlight the variance in exposure and fluency in ancestral languages among participants. Lexie and Sam elaborated on the influence of their native language on identity, which they both stated were transmitted through family and in Sam's case, being raised in Quebec. Sam also noted the importance of maintaining his French language within a Canadian and Quebecois context.

1.1.2.5 Exposure to Cultural Foods. Many participants identified their connection to their cultural foods as an integral part of their identity. Most of these participants identified as Racialized, with the exception of a few, and noted the substantive role of food within their cultures. For example, Curly, a Racialized Iranian-born Canadian stated the following:

> "Oh my gosh, the food is such a big part of it."

Of the participants who identified as White with European ancestry, only some conveyed the significance of food within their culture. These were participants who identified as having Israeli, Dutch and Italian ancestry. For example, Lexie shared that when she reflects on her Italian culture, some of her most "comforting memories" are connected to food:

> "In terms of food and culture…one of my most comforting memories is like waking up to the smell of tomato sauce on Sunday morning…like homemade pizza…food for sure is connected. My grandpa making like homemade wine and then giving us peaches and wine for dessert."

Curly and Lexie shared how cultural foods served an influential role in identity formation. Curly described Persian/Iranian food as being a "big part" of her identify and similarly, Lexie remarked on how Italian food is "connected" to her identity.

1.1.3 Perception and Insights towards One's Own Racial and Cultural Identities. Participants also critically reflected on variables that shaped their understanding and perception of their racial and cultural identities. For example, Jill considered the influence of geographical region on the classification of her racial identity and she stated, "I'm Brown…other than when I moved to Canada, I've never heard of that word [Brown] before." Furthermore, Wolf reflected on the impact of the "British colonial system" on his ancestor's attitudes towards their Sri Lankan culture; and Henry considered the implications of childhood experiences of racism and he stated, "I do remember as a child feeling like I was othered." These critical reflections were categorized into the following tertiary themes, respectively: (1) Racial and Cultural Demographics of Geographical Regions, (2) Intergenerational Experiences, and (3) Personal Experiences of Prejudice, Racism and/or Privilege.

1.1.3.1 Racial and Cultural Demographics of Geographical Regions. Participants shared how the racial and cultural demographics of their geographical regions and neighbourhoods shaped their perception of their racial and cultural identities. They indicated that they spent their formative years in diverse and/or primarily mono-racial/cultural communities. Some also elaborated on how changing geographical location altered their perceptions of their identities. For example, Luca, who identifies as a White Canadian with Scottish, Irish and Ukrainian ancestry, grew up in the prairies, which he described as predominantly White. He came to the realization that his "Canadian" identity was "more complex" when he moved to Toronto and thus started to deliberate on his ancestral identity:

> "My whole family has been in Canada, in the prairies mostly for 100-150 years…in my hometown where everyone is probably White…there's never really any discussion about, 'oh, where are you from'…It was only when I was here in Toronto when 'where you came from' became part of my identity…I had to start asking questions because everybody came from somewhere and that was sort of like part of your identify and how you identified and connected with other people…we're all coming from someplace…it's still not a strong part of it but I still identify as Canadian but it's probably a little more complex than that."

Similarly, Sam, a White French-Canadian participant, described growing up in a predominantly White, French, and Catholic community and stated that only after his move to Montreal and eventually Toronto, did he start to reflect on his identity as "White" and also experienced questions regarding his ancestry for the first time:

> "I was born and raised in Quebec which is a very White French environment…Catholic, Whites and French people… I identify as French Canadian…I'd never really identified as 'White' French Canadian until recently…when I first moved here, I had some concerns about, you know my accent…still to this day, people think I'm an immigrant because I have an accent…my family's been here for 400 years."

Cassandra on the other hand, said that because she grew up in a racially and culturally diverse region of Toronto, she did not deem herself "different" and therefore did not reflect on her identity and did not consider herself "East Indian":

> "I didn't really identify myself as East Indian back then. I kind of was honestly naive to the fact that I'm different. To be honest with you, growing up in Scarborough, there was a lot of East Indians. Like it was a very mixed, multicultural kind of group. And, so I didn't really feel like I was any different."

In contrast, Robert, who was born and also raised in Toronto but grew up in a predominantly White-Italian neighbourhood, shared how the prevalence of White-Italians in his community influenced his identity formation:

> "I would say that I identify as Italian or Italian Canadian. I was born and raised in Toronto…I grew up in a pocket community that was very much the same. It was Italian-Canadians that had emigrated here from Italy and then their grandparents and their parents and all that kind of stuff."

These participants shared how the racial demographics of their geographical regions influenced their perception and insights on their identity. Luca and Sam conveyed how inquiry into and acumens on their identity (i.e., ethnicity and ancestry) were incited by relocating to more diverse geographical regions. Moreover, Cassandra and Robert shared how the demography of their neighbourhoods influenced their experiences and identity, where a "very mixed" region in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) created a sense of 'not feeling different' for Cassandra, whereas an Italian-Canadian community in the GTA resulted in similar sentiments for Robert.

1.1.3.2 Intergenerational Experiences. Some participants shared how historical experiences contributed to the development of their racial and cultural identity, disseminated through storytelling and/or intergenerational transmission. For example, Susan, a White Canadian with European heritage, shared her grandparents' involvement in the Prohibition and how these ancestral narratives are "built into" her family's history:

> "There's different stories kind of about like my grandparents…playing different roles even during like some of the riots that happened in that area years and years ago or like with the Rum Runners…like the Prohibition. So there's a lot of like stories kind of built into my family's history."

Another participant, Henry, a Racialized Canadian with Filipino heritage, shared that his family's encounters of racism shaped his own racial and cultural identity, where in an attempt to protect him from experiencing similar racism, his mother limited his Filipino influence and fostered a stronger Canadian identity:

> "I think they actually actively try to avoid raising me with a lot of Filipino influence…the thinking behind it was, they experienced a lot of racism, especially tied to their accents, when they immigrated to Canada, so they really wanted to ensure that I didn't grow up with a Filipino accent…I guess on the flip side of that, she actually introduced us to things that she thought represented a lot of Canadian culture."

Wolf provided another example on the consequences of British colonialism on the formation and perception of his race, culture and country of origin. Wolf and his partner, Firehawk, shared the following:

> Wolf: "My family didn't follow tradition, even in Sri Lanka, for that matter…because the British colonial system was more powerful than those Sinhalese traditions…I grew up in Sri Lanka with not a very positive attitude towards that country…I wasn't brought up that way… It was colonialism."
>
> Firehawk: "Wolf was brought up to be ashamed of that…and be proud of the English, to be English."

These participants conveyed the influence and ramifications of historical events, colonialism and racism on identify formation. Firehawk and Wolf remarked on the effects of British colonialism which resulted in feelings of 'shame' about Wolf's ancestry, and Henry shared how his mother 'actively avoided' raising him with Filipino influence as a strategy to protect him from racism, due to her own encounters with racism.

1.1.3.3 Personal Experiences of Prejudice, Racism and/or Privilege. Some participants shared personal experiences of prejudice, racism and/or privilege. Participants who reported personal encounters of prejudice and racism were primarily Racialized. These participants disclosed that their experience of racism was dependent on their geographical region and most participants shared that it was inflicted by members outside their racial and cultural group. A few participants said they endured discrimination based on the colour of their skin by members within their racial/cultural community. Furthermore, of the participants who identified as White, one participant shared his experience with anti-Semitic discrimination, and another his reflections on the privileges of being White. Some of these excerpts are presented below.

Lydia, a Black Canadian-Ethiopian participant, stated, "I dealt with racism all my life." Similarly, Tania, a Racialized Canadian with Chilean and Filipino ancestry, shared that many of her life experiences that she conceived as barriers were because of her racial identity:

> "I didn't realize so many experiences that I had were because of my racial identity until later on…once I understood, it's like, oh okay, so it had nothing to do with who I was. It was literally how I looked. I had so much up against me, that's why these things happened for example."

Contrary to Lydia and Tania, Sophia, who is Canadian-born with Korean heritage, shared that she could not recall a single incident of racism, but she also reflected on her incognizance towards racism:

> "I think I've been really lucky, I can't recall a single time in my life where I felt like someone was being racist towards me. Like never…unless I was completely oblivious and just not know it's racist…I can't even recall an experience like that, maybe back in the day when I was camping out North…but other than that like nothing out right, like nothing obviously racist."

Another participant, Cassandra, a Pakistani-born Canadian with East-Indian and Goan ancestry, shared her experience of discrimination targeting her skin tone by members of her own race and culture:

> "There's always jokes about the dark-skinned person, even though we're all from the same culture. There's always a comment about 'oh, they're so dark'…in the summertime…if I got really dark in the summer… 'oh my God, you're so dark.'"

In contrast to the participants above who all identified as Racialized, Jack, a Jewish White-Canadian, disclosed that he experienced anti-Semitism from members outside his cultural group, but also had "negative experiences" and encountered racism from members within his own community:

> "My negative experiences were with Jewish people but I felt good around some others…being part of like Jewish camps…Jews will say racist things against Jews as a joke…because everyone's Jewish…I don't know that it really is funny… I've heard externally like mean-spirited ones…around the neighborhood. I haven't directly heard anything anti-Semitic since I was a kid…like your people killed Jesus is one that I got some times…you guys have all the money or your Jewish nose, you must be Israeli. I heard stuff growing up for sure."

On the other hand, Luca, a participant who identifies as White with mixed-European ancestry, shared his reflections on the privileges he possesses as a White male:

> "My awareness of being White and male and the privilege that comes with that…the role that I have in society and whether, it's not by choice, but it's the role that, you know, my race has…I dislike the responsibility because it also means that there are others in the world without the privilege…that bothers me."

These narratives highlighted the differing experiences of racism faced by participants, which ranged from having experienced racism "all my life" to "can't recall a single time." Cassandra and Jack described the presence of racism within communities, including discrimination of skin colour and racist "jokes." Moreover, Luca commented on the privileges and subsequent experiences afforded to White people compared to Racialized people.

1.2 How I Developed Cross Racial and Cultural Awareness and Insightful Understanding.

Deliberations on cross racial and cultural knowledge emerged organically from the interviews, where participants considered their procurement of cross racial/cultural awareness prior to their current mixed-race relationships. They elaborated on how they attained critical cross racial/cultural experiences, and Wendel reputed, "living in the city that is so diverse" as the source of his cross cultural experiences. They also reflected on their attitudes and beliefs towards diverse races and cultures, and George reveres his father who has "been around the world" for structuring his open attitude towards diverse groups. These narratives resulted in the culmination of the following sub sub-themes, respectively: (1) Cross Racial and Cultural Experiences and (2) Attitudes, Beliefs and Insights on Diverse Races and Cultures.

1.2.1 Cross Racial and Cultural Experiences. Participants described factors that facilitated greater exposure and engagement with races and cultures outside their group membership. Two primary factors were identified, including: the racial and cultural demography of geographical regions, exemplified by George, who described his "move to Toronto" as catalyzing greater opportunities for engagement with diverse groups; and the diversity in school and in peer groups, in which Luca described the racial/cultural diversity of his peer group as

"everybody is from somewhere." Subsequently, two tertiary themes emerged from these dialogues: (1) Diversity of Geographical Regions and (2) Diversity amongst Peers and in School.

1.2.1.1 Diversity of Geographical Regions. Racial and cultural diversity in geographical regions engendered greater exposure and engagement between racial and cultural groups. Participants shared that they grew up in diverse geographical regions, relocated to more diverse communities and/or travelled to culturally and racially diverse places. Moreover, many participants in this study who identified as White grew up in homogenous communities with minimal early exposure to diverse races and cultures. For example, Firehawk, a White female who emigrated from Wales in the 1960s, shared that her birth country was predominantly White and even after she immigrated to Canada and lived in Quebec, she had minimal exposure to diverse races and cultures. It was not until her relocation to Toronto that she first experienced races and cultures outside her own group:

> "I've never met a non-White person…and in Quebec…there were no non-Whites…maybe Jews...so when I came to Toronto…Wolf's parents were the first non-White people I've ever met or seen…I'd also never seen Black people until I came to Toronto. Not ever in my entire life…because Wales…was a very, very White country in 1967…where I lived, was a seaside village."

Another participant, Alexander, who identifies as White-Canadian with Scottish ancestry, reported that he grew up in a predominantly White town, 80 kilometres from Toronto. He elaborated on how his experience of travel bolstered his interactions with diverse groups:

> "I grew up in a town…it was purely White…we had three or maybe four people in our entire high school who weren't White…we travelled a lot when we were younger so we were all over the place…so I guess it's [diversity] kind of always been around."

Additionally, Luca, a White Canadian-born participant who grew up in the prairies and deliberately sought out to live in a region with more diversity, elaborated on the "culture shock" he experienced when he revisited his home town for the first time:

> "I was eager to understand other cultures, people, languages and just learn from the diversity. I loved it. The culture shock actually came on my first visit back to Saskatchewan…how quickly I would change and like going back into a single dominant culture, how strange that would be and I wasn't quite prepared for that. It was actually a little rough. I didn't know how to react to it all and how to relate to folks there and the assumptions that they were making, like it was difficult to communicate my own experiences in a way that others would understand."

On the contrary, Cassandra, a Racialized Pakistani-born Canadian, described the region in Toronto in which she grew up as "mixed" while Joy, a Black Nigerian-Canadian, described being the "only Black family" in her childhood hometown. Joy stated she was mainly exposed to White people until her family relocated to Toronto, where she was then exposed to other Black people:

> "We were the only Black family in our entire school…in the town…a small town outside of Ottawa. And everyone that we knew was White…and French speaking, so people speaking a different language was also something else…we were always around White people…after moving to Toronto, you're more exposed to Black people."

The accounts of these participants illustrate how the racial and cultural diversity in geographical spaces fostered their cross-racial and cultural exposure. Some participants revealed how increased exposure to diversity created greater opportunities for interacting and socializing with races and cultures outside their own group.

1.2.1.2 Diversity amongst Peers and in School. Peers and school were identified as some of the first opportunities for engagement with diverse groups. The breadth of diversity among peers and in schools was contingent on the diversity of the geographical region. Tania, a Canadian-Filipino-Chilean participant who grew up in Toronto, shared that she was primarily surrounded by Racialized peers and non-White cultural groups, with limited interactions with White people:

> "A lot of my friends, like my closest friends are really diverse…from all over the world that we're all born in Canada and like I think because of that, I've kind of

> always been somewhat uncomfortable or maybe even insecure around large groups of White people."

Whereas Jack, who identifies as White Jewish-Canadian, stated that living in Toronto has catalyzed the rich diversity in his friendships, which allowed him to always 'see and know' "colour":

> "I had friends who were Black or who were White or who were Chinese…I've always seen colour and known colour."

Several participants believe their first engagement and socialization with diverse races and cultures occurred in post-secondary. For example, Robert, who grew up in a predominantly Italian-Canadian region in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), stated that his attendance at a racially and culturally diverse university created some of his first opportunities to socialize with groups outside his "bubble":

> "It was always the norm for me until I went to university and that's when I started to see that there was a world outside of that little bubble."

In addition, Susan, a White-Canadian with mixed-European ancestry, shared her experience with religious diversity. She said that having peers of different religious backgrounds facilitated greater exposure and knowledge on diverse religions and perspectives:

> "I personally identify as Christian but have had quite amazing women in my life who practice different religions who I've learned so much from and who I very highly respect and just love that we have different, you know, avenues and different ways in which we kind of connect to God or the universe."

These participants disclosed how school and peers created some of the first opportunities for socializing with diverse races and cultures. Some participants highlighted that opportunities for cross racial/cultural mixing was dependent on the diversity of the geographical region. In addition, Tania remarked on how limited interactions with White people resulted in feelings of discomfort and insecurity.

1.2.2 Attitudes, Beliefs and Insights on Diverse Races and Cultures. Participants also elaborated on their attitudes and beliefs towards diverse races and cultures prior to meeting their current partners. They expounded on how awareness of racism and/or privilege and their family's attitudes towards other races and cultures contributed to their perception and understanding of diversity. This led to the emergence of two tertiary categories, respectively: (1) Awareness of Racism and/or Privilege, and (2) Family's Attitudes and Beliefs towards Diverse Races and Cultures.

1.2.2.1 Awareness of Racism and/or Privilege. Some participants shared that their awareness and/or witness to racism and/or privilege contributed to their beliefs and attitudes on races and cultures outside their own group. More specifically, some shared how this elicited participation in advocacy and promoted self-reflection on their positionality. For example, Firehawk, a White Welsh-born Canadian, shared that her witness to racism both in her neighbourhood and in her role as a teacher compelled her to respond to racism:

> "There wasn't a lot of immigrants in Canada...the 60s…some Black people, really no East Indians except one East Indian restaurant…everybody was making a big fuss because Greeks and Italians were moving in…very racist and prejudiced against the Italians and the Greeks… A lot of the teachers were racist…one little [Black] boy shared a name with a British prime minister and this really amused the staff…they said, 'well I wonder whether his mother thinks he's going to become Prime Minister of Britain?'...that was supposed to be a joke…I stood up for him…I made him president of my class."

Another participant, Luca, a White Canadian-born with mixed-European ancestry, reflected on his privilege as a White male and the role his race possesses:

> "My awareness of being White and male and the privilege that comes with that…came in part through university… I had lived in China for a little while…a set of friends that are definitely you know, advocates of change and just being exposed to that…that's what really clued me in at the role that I have in society and whether, it's not by choice, but it's the role that, you know, my race has."

Firehawk and Luca described that their awareness of and witness to racism and privilege resulted in advocacy, action and deliberations on social responsibility, where for example, Firehawk shared that she "stood up" for a student and Luca stated he was "clued" in to the 'role his race has.' In addition, Firehawk's excerpt delivered some insights into racism in the 1960s in Toronto, where she disclosed that Greeks and Italians experienced discrimination by other White Europeans.

1.2.2.2 Family's Attitudes and Beliefs towards Diverse Races and Cultures. Some participants elaborated on their family's attitudes and beliefs towards cultures and races outside their own group. Participants shared that their family's attitudes varied, where some maintained positive attitudes while others possessed negative beliefs. Furthermore, some participants shared that their family's attitudes were race and culture dependent, where some races/cultures were more favourably viewed in comparison to others.

Margriet, a White Canadian-born participant with Dutch and Italian ancestry, shared that her parents and Italian grandparents' openness to diversity cultivated her own interests in diverse cultures and languages:

> "My family growing up…we'd always had a close network of neighbours and friends who were from different races and different cultural backgrounds. So it wasn't something that I thought of as…particularly unusual…my grandparents although, they were from the old country, they had very inclusive, very progressive at the time for them, views…and my grandfather always liked to talk to absolutely everybody…learn a few words from every other language…talk to them about their families, their background and find things in common. I think that was probably influencing me in terms of having like an interest in other cultures and languages and ways of being."

Similarly, Wolf, a Racialized Sri-Lankan born Canadian, shared that his own family's mixed-heritage contributed to his mindset on diversity:

> "I had no problem relating to different races and all that because of my own background…I came from a mixed background to begin with. I never looked

> at…somebody being White or Black or anything like that. That never entered my mind…I'm more aware of it today at my age."

On the other hand, Wendel, a White Canadian-born participant with English ancestry, shared that his mother held adverse attitudes towards some races and cultures. Wendel and his partner, Cassandra shared the following:

> Wendel: "Behind the scenes, there were comments, you know about certain cultures that I would say, 'no mother, no mother, that's not right'…I would have to correct her."
>
> Cassandra: "Yeah, but not the Indian culture."
>
> Wendel: "No…but some of the other cultures, and I would have to correct her."

The preceding narratives illustrate that cross-racial/cultural attitudes varied in families, and as demonstrated by Margriet, positive views by her family fostered her own inclusive cross racial opinions and beliefs. Wendel and Cassandra shared that attitudes toward diverse groups may also be race/culture dependent. For example, Wendel's mother regarded the Indian race/culture more favourably compared to some others.

1.3 How I Conceptualize Mixing of Races and Cultures in Relationships: Influences, Beliefs and Experiences.

Conversations surrounding one's racial and cultural identities as well as the acquisition of critical cross racial awareness, habitually resulted in dialogues on interracial mixing. Participants shared their perceptions on mixed-race relationships prior to their current interracial partnerships. They discussed factors that influenced their conceptualization of mixed relationships, where for example, Luca attributed his views to his personal values and described himself as "open and looking for more worldly experiences." Participants also shared experiences of dating both inside and outside their racial/cultural groups, prior to their current partnerships. Susan provided an example and stated, "I actually dated different people from

different cultural backgrounds" in reference to her dating experiences prior to her current relationship. These dialogues were framed within the following two sub sub-themes, respectively: (1) Factors Influencing my Insights and Perception of Mixed-Race Relationships and (2) Experiences and Insights on Dating Inside and Outside Racial and Cultural Groups.

1.3.1 Factors Influencing my Insights and Perception of Mixed-Race Relationships. Participants deliberated on factors that influenced their perception of interracial relationships. They proposed several influential factors, including: "multicultural environment" conducive for racial and cultural mixing as proposed by Wendel; family perception of mixed relationships as exemplified by Alexander, who described his parents as "super open-minded"; prevalence of interracial relationships among peer groups; and intrinsic personal values that shaped one's perspectives on mixed-race relationships. These dialogues were thematized in the following four tertiary themes: (1) Mixed-Race Relationships in Geographical Regions, (2) Family's Perception of Mixed-Race Relationships, (3) Mixed-Race Relationships in School and amongst Peers, and (4) Personal Values and Beliefs on Mixed-Race Relationships.

1.3.1.1 Mixed-Race Relationships in Geographical Regions. Participants shared how their geographical regions and neighbourhoods contributed to their exposure, experience and/or perception of mixed-race relationships. Some participants shared how their geographical regions were diverse and thus mixed-race relationships were more common. For example, Jolanda described mixed-race relationships in Toronto as "non-noteworthy." She stated:

> "I think in Toronto it is pretty normal, non-noteworthy."

Another participant, Sophia, shared similar sentiments on the normalcy of mixed-race relationships in Toronto due to the prevalence of these unions:

> "Being exposed to people in Toronto, like I would see it a lot so I never really thought much about it. Like when I see a couple, it was just the couple instead of

> really thinking 'oh it's like an Asian guy with a White girl'…well to be fair I did think a little bit about it, but it was just so normal."

On the other hand, some participants shared that the lack of diversity in their geographical regions and neighbourhoods limited their exposure and experience with mixed-race relationships. For example, Lexie, who grew up in a mono-racial/cultural region in the GTA, shared that the lack of diversity and exposure to mixed-race relationships were the pretext for initially not considering dating outside her race/culture:

> "I didn't grow up with a lot of diversity…so for most of my like dating time, I lived in a predominantly White-Italian area…so when I thought about dating, it never occurred to me that I would be with somebody outside of my race…when I would imagine it…it would be White, like a White guy that was Italian…it wasn't because I wasn't open to it, I wasn't around it enough to consider it as an option."

Moreover, some Racialized participants who grew up in largely White regions shared how this predominance contributed to them primarily dating outside their race/culture, specifically dating White people. Some further elaborated on how relocation to geographically diverse regions later presented them with options for dating inside their own race and culture as well as other non-White races and cultures. For example, Joy grew up in a predominantly White area near Ottawa. She stated that she only began to date within her race when she relocated to Toronto. She further stipulated that she then became open once again to dating outside her race:

> "In Ottawa, the only people were White…I had White boyfriends…we were always around White people so it wasn't a thing…but moving to Toronto, I started mixing more with people that looked like me. So I started dating people that look like me, Black people…I've never dated a Black person, so maybe I should focus on dating Black people…and then you realize that you should be open-minded again."

These participants identified the demographics of their geographical regions as an influential factor on their exposure, experience and thus insights on mixed-race relationships. A few highlighted that the degree of diversity in their geographical regions was a prefatory factor

that contributed to the prevalence of mixed-race relationships, and as stated by Lexie, influenced whether she considered it "an option" for dating.

1.3.1.2 Family's Perception of Mixed-Race Relationships. Participants shared their family's perception on mixed-race relationships. Discernments regarding mixed-race relationships were either positive and supported, negative and discouraged or dependent on the racial/cultural configuration of the relationship. Further elaborations are provided below.

1.3.1.2.1 Positive and Supported. Some participants disclosed that their families were open to mixed-race relationships without conditions, which influenced their own perception of these unions. For example, Alexander, a White Canadian male with Scottish ancestry, shared that his parent's openness as well as having a mixed-race relationship in his extended family contributed to his views on these unions:

> "I guess I never really thought about it…I guess that's probably cause my parents are super open-minded…one of my cousins is in a mixed relationship so I guess it's kind of always been around…I didn't really think about it as like, 'oh it's a mixed relationship'…it was just a relationship."

Similarly, Lydia, a Black Canadian-born participant with Ethiopian ancestry stated that her parents did not focus on ethnic similarities in their discussion on relationships but instead emphasized compatibility, happiness and longevity. She also shared that she was surrounded by various examples of healthy mixed-race relationships in her family:

> "My parents also are very aware that within a very like multicultural context in the GTA, they've always told me, just find somebody that makes you happy…it wasn't…you have to find somebody that's from our exact ethnic background…it was very much just around who's going to make you happy, who's going to be compatible with you, who can you see yourself aging with…I have been raised around a number of couples…that are in mixed-race relationships, and so it's something that I've seen modelled and I've had access to healthy examples of mixed-race relationships."

Another participant, Tania, who is Canadian-born with Filipino and Chilean ancestry, shared that her parent's own mixed-race marriage influenced her perception of the normalcy of these unions:

> "In terms of what I thought about mixed-race couples, like my parents are a mixed-race couple, so Filipino and Chilean… trying to think about how I thought about mixed-race couples…I didn't really think about them that much."

1.3.1.2.2 Negative and Race/Culture Dependent. Some participants on the other hand, shared that their families possessed more negative views on mixed-race relationships attributable to stereotypes, prejudices and beliefs that same-race/culture relationships are more compatible. For example, Lexie, a Canadian-born participant with Italian heritage, divulged that her mother previously held the belief that "races should not mix," which stemmed from previously held stereotypes and remnants of colonization:

> "My mom doesn't think that races should mix…like the most out of her culture she has is like a Portuguese friend…I think, it's a lot of the unknown. It's a lot like stereotypes that come from like Italy and the history between like Italy and Africa and like colonization."

Similarly, Firehawk, a Welsh-born White Canadian, shared her grandmother's racist beliefs and attributed them to a lack of education:

> "My grandmother…as a child, she told me 'don't ever have a blood transfusion from a Black man because your hair will turn black and your blood will turn black'…she wasn't very educated."

Another participant, Cassandra, a Racialized Canadian woman who was born in Pakistan, shared that her parents' perception on mixed-race relationships was race and culture dependent. She disclosed that her parents were open to mixed-race relationships between some races and cultures but disinclined to others:

> "They're not always as receptive…if I came home with an African American male or a Chinese Canadian male, I don't think my parents would have been all that accepting. It's very sad to say. But they would have made comments, they wouldn't reject, like of course accept them for who they are as a person…but I think they would still say something."

The narratives in both groups are reflective of the sample, where participants shared a range of beliefs and attitudes previously and/or currently held by their families, ranging between unconditionally supporting interracial mixing to beliefs that "races should not mix." A few participants also shared the presence of race-specific prejudices and preferences, as exemplified by Firehawk, who divulged her grandmother's anti-Black racist beliefs.

1.3.1.3 Mixed-Race Relationships* in *School and amongst Peers. Many participants shared how their experiences in school and engagement with peers contributed to their perception on mixed-race relationships. More specifically, university was identified as a setting in which participants were first exposed to diverse races and cultures as well as mixed-race relationships. For example, Luca shared that it was only when he attended a university located in Toronto that he was exposed to other cultures and dated outside his race and culture:

> "I moved out to Toronto to go to university…and if you've ever been to that campus, it's incredibly diverse…in Saskatchewan…it was pretty much all White, so in high school that's the way it is...but then in university…someone from every country around the world and the girlfriends I had in university were very diverse. I don't think there was any two of the same races actually."

Another participant, Henry, emphasized how his time in high school and university exposed him to mixed-race relationships and the 'ordinariness' of these unions:

> "Mixed-race relationships to me was never really a thought… I grew up in the GTA. Almost every relationship amongst like, in high school and university were mixed-race relationships."

Luca and Henry described the efficaciousness of their peer groups and school in creating opportunities for interracial socialization and dating, especially during their teenage years and early adulthood.

1.3.1.4 Personal Values and Beliefs on Mixed-Race Relationships. Participants shared their personal values and beliefs on interracial relationships. Some elaborated on how these

inherent values informed their views on mixed-race relationships. Randy, a White Canadian participant of French and Italian ancestry, simply stated the following:

> "I've always been welcoming to everybody."

Another participant, George, who is a White Canadian with mixed-European ancestry, discussed how he focuses on the 'individual' which is governed by his internal "politics":

> "I find with me…politics, in the way I think…I always try to treat people actually like individuals and I don't really adhere to some you know like the group things…I just try to give everybody a chance and so it's very low on my priority list, like what somebody looks like and what culture they're from. I swear even my closest friends, like when I first get to know them…it was long after, like I'll actually find out where their parents are from…it didn't really matter. It just wasn't a high priority for me."

Similarly, Wolf, a Sri-Lankan born Canadian, shared his beliefs on the genetic similarities of humans despite racial and cultural differences. He argued that there is an overemphasis on differences:

> "People are so ignorant that we are all up wondering…we got the same DNA. I mean our blood is the same…doesn't matter if we're European or Chinese or anything like that…we're all the same...we carry the same DNA. I went on 23andMe and I found relations all over the God damn place, you know, related to me through my DNA."

The preceding commentaries from Randy, George and Wolf showcased how their strong personal values and convictions such as, "welcoming to everybody" and "we're all the same," influenced their positive perceptions on mixed-race relationships.

1.3.2 Experiences and Insights on Dating Inside and Outside Racial and Cultural Groups. Participants shared their personal experiences and acumens on dating inside and outside their racial and cultural groups, prior to their current mixed-race relationships. Some participants revealed that they dated both inside and outside their racial/cultural group, while some shared that they only dated outside their racial/cultural group. The latter is exemplified by

Elias, who described his dating history as "all over the place, but no Arab women." Participants also critically reflected on the role of race and culture on partner preference. These dialogues led to the emergence of three tertiary themes: (1) Dating In and Out of Racial/Cultural Group, (2) Dating only Out of Racial/Cultural Group and (3) Critical Reflections of Race and Culture on Partner Preference.

1.3.2.1 Dating In and Out of Racial/Cultural Group. Participants in this category shared their experiences of dating both inside and outside their race and culture. Some participants shared an openness to all races and cultures, while some shared specific racial and cultural preferences and exemptions. Some of these commentaries are presented next.

Sam, a White French Canadian male, shared that in his pursuit for a romantic partner, race and culture were non-deterministic factors:

> "When I started dating again, I was not looking for like a specific race or goal. It was not something that was important for me. It was more looking at the person…I think I've always been pretty open minded and never just closed about anything…follow one specific kind of dating or whatever."

Similarly, Jolanda, a Racialized Canadian with Chinese ancestry, shared that in creating her on-line dating profile, race/culture were not selected as exclusionary or inclusionary factors:

> "I think I probably left it just unanswered…I don't remember selecting."

Another participant, Luca, who identifies as White Canadian with mixed-European ancestry, shared that in his on-line dating profile, he excluded some races and cultures in his preferences but included Asian women and White women:

> "I've dated a whole lot of people of different backgrounds…I guess I have preferences…I didn't select all of the categories, just sort of narrowed it down…Asians was one category, White was another…I don't know which ones exactly I selected… I definitely didn't select all of them."

1.3.2.2 Dating only Out of Racial/Cultural Group. Participants in this category shared that they primarily dated outside their racial and cultural groups. Participants identified various reasons for dating out, including negative experiences and perception of partners within their racial and cultural group, more attraction towards races and cultures outside their own group, and more similarities with outside groups.

For example, Curly, a Racialized Iranian-born Canadian, shared that her negative experiences with her father and other males in her family contributed to her disinterest in partners from her race/culture:

> "One thing I knew for sure is that I did not want to marry someone from my culture because I just had such a negative experience with males from my culture, like starting with my dad and then just my uncles and just cousins…definitely based on my life experiences with Iranian males…I've been attracted to all spectrums…I am attracted to Black people to Indian, like any culture. I've been attracted to Chinese people, like I don't have a type…it was very important that he not be from my cultural background."

Similar to Curly, Reggie, a Black Canadian-born participant with Jamaican ancestry, disclosed that his encounters of disability discrimination from Jamaican women compounded with more positive experiences with White women, contributed to a more favourable outlook on dating outside his race/culture:

> "In high school…I didn't date any Black women; they were always White or another ethnicity. Because I did face, you know some biases because at that time, a lot of the Jamaican girls they didn't want to 'take care' of me…they didn't think I could take care of myself, so they would pass me over. Whereas when I was dating somebody White…they didn't see the disability per se…it wasn't like I didn't try to date inside of my culture or race but it just never worked out that way…dating somebody outside of my culture was normal to me."

Furthermore, Sophia, a Canadian-born participant with Korean ancestry, stated that having similar values and stronger connections with Chinese and White Canadians incremented by negative perception of Korean men, influenced her preference in romantic partners:

> "I just got along…or maybe connected more with either Chinese or White…there are aspects of certain other cultures where I'm not okay with it…like with Koreans…it is sort of stereotyping them…they think, 'oh I'm the man of the house and that's how it should be, I should make more money than the woman'…I'm not okay with that…growing up…my mom was like the breadwinner, my dad stayed home with us…felt like I would be able to find like a long lasting relationship with someone from those cultures…the White culture where they would see women as being equal…Chinese men just seem to be you know more polite and the way they treat their mothers."

Another participant, Randy, a White Canadian with Italian and French ancestry, reflected on his dating history. He disclosed that the only other significant relationship besides his current relationship was also with a Racialized woman. He shared that physical attraction as well as cultural interests contribute to a greater degree of attraction to women from Middle Eastern and East Indian backgrounds:

> "My high school relationship…her family's from India…I think for myself like I'm attracted more to people from that region than people from my region because it's just more interesting to me than people that I've known my whole life and walked in around my whole life…I don't know what it is specifically but there's definitely a physical attraction…it's not that I'm not attracted to Caucasian females…I'm attracted to all cultures…it's tough to say."

These participants described the varying degrees in which race and culture informed their choice in romantic partners. They stated that decisions pertaining to dating outside their race/culture were attributed to several factors, including negative intergenerational and dating experiences in their own race/culture, stronger connection and more shared values with some/other racial/cultural groups, and stronger personal interests and physical attraction to some/other races/cultures.

1.3.2.3 Critical Reflections of Race and Culture on Partner Preference. Some participants shared critical insights into factors that informed their racial and cultural preferences in relationships. For example, Luca, a White Canadian with mixed European ancestry,

articulated that relationship preferences may be partially informed by "stereotypes" and "systemic discrimination":

> "You've also just got personal preferences and of course that's informed by all the stereotypes and everything from history and systemic discrimination, it's all built in to sort of who we are."

Another participant, Jolanda, a Racialized Canadian of Chinese ancestry, shared that dating certain races are "a bigger leap" because of lower prevalence in certain racial configurations in mixed-race relationships, as well as limited experience dating certain races and cultures:

> "I've dated a South Asian but I don't think I've really ever seriously dated like a Black person and so it would have been a bigger leap to go on a date with a Black guy...could I see a really serious future…I wouldn't have excluded that possibility but I think subconsciously it would have taken more from me to see that future just because I'm not used to seeing that much and I hadn't had as much experience and hadn't done it before."

In addition, Tania, a Canadian-born participant of Filipino-Chilean ancestry, described her "type" when she was younger as a "White guy" and recognized that this was conceivably informed by societal and cultural standards:

> "My best friend…we always like talked about like our types…and it was very, very White. Like 'my type' when I was younger, was like a White guy with like a big nose or something…but it was very much societal informed, like culture informed. Like these are the people I had crushes on in TV…that was like what I wanted when I was younger which is like so weird to say out loud."

These participants, who dated both within and outside their racial/cultural groups, offered critical insights on the influence of race and culture on their partner choice. They identified the following variables: effects of systemic racism and discrimination, greater perceived disparity between some groups, lack of prevalence of certain mixed-race configurations, and socio-cultural influences.

Summary of Core Theme One. In the first core theme, participants showcased the multifaceted dimensions of their racial and cultural identities, which were found to be shaped by

historical and intergenerational experiences, pervasive racial/cultural variables, and subject to ongoing evolution in light of new experiences. They also conveyed the processes in which they obtained critical cross-racial knowledge and acumens. Similarly, the acquisition of critical cross-racial/cultural understanding was a multidimensional process, informed by the degree of diversity in geographical spaces and thus, opportunities for interracial mixing. Some participants also revealed that in their attainment of a more embracive cross-racial understanding, they were astute to the dynamics of racism and privilege, and scrutinized their own family's attitudes towards outside groups. The juxtaposition of these two sub-themes organically established the frame for presenting their experiences and understanding of interracial relationships, prior to their current partnerships.

The factors that increased exposure to mixed-race relationships paralleled those that allowed for greater socialization between diverse groups. Family perceptions of interracial relationships were found to be largely positive, however some families harboured negative attitudes towards all or some interracial relationships; this was a verification for the presence of race-specific prejudice and discrimination. Of particular pertinence was the presence of strong positive values and convictions towards mixed-race relationships, which may serve as potential rebuttals to family and societal objection.

Participants also elaborated on their experiences of dating inside and/or outside their racial/cultural group. They highlighted several factors that contributed to preferences for dating outside of their race/culture, including: negative experiences and perception of potential dating partners within their own race/culture, and stronger connection, interests, attraction and shared values with outside groups. Finally, some participants critically reflected on the roles of race and culture in mixed-race relationships and suggested that racial/cultural preferences may be

informed by systemic racism, greater perceived divergences among some racial/cultural groups, scarcity of some racial configurations among mixed-race relationships, and socio-cultural influences.

The narratives shared in core theme one provide fundamental information for presenting and contextualizing the findings in core theme two – *Lived Experiences of Race and Culture in Mixed-Race Relationships* – which will be presented next.

2.0 Lived Experiences of Race and Culture in Mixed-Race Relationships

The second core theme, *Lived Experiences of Race and Culture in Mixed-Race Relationships* (*Figure 2*), is dedicated to the lived experiences relevant to race and culture in mixed-race unions. Participants conveyed how they met their partners and factors that contributed to their attraction, specifically the role of race and culture on attraction and the pursuit of a relationship. These accounts generated the first sub-theme, *Meeting and Attraction: Race and Culture on Attraction and the Pursuit of a Relationship.* Participants also expounded on components of their race and culture that they incorporated in their mixed-race relationships. They elaborated on the extent to which they 'mixed' their races and cultures in their interracial unions and the subsequent shifts to their collective and individual identities. This led to the advent of the second sub-theme, *'Mixing' Race and Culture in Mixed-Race Relationships.* Participants also recounted the strengths of their partnerships, including individual growth and relationship enrichment, children, and cultural empathy, which led to the genesis of the third sub-theme, *Strengths of Mixed-Race Relationships*. The second core theme concludes by presenting some challenges experienced by couples, ensuing from intrinsic racial and cultural differences, as well as discrimination, racism and prejudice, which resulted in the formulation of the fourth sub-theme, *Challenges Experienced by Mixed-Race Couples.*

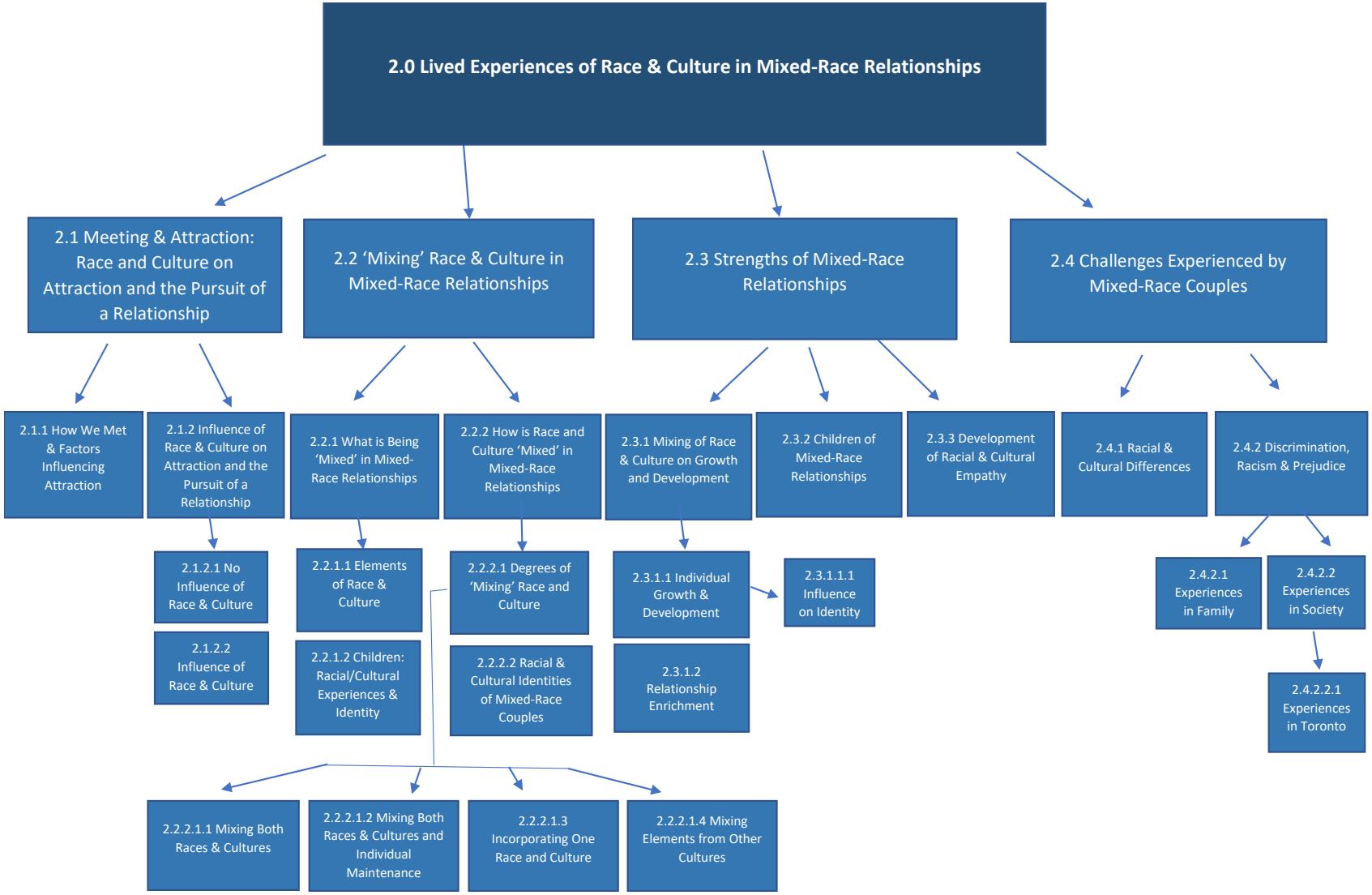

Figure 2: Lived Experiences of Race and Culture in Mixed-Race Relationships

2.1 Meeting and Attraction: Race and Culture on Attraction and the Pursuit of a Relationship.

Dialogues centred around the lived experiences of interracial couples naturally included narratives on the early stages of these relationships, including how they met, courtship and attributes that kindled attraction. The places in which couples met varied and characteristics that sparked attraction were multitudinous, as exemplified by Randy who met Curly at a bar in their university town, and he described her as "energetic and fun and sweet and kind." Additionally, participants elaborated on the role of race and culture on attraction, and some indicated that race/culture had no influence while others recognized its effects. For example, Cassandra identified Wendel's physical features as influencing a "little bit of the attraction," particularly "his light eyes and dark hair." These narratives engendered the following sub sub-themes, respectively: (1) How We Met and Factors Influencing Attraction and (2) Influence of Race and Culture on Attraction and the Pursuit of a Relationship.

2.1.1 How We Met and Factors Influencing Attraction. In this sub sub-theme, participants shared how they met and factors that contributed to their attraction to their partners. The venues that served as channels for connection included: online dating platforms (2 couples), post-secondary and/or venues surrounding their shared college/university campuses (5 couples), social gatherings (2 couples) and work/work-related events (3 couples).

Participants elaborated on the features, characteristics and attributes that contributed to their attraction to their partners: (1) personality traits: confidence, kind, caring and good-hearted, fun, energetic and positive, initiator, reliable, open and spontaneous, charismatic, humourous, vulnerable and self-aware (2) shared interests, hobbies and passions: career interests, life purpose and spirituality, food, hockey, language, travel and cycling (3) physical attraction (4) intelligence

(5) similar life trajectory (6) connection and (7) friendship. Some of these narratives are presented below.

Cassandra shared that connecting over similar interests and developing a sense of comfort contributed to her attraction to Wendel, whom she met at a mutual friend's party:

> "I think it's…in some ways a connection…we connected over hockey…our jobs…he works with high school aged students, I work with high school aged youths in a mental health capacity…we both had that kind of interests…over time, it just became a comfort, like we were comfortable with each other."

Similarly, Susan also declared that comfort in addition to shared purpose and connection, personality and physical traits precipitated her attraction to Henry, whom she met at a work-related event:

> "Our comfort with each other…some pretty personal, spiritual conversations…we were both kind of at…similar places…search for sort of our spirituality and pursuing purpose in our lives…we sort of got into these really deep conversations…support each other…learning from each other…like a comfort there…definitely like an attraction…his intellect…self-awareness…openness to discovery, purpose…pursuing passion…a lot of those things really attractive to me…I also found him physically attractive…his height…his general build...he's like a cyclist…there's definitely like a physical attraction as well."

Another participant, Jill, a Racialized Bangladeshi-born Canadian, shared that her attraction evolved from having worked with Jack and first developing a close friendship:

> "We worked together a lot, so it gave us an opportunity to experience highs and lows and we learned about each other…he was my best friend or became my best friend…I ended up marrying my best friend."

Furthermore, Sam shared that he met Joy online and he described first being attracted to her physical features due to the nature of online dating, which was then reinforced by her personality. He described their connection as 'an instant click':

> "I thought she was really beautiful because the picture is kind of the first thing you see…she also had this…let's live and let's see what happens type of attitude…very open and very willing to just try and see where things goes...we

> had so much in common in our personality in the way we were thinking, what we wanted to do…traveling…food…it just clicked…just instantly."

These participants revealed the multitudinous factors that precipitated romantic attraction to their partners which included personality traits, values and perspectives, connection, and physical features. They also spoke of attributes of attraction in a manner that was independent of race and culture.

2.1.2 Influence of Race and Culture on Attraction and the Pursuit of a Relationship. Participants explicated on the role of their partner's race and culture on attraction and the pursuit of a romantic union. Most participants declared that their partner's race and culture were not antecedents to romantic attraction or an impetus for pursuing a relationship, as shared by Lydia, who said, Robert's race and/or culture "didn't pull me one way or another." On the other hand, a few participants shared that race and/or culture played an instigating role; an example is Jack who stated, "I actually liked the not-White part" in reference to Jill's Racialized identity. Only one participant disclosed that their partner's culture initially served as a deterrent. These narratives were framed in the following tertiary themes, respectively: (1) No Influence of Race and Culture and (2) Influence of Race and Culture.

2.1.2.1 No Influence of Race and Culture. Most participants shared that race and culture did not play a deterministic role in romantic attraction and the pursuit of a romantic union. For example, Henry, a Racialized Canadian of Filipino heritage and Susan, a White Canadian of mixed-European ancestry, narrated that their attraction to each other stemmed from the "individual":

> Henry: "I'm not sure if it was a cultural attraction, as much as like just as an individual."
>
> Susan: "I feel very similarly, actually."

Similarly, Margriet, a White Canadian participant with Dutch and Italian ancestry, shared that her attraction to Elias was individually influenced, as she was uncertain of his background because his physical features and name are not traditionally associated with Lebanese or Middle Eastern heritage. She stated that subsequent to discovering his heritage, it roused a sense of curiosity and interest:

> "I wasn't sure about your background because your name and surname…didn't really to me kind of link up with any particular heritage…I was attracted to you as a person...I found out that you had…Lebanese…Middle Eastern heritage…I think that was interesting for me…I just wanted to learn more about that…something that I was curious about...so I would say it wasn't a big factor."

Another participant, Robert, who is a White Canadian with Italian ancestry, shared that Lydia's race and culture did not play a deterministic role in his attraction, but he too experienced a sense of curiosity and reflected on what their relationship might look like:

> "It didn't necessarily pull me one way or the other…I didn't know much about Ethiopia before we became friends…growing up, the dominant relationships I saw were Italian-Italian…or European-European relationships…I was curious…I wondered what this would look like or I wondered how this would evolve or play itself out if we were to date, so I thought about it for sure, but it didn't sway me one way or the other...I was really interested in her as a person."

Jolanda, a Racialized Canadian of Chinese ancestry, made it clear that though race and culture did not play a conscious role in her attraction to Luca, she wondered about the role it played on a "subconscious" level, since Asian-White mixed-race relationships are more prevalent:

> "I think it was if anything like probably less of a choice and more of a subconscious thing…when you're meeting new people and you're sort of thinking, 'can I see myself having a future with this person,' it's just like if you already have an idea that an Asian-White couple is normal then it makes it easier to see that future…I think it made it easier to picture a future with you…that like seemed very normal and wonderful."

These participants asserted that attraction stemmed from the "individual" and a few described a sense of curiosity and interest in their partner's race and culture. Furthermore,

Jolanda shared how the higher prevalence of Asian-White mixed-race relationships buttressed a sense of normalcy for these mixed-race configurations, and therefore may have had a "subconscious" influence on the pursuit of her relationship with Luca.

2.1.2.2 Influence of Race and Culture. Race and culture influenced romantic attraction and the pursuit of a mixed-race relationship in several ways. For instance, some participants shared that their partner's race and culture contributed to their romantic attraction and pursuit of a relationship, while others stated that their romantic attraction and relationship pursuit were influenced by the fact that their partner's race and culture differed from their own. Only one participant disclosed that their partner's culture initially served as a deterrent. Further elaborations are presented below.

Tania, a Racialized Canadian of Filipino and Chilean ancestry, shared that Alexander's physical features but not his culture may have played an inciting role on attraction:

> "It probably played a role with me…maybe unknowingly…like I found Alexander attractive when I first met him…but I don't think like Alexander's culture or anything like that played a role (laughs)…his blue eyes."

Another participant, Randy, a White Canadian with mixed Italian and French ancestry, shared that his attraction to Curly, an Iranian-born Canadian, was informed by both her race and culture:

> "I don't know…what it is specifically but there's definitely a physical attraction…initially it's a physical attraction…then get to know the person…part of like falling in love with Curly as well was you know like her family…like their story and just like how it's like a different culture with different cuisine and different life experiences…like getting to know her brother…her mom…that was important as it got like more serious."

Contrary to the participants noted above, Elias, a Racialized Canadian with Lebanese ancestry, shared that Margriet's White and European background did not serve as an impetus for his attraction; however, the fact that she was non-Arabic was "more attractive":

> "I don't think it played at all for me, at least…maybe the fact that Margriet wasn't Arab was more attractive…the fact that you know, she has a European background or White background wasn't…I don't think it was a factor…if I think of the women that I had dated, before Margriet, it was kind of all over the place…but no Arab women…other than that, I don't think it was anything really pushing me one way or another."

Furthermore, Jill, a Bangladeshi-born Canadian, shared that Jack's culture, particularly his religion, initially served as a deterrent to pursuing a romantic relationship. She attributed this to "unheard of" mixed-race unions between Muslims and Jews and the anticipated challenges with their families:

> "His cultural background and religion was actually a deterrent…the reason not to date him… more so than race, I think it was religion…I'm Muslim…almost unheard of to be married to a Jewish person…I knew that would be tough with our family…so that feeling that we were against, right from the beginning, in terms of trying to do something that our parents or family may not support."

These participants discussed how race and culture played a role in romantic attraction and the pursuit of their current mixed-race relationship in a myriad of ways, including: race and/or culture overtly contributed to attraction; race and culture influenced attraction "unknowingly"; and the sheer difference in their partner's race and culture from one's own contributed to attraction and the pursuit of a relationship. Furthermore, Jill shared the implications of having different religions, which she defined as a "deterrent."

2.2 'Mixing' Race and Culture in Mixed-Race Relationships.

By virtue of their interracial relationships, participants elaborated on the intermixing of their individual races and cultures in their partnerships. They conveyed various facets of their unique races and cultures that they brought into their mixed-race relationships. For example, Elias shared that Arabic and Lebanese food was an "easy" component of his culture that he introduced as well as maintained in his relationship with Margriet. In addition, participants also expounded on the varying degrees in which they incorporated elements of their races and

cultures in their mixed-unions. Reggie provided an example, where he divulged that he and Lexie, equally "merged both of our cultures" in their relationship. These narratives resulted in the culmination of the following sub sub-themes, respectively: (1) What is Being 'Mixed' in Mixed-Race Relationships and (2) How is Race and Culture 'Mixed' in Mixed-Race Relationships.

2.2.1 What is Being 'Mixed' in Mixed-Race Relationships. Participants spoke on the various components of race and culture that were brought into their mixed-race relationships. Many couples also revealed that the integration of their race and culture was evident in the experiences and identities of their mixed-race children; for example, Jill emphasized that their daughter is "exposed to both" her Bangladeshi and Muslim traditions as well as Jack's Jewish traditions. These accounts resulted in the following tertiary themes, respectively: (1) Elements of Race and Culture and (2) Children: Racial/Cultural Experiences and Identity.

2.2.1.1 Elements of Race and Culture. Participants elaborated on various elements of their race and culture that they brought into their mixed-race relationships, including: cultural foods, religion, cultural celebrations and ceremonies, native languages, traditional clothing, racial and cultural artifacts, sharing of racial and cultural stories and histories, and cultural ways of family engagement. In this study, cultural food was identified as the most common element of culture that was incorporated by most couples, at varying degrees. Some of these anecdotes are presented below.

Joy shared how they incorporate elements of both her Nigerian and Sam's French-Canadian cultures in their marriage, as exemplified by their wedding where they attempted to integrate traditional clothing, cultural ceremony and native languages into their marriage ceremony:

> "For our wedding, we were supposed to…have a Nigerian celebration called the African engagement…we went to…get ourselves sized for African attire…he owns one and I own it…then COVID happened and you can't do that celebration…instead we just did…regular outfits…we had the different signs, like it had French, English, Nigerian, there was a different kind of welcome…so we try to incorporate it that way."

Another couple, Wendel, who is White Canadian with British ancestry and Cassandra, who is Pakistani-born with Goan ancestry, discussed the induction of Cassandra's traditional Pakistani and Goan foods, cultural artifacts and religion into their marriage, though to a minimal extent:

> Cassandra: "The food…we don't really cook it as much, but we still try to maintain it."
>
> Wendel: "I made a promise to the priest upon marriage that I would…have my kids go to Catholic school and to from time to time, go to Christmas…go during March and whenever it was important to go...we have certain things that are Goan…a Goan mug…we have a picture of the Virgin Mary at the front door…celebrating Goa to some extent."

Another example is shared by Lydia, who elaborated on the elements of her Ethiopian culture and Robert's Italian culture that they "infuse" into their relationship. She also commented on the significance of this cultural preservation within a Canadian context:

> "Whether it's attending a baptism, weddings, funerals or making a special dish that would be very specific to one of our cultural cuisines…those types of things are pretty much how we try as much as possible to infuse and keep alive our heritage...I certainly would want to keep fostering…I feel as though it can be so easy especially within a Canadian context to feel like that can sort of fizz out…I think that's an important piece that we're going to do our best...try to infuse within our identity and life as a mixed-race couple and family."

The preceding narratives highlight some of the elements of race and culture that these couples interweave in their relationships. They discussed varying degrees of racial and cultural 'mixing' where, for example, some couples integrated primarily one partner's race/culture as exemplified by Cassandra and Wendel, and some couples integrate both partner's races and cultures as described by Lydia and Robert. Moreover, Lydia emphasized the importance of

maintaining both their cultures within a "Canadian context," which she suggests may contribute to the 'fizzing out' of cultures.

2.2.1.2 Children: Racial/Cultural Experiences and Identity. Most mixed-race couples with children articulated that the integration of their race and culture in their unions is evident in the racial and cultural experiences and identities of their children. Couples introduced various attributes of their races and cultures to their children, including: cultural food, native language, cultural clothing, celebrations and ceremonies, religion, knowledge of racial and cultural heritage, and cultural ways of social engagement.

For example, Curly, a Racialized Iranian-born participant who lived in France prior to immigrating to Canada and Randy, a White Canadian with mixed Italian and French ancestry, highlighted the multiple elements of their race and culture that they infuse in their parenting, including native language, cultural ceremonies and religion:

> Randy: "Kids in French school, you speak only to them in French…we're part of a French community at the school…they also do Farsi school."
>
> Curly: "There's five or six different ceremonies and I make a point to teach those ceremonies to the kids so they can understand the significance of them…I'd say more Iranian than the French…there's a lot more ingrained with the family…we put them in French Catholic school…I'm fine with them learning about the Bible and all that comes with it cause I think Christianity is such a big part of humankind…they're definitely getting a Catholic education…that's I guess identifies with Randy's side of the family."

Another example is Margriet, a White Canadian with Dutch and Italian ancestry, and Elias, a Racialized Canadian with Lebanese ancestry, who chronicled native languages, cultural clothing, religion and music as elements of their race and culture that they introduced to their children. Elias also remarked on the racial and cultural identity of their children:

> Elias: "Spoken Arabic, not really, a couple of words here and there…one speaks French pretty well, the other one is young and he's learning French in school and

> I'll speak in French to both of them…I've always told them they're Lebanese boys...I guess they're half Lebanese, half White-European."
>
> Margriet: "We'll celebrate Sinterklaas…they put their shoes out and they get presents…little chocolate letters…we have a national costume from Lebanon for the kids…they really like putting that on…they feel really connected to that…when they have international day in school, they're really proud to share that part of themselves…music and the language and the culture and the faith."

Similarly, Sophia, a Racialized Canadian with Korean ancestry, and George, a White Canadian with mixed-European ancestry, shared the significance and intentions of introducing elements of race and culture to their toddler, even though Sophia remarked on feeling less connected to her Korean culture and more connected to her Canadian culture. Sophia also commented on their son's mixed identity:

> Sophia: "Mixed-kid, half Korean half White…I would love for him to be able to eat the food…so I would like to incorporate some of it…I'd like to give him the option of identifying with the Koreans…if we don't introduce it at all then really there's no shot of him doing so."
>
> George: "He can pick what he likes…I would like him to know the Korean culture…I'd want him to know about like Korean War…Korean history…have that basic understanding from Korean as well as obviously Canadian…the more the better right."

In addition, Henry, a Racialized Canadian with Filipino ancestry, shared that he and Susan, who is White Canadian with European ancestry, aim to teach their infant son the traditional Filipino ways of addressing family members:

> "The only other customs or traditions that we consistently, repeatedly is trying to teach our son…to refer to some members of the family in their traditional customs…their titles, uncles are tito and grandparents are lola and lolo."

Contrary to the participants above, one couple described a predominant "Canadian" influence on the experiences and identity of their children, by minimally infusing their ancestral heritage and culture into their parenting practices. Firehawk stated that they "just followed the Canadian" culture and described their daughter's identity as primarily Canadian:

> "Our kids are Canadian…we just follow the Canadian…they eat hamburgers and fries…they have Canadian accents…we do have rice and curry…I've taken them home to Wales…she doesn't feel Welsh at all…she doesn't feel Sinhalese. She feels Canadian because that's what she is…she has a Canadian accent, not a Welsh accent, not a Sinhalese accent, she's Canadian in our head."

These participants shared how they integrated their races and cultures into their parenting practices. They described the multiple elements of race and culture and the varying extent to which they transmit cultural traditions and knowledge to their children. Moreover, some couples shared that the endorsement and maintenance of racial/cultural elements are supported by both partners/parents regardless of whose race/culture they originate from, as exemplified by Sophia and George.

2.2.2 How is Race and Culture 'Mixed' in Mixed-Race Relationships. Couples expounded on how they integrate their race and culture in their relationships and described varying degrees to which they 'mix' their race and culture. For example, Reggie described the integration of his Jamaican and Lexie's Italian culture as a "merge," while Sophia asserted there was "absolutely nothing" from her Korean culture that she incorporated in her relationship with George. Some couples also reflected on the possible implications of 'mixing' their races and cultures on their individual and/or collective identities. These commentaries led to the genesis of the following tertiary themes, respectively: (1) Degrees of 'Mixing' Race and Culture and (2) Racial and Cultural Identities of Mixed-Race Couples.

2.2.2.1 Degrees of 'Mixing' Race and Culture. Participants shared the varying magnitudes in which elements of their races and cultures were incorporated in their mixed-race unions. Participants who had closer connections to their ancestral heritages and cultures incorporated more elements of their races and cultures, and to a greater extent in their relationships, compared to participants who did not have close ties to their ancestral

heritages/cultures. In addition, most of the participants who felt closer to their ancestral heritages and cultures and thus incorporated those elements into their relationships were Racialized, with a few exceptions. These accounts led to the advent of the following quaternary themes: (1) Mixing Both Races and Cultures, (2) Mixing Both Races and Cultures and Individual Maintenance, (3) Incorporating One Race and Culture, (4) Mixing Elements from Other Cultures.

2.2.2.1.1 Mixing Both Races and Cultures. Many couples shared that they incorporated elements from both their races and cultures to varying degrees in their mixed-unions. For example, Lydia shared that in her relationship with Robert, they incorporate and practice several components from both their Ethiopian and Italian cultures:

> "Whenever we can incorporate...opportunities to either practice different aspects of our cultures together, we'll do things that are a part of Robert's culture, we'll do things that's part of my culture, we'll include our extended family members and those types of activities and events."

Similarly, Reggie stated that in his relationship with Lexie, they "merged" their cultures by incorporating both Jamaican and Italian traditional foods:

> "We kind of merged both of our cultures into the food…there was pasta and there was rice and peas."

Another example is Sam and Joy, where Sam highlighted the importance of his French language but emphasized the significance for them to "attach to" Joy's Nigerian culture, including knowledge of ancestry/heritage and traditional food because of its minoritized status:

> "Joy's culture being the minority…it's more kind of important that we try to attach to it. For me, the only thing that matters really is the language…very important that my kids speak French…it's important to me that they understand both sides of the culture…where does Joy come from, the Nigerian culture, the food…even though I don't prefer the food, I'd love to be able to cook it so that they can experience it, they can have you know, at minimum jollof rice…some really cultural food…because I find that we identify a lot by the food that we eat and by the language that we speak."

2.2.2.1.2 Mixing Both Races and Cultures and Individual Maintenance. A few couples in this study incorporated and engaged in some elements of both their cultures as well as individually practicing some other aspects of their own culture. An example is Jack and Jill, where they highlighted that they both celebrate the Muslim and Jewish holidays and celebrations but singularly maintain some aspects of their religious beliefs and practices. Jack further conveyed that their daughter observes some aspects of Jill's religion:

> Jack: "I love Jewish holidays…I love the Muslim holidays…I love celebrating Bangladeshi New Year…I encourage her family and I to go to Bangladeshi New Year celebration because I want to support her. She keeps halal…I agree from day one that our daughter and her would stay halal and then our home, we will only have halal food here. If I go out, I love pepperoni and bacon and things like that, but in the house, like I respect that…she doesn't drink…I pray and I'm a spiritual person."
>
> Jill: "We're designing it as we go along, we incorporate aspects of both of our upbringings."

Similarly, even though Cassandra and Wendel identify predominantly with the Canadian culture, they highlighted the influence, though to a minimal degree, of their Pakistani/Goan and English heritage. Wendel further commented on upholding no affiliation to any religious groups but continues to support the Catholic faith of Cassandra and their children as he "made a promise to the priest upon marriage." They shared the following:

> Cassandra: "He brought…more of the Canadian culture and the formal sort of English presence…because from an Indian culture, like my parents…they would eat with their hands like rice and curry."
>
> Wendel: "I don't abide by any particular religious affiliation."

2.2.2.1.3 Incorporating One Race and Culture. A few couples shared that there was minimal integration of their ancestral race and culture in their mixed-race marriage, either by one or both partners. This was ascribed to minimal ties to ancestral culture and heritage, and stronger affiliation with the Canadian culture/identity. For example, Firehawk and Wolf reported they

"followed the Canadian" lifestyle as a family and there was minimal integration of their Welsh and Sri-Lankan cultures. Wolf attributed this partially to being raised 'non-traditionally' as well as the powerful influence of British colonialism:

> "My family didn't follow tradition, even in Sri Lanka…because there, the British colonial system was more powerful than those Sinhalese traditions."

Another example is Sophia and George, who said they primarily incorporate aspects of the Canadian culture, which they attributed more to George's racial/cultural identity. Sophia professed that while she hopes to introduce their son to aspects of the Korean culture, there was "absolutely nothing" that she introduced into her mixed-race marriage from her Korean heritage, and that she had prior interests and a closer connection to the/her Canadian culture. They shared the following:

> George: "You wanted to do a lot of…the cultural norms that I was already doing…like Christmas is a bigger deal in my family than it was in your family…like a typical White Canadian family would…that kind of 'more Canadian' for lack of a better term stuff…I think she already wanted to do the things that I was doing, in a sense."

> Sophia: "So it's like Christmas…you're White you love Christmas, let's go! (laughs) You know, get the Christmas tree, do it all…but nothing on my side."

2.2.2.1.4 Mixing Elements from Other Cultures. Some couples said that they incorporate elements of other races and cultures that extended beyond the boundaries of their own racial and cultural identities. For example, Henry, a Racialized Canadian of Filipino heritage, and Susan, a White Canadian of mixed-European ancestry, shared that the experience and wisdom they acquired from other cultures have influenced their approach on how they integrate race and culture in their relationship:

> Henry: "Our strategy is not just merging our cultures, but like embracing a lot of different cultures, so different foods…music."

> Susan: "It's not necessarily based on our backgrounds. I think Henry and I have both traveled quite a bit…we really appreciated sort of learning from others…different cultures and traditions…we're interested in sort of providing that for our son as well…an openness…different ways of doing things and living and being and eating and all that kind of stuff…an intentionality to just kind of like expose our son."

Jill and Jack provided another concrete example of how they integrate other traditions beyond their Bengali-Muslim and White-Jewish traditions. Jack recounted that being in a mixed-race relationship allows them to be flexible and "make up their own rules":

> "We have flexibility…we make up our own rules…we have a Christmas tree right here…none of us grew up with the tree…we're talking about putting a menorah or something…ok, so get this, our daughter goes to a school…they were teaching her Christmas songs and stuff…and we're like a Muslim and a Jew's daughter is learning Christmas songs. Okay, I guess that's how it goes."

Another example was provided by Reggie and Lexie, who chronicled their Christmas traditions where they often celebrate with a Jamaican influenced Christmas breakfast with Reggie's family and a lamb dinner with Lexie's family, who are Italian Catholics. However, they highlighted that in lieu of the traditional Italian "big fish feast" on Christmas Eve, they created their own tradition involving Japanese cuisine:

> Lexie: "On Christmas Eve, Italians have like a big fish feast…me and Reggie just end up doing something by ourselves and we always order sushi…it's still fishy…not Italian or West Indian."
>
> Reggie: "Sushi on Christmas Eve and watch a movie."

The preceding narratives epitomized the four ways in which couples in this study integrate elements of their race and culture in their mixed-race relationships. Some participants described their styles of integration as not mutually exclusive, where a couple may incorporate facets from both their cultures but also integrate elements from another culture, as described by Jack and Jill. For the couples who reported that they integrated elements from both their cultures, one described this mixing as a "merge," where they integrated and celebrated

components from both their cultures. Another participant within this group emphasized the significance of preserving and "attaching" to his partner's culture due to its minoritized status. Two couples shared that they mix elements from both their cultures but also singularly maintained and practiced some other aspects of their own culture. Both couples identified this singularly maintained cultural element as religion. For example, Jill and Jack described that they jointly celebrate aspects of the Muslim and Jewish faiths, but only Jill maintains a halal diet. Furthermore, for the couples who divulged that they mostly integrate one race/culture in their relationship, both partners in these relationships described a stronger connection to their Canadian culture and weaker attachment to their ancestral heritage. For example, Sophia and George described a "more Canadian" influence in their relationship, which they attributed to George's heritage/culture. Finally, for the couples who reported that they integrate elements from both their cultures and also incorporate attributes from other cultures, one described having learned from and possessing a great appreciation for other cultures. Jack shared that being in a mixed-race relationship affords them the "flexibility" to do so.

2.2.2.2 Racial and Cultural Identities of Mixed-Race Couples. Couples shared their deliberations on their collective and individual identities that emerged and evolved from their mixed-race relationships. Responses varied. For example, Alexander, a White Canadian with Scottish ancestry and Tania, a Racialized Canadian with Filipino and Chilean ancestry, commented that they have not considered defining their collective identity as a mixed race couple:

Alexander: "I've never thought about it."

Tania: "I haven't really thought about defining ourselves."

Contrastingly, Lydia, who is in a relationship with Robert, revealed that she tends to "just say 'mixed-race couple,'" whereas Robert expressed that he often shares the specific ethnic and cultural composition of their collective and individual identities:

> "Sometimes I'll say like nothing and sometimes I'll say like 'yeah I'm in a mixed-race relationship' or 'my partner is Canadian-Ethiopian'…I tend to say more like… 'my partner is Canadian-Ethiopian' or 'we're Ethiopian-Italian'…I feel like I say that a lot."

In addition, Sophia shared that stipulating the racial identity of George has helped to contextualize and "paint the picture" for others in conversations about her relationship:

> "Sometimes it does help…paint the picture…if someone talks to me…they don't know that George is White...they just make an assumption in their head that I am with say someone Asian…as I talked about what we're doing...something about what we did that day, they'll kind of asked me…'what race is your husband?'…I'll say 'White'…they'll say 'oh okay'…I feel…it helps them understand the story a little bit more."

Another example is Wendel and Cassandra, who shared that they define their relationship as primarily "Canadian"; however, Wendel stipulated that he has incorporated aspects of Cassandra's racial and cultural identities into his own identity because of his "acceptance into the culture." They said the following:

> Wendel: "It's a Canadian relationship. I'm half Canadian but I'm half Goan-Indian, because I've been adopted into that culture...the reality is that I am Goan and Indian, because of the food, but more importantly, the acceptance into the culture. The toleration by Cassandra's parents, the welcoming, the friendship that existed there.
>
> Cassandra: "You're right…first and foremost, Canadian."

These participants shared the implications of being in a mixed-race relationship on their collective and individual identities. Participants shared unique experiences and classification on identity, where their responses varied from 'not having thought about a collective identity' to 'changes to individual identity.' In addition, one participant highlighted that identifying the race

of her partner helps to 'set the context' when having conversations with others about her relationship.

2.3 Strengths of Mixed-Race Relationships.

Participants elaborated on the strengths inherent to their interracial relationships. They conveyed the growth and benefits procured as individuals, as exemplified by Jill, who described herself as "a more open-minded person" since her relationship. Participants also expounded on the benefits to relationship enrichment, which they identified as emanating from their racial and cultural integration. Moreover, many couples referenced their children as paramount strengths of their mixed unions. The acquisition of racial and cultural empathy was also delineated as a principal benefit. Luca remarked that his mixed-partnership has allowed him to be "more attuned" to race and culture related issues, which makes him a "better citizen." These accounts led to the formulation of the following sub sub-themes, respectively: (1) Mixing of Race and Culture on Growth and Development, (2) Children of Mixed-Race Relationships, and (3) Development of Racial and Cultural Empathy.

2.3.1 Mixing of Race and Culture on Growth and Development. Couples detailed the benefits of their diverse races and cultures on growth and evolvement. They elaborated on the contributions to their individual growth and self-development, including influences and contributions to their personal identity. They also expounded on enrichments to their relationship by virtue of their mixed-race status. These accounts resulted in the following tertiary themes: (1) Individual Growth and Development and (2) Relationship Enrichment.

2.3.1.1 Individual Growth and Development. Participants described a myriad of benefits that emerged from their mixed-race relationships that were specific to their individual growth and development. They include: (1) open minded, well-rounded and willingness to learn, (2)

self-awareness, ongoing growth and reevaluation of personal perspectives, (3) social, cultural and political enhancements, (4) development of strength and ability to cope with difficulties, (5) new experiences and cultural exposure, and (6) shifts in personal boundaries and self-confidence. Some of these commentaries are presented below.

Curly, who is Iranian-born, and Randy, who is Canadian-born with mixed Italian and French ancestry, commented on how their culturally diverse marriage afforded them new experiences and learning, which contributed to them being more well-rounded, "open-minded" and less confined:

> Curly: "I find being in a culturally diverse marriage gives you more freedom to discover new culture, learn about a new culture…be a lot more open-minded…willing to learn…different language…try new foods …going to new places…you're letting down your boundaries."
>
> Randy: "I think it's just really made myself like more rounded which then filters down to our kids."

Similarly, Robert, who is Italian Canadian, shared that his relationship with Lydia, who is Ethiopian Canadian, has provided him opportunities to have experiences outside of his "bubble," which has benefitted him politically, socially and culturally:

> "I've just learned so much and to the point where it would be such a shame if we didn't end up together…it would be so sad to think that I didn't get outside of my bubble…different experiences outside of my little homogeneous group…one of the benefits of our relationship is that I'm able to see things from a different perspective…learn more about diversity. Our relationship challenges me to be a better person…I'm constantly learning and growing …I've definitely been enriched in all three of those categories [politically, culturally, socially] since being with her."

Henry, a Canadian-born participant with Filipino ancestry, further shared that his mixed marriage has allowed him to procure diverse (cultural) perspectives, which has enabled him to "reevaluate and reflect" on his existing thoughts and outlook:

> "The ability to see a different perspective…as a way to see if your thoughts are really truly a cultural thing or something else…being able to reevaluate and reflect on your own views and perspectives."

Another example is Firehawk, who is White and Welsh-born, and Wolf, who is Racialized and Sri-Lankan-born, who elaborated on the acquisition of strength and fortitude as they navigated and coped with various challenges. Firehawk shared that in journeying through the challenges of being an interracial couple in the 1960s, she "got stronger" and Wolf highlighted the strength and confidence he developed through Firehawk's support of his childhood trauma. They shared the following:

> Firehawk: "When I was young, I wouldn't have seen any strengths. But as I got older…had children…I got stronger…I was going to fight…I got to defend and protect these children."

> Wolf: "The strength that I got is that I learned how to cope with difficulties…growing up…I went to a boarding school where I was abused, sexually and physically and mentally...getting married to Firehawk made me a stronger person…she gave me a confidence in myself."

In addition, Tania, who is Canadian-born with Filipino and Chilean ancestry, shared how her relationship with Alexander and his family and friends enabled her to be less "armed" and it bolstered her confidence to show up in social spaces 'as herself,' rather than in a more "Western" manner:

> "I've kind of always been somewhat uncomfortable…even insecure around large groups of White people…every holiday that I spend with Alexander's family…friends, I've grown more comfortable…be myself and show up as myself in those types of groups…when I reflect back on old jobs where I worked for let's say like White people…I wasn't connecting…there was like a guard up…I don't have much of a guard anymore…at work I feel like I have to be armed…I have to be almost more like Western than I typically would be at home with family to be almost taken seriously…I don't feel as armed in social settings at least because of my experiences with Alexander's friends and family."

The participants above identified some of the individual benefits they procured from their mixed-race relationships. Some of these benefits included: positive shifts in "boundaries" and

feeling less "armed," 'reevaluation and reflection' on personal views and perspectives, increased ability to "cope with difficulties," and greater confidence to "show up" as one's authentic racial and cultural self.

2.3.1.1.1 Influence on Identity. More specifically, participants identified various benefits to their individual identities, stemming from their mixed-race relationships. They include: (1) reinforcing and gaining a sense of pride towards their ancestral and Canadian identities and (2) opportunities to experience and participate in another culture/identity.

For example, Sam shared that having conversations with Joy about her identity as a Black woman has encouraged him to "refocus" on his own ancestral roots and procure a greater sense of pride towards his French-Canadian heritage:

> "Joy allowed me to kind of refocus on my own culture and who I really am…there's this big umbrella about White people…there's like so many different types of White people…so I think it allowed me to refocus on my roots…and being proud of it…all those discussions allow me to do that as well, which I think is good."

Similarly, Sophia, who is Canadian-born with Korean ancestry, shared that being with George has augmented her appreciation of her Canadian identity:

> "I maybe feel more proud as a Canadian just being with you…you give me tidbits of like Canadian history…there's a bit more of an appreciating like the Canadian side of me."

Furthermore, Margriet shared that having grown up in a majority culture, she did not experience a particularly close tie to her ancestral culture and identity (Canadian, Dutch, Italian), and being with Elias, who is Lebanese-Canadian, has bestowed the privilege of experiencing and participating in a more "unified cultural identity":

> "Growing up as part of a majority culture for myself…not feeling as close to a tie to any particular cultural identity, I felt like I was kind of missing that…and would have liked to have more of that…I think that, for me has been really

> cool…because you have both parents from the same country…and because you have kind of like a unified cultural identity."

Sophia, Margriet and Sam articulated the following benefits to their racial and cultural identities, respectively: increased sense of pride and appreciation towards their Canadian identity; 'filled in the gap' where they formerly experienced the absence of a "unified cultural identity"; and reconnection to their ancestry as they previously fell under the broad "umbrella" that encompassed all "White people."

2.3.1.2 Relationship Enrichment. Participants also shared how integrating their races and cultures in their partnerships have affected growth, development and enrichment in their relationships. For example, Randy, a White Canadian with French and Italian ancestry, shared that the strength in his relationship with Curly, a Racialized Iranian-born Canadian, stemmed partially from the "extra level" of opportunities to share racial and cultural experiences, which is "exciting and new and fresh":

> "I think our relationship is very strong because…it's not the same…you're getting to know the culture and differences and that's sort of exciting and new and fresh…you find good and you find bad…we're now here 10 years down the road…it just creates an extra level of something you share with each other, that makes for a stronger relationship."

Similarly, Jolanda and Luca elaborated on the benefits of possessing diverse perspectives and worldviews, as well as the richness in celebrating multiple cultural traditions:

> Luca: "We come at the world…we have different perspectives on how things are happening every day…I like that we have different perspectives and that we share and talk about things…I think that was definitely something that I was looking for in a relationship."

> Jolanda: "We get to celebrate more holidays …we celebrate Chinese New Year and Ukrainian Christmas…its more interesting…all the western traditions as well and all the cultural."

Robert, who is Italian-Canadian, further highlighted that being in a mixed-race relationship with Lydia, who is Ethiopian-Canadian, has enabled him to advance to a "different potential" and navigating various challenges has catalyzed numerous opportunities to grow as both individuals and as a couple:

> "There's so much strength in being in a mixed-race relationship…I sometimes think about friends or family members that…maybe don't look outside of their own race to be in relationships…I feel like I'd never reached a different potential or a different level of learning if I wasn't in our relationship…the challenges that we face, really helped to push that growth and that learning that we experience as a couple and as individuals…we'd be missing out on so much if we weren't in this relationship."

These participants described the integration of their diverse races and cultures as enriching their relationships. Jolanda described her relationship as "more interesting" and Robert shared that it enhanced his "growth," which enabled him to reach a "different potential" of learning. Randy shared that mixing races and cultures in a mixed-union "makes for a stronger relationship."

2.3.2 Children of Mixed-Race Relationships. Children were identified as a principal strength in mixed-race relationships. Couples described several advantages of their children having mixed races and cultures including a multitude of racial and cultural experiences, enrichment to identity, and inclusive and open worldviews. For example, Margriet and Elias highlighted that exposing their children to both their Dutch/Italian and Lebanese races and cultures has resulted in a "richness" and "openness." They commented that their relationship, as well as other mixed-race relationships in their families and social circles, have established a "nice model" to normalize the 'mixing of races and cultures' for their children:

> Margriet: "The real value in us being from different cultures has come about when we've had kids and being able to share both cultures with them…it just brings kind of like a richness, like a nice part of the identity and a nice connection…share the language and also share some of the racial background."

> Elias: "It's just broadening…the openness…inclusiveness of the children, when they realize that their parents are different and they maybe speak differently, look different…like to eat different things, but it's all acceptable."

Another example is Jolanda and Luca, who commented on the 'genetic advantage' for their son, as well as the advantage of introducing him to multiple worldviews reflective of their mixed Chinese and European cultures:

> Jolanda: "A better genetic DNA pool for our offspring…we have had conversations about our son…what do we want to teach him about our respective cultures and how we can do that… it will benefit our offspring."

> Luca: "It's exciting that we are going to be able to make those choices and be able to present hopefully a world view that, you know, is positive for our son and going to be reflective of both of us."

Similarly, Jill stated that their daughter will be exposed to multiple races, cultures and religions beyond their Muslim and Jewish faiths:

> "Relative to other kids, our daughter's going to see a lot more mixture of things…we're not kidding, we have a seven foot Christmas tree."

These participants elaborated on the strengths procured to their children, including participation in diverse experiences and attainment of multiple perspectives and worldviews. A few participants shared that their children's experiences are reflective of both parents' cultures, and Jill remarked that this may even extend beyond the boundaries of both parent's race and culture.

2.3.3 Development of Racial and Cultural Empathy. Participants shared that being in a relationship with a partner of a different race and culture has fostered profound racial and cultural empathy. They attributed this in part to having more intimate exposure and experiences with diverse races and cultures, as well as unequivocally witnessing their partner's experiences.

For example, Jill, a Bengali-born Muslim Canadian, described empathy as the "biggest win" in reference to the benefits of their interracial relationship. She highlighted that empathy was achieved for both her and her parents through "experiences" with Jack's culture and religion:

> "The biggest win is around empathy…while empathy can be developed and learn…there's empathy that…people get from having experiences…I've seen this with my parents, the idea of their daughter marrying a Jewish person…the worst thing that could probably happen to my parents…now gotten to know him over the years…like we develop an empathy for a group that you haven't thought about or would otherwise consider."

Firehawk also shared that her relationship with Wolf fostered a greater sense of awareness and influenced her own values, particularly her thoughts on the repercussions of colonialism:

> "It's really made me aware of what is going on in the world…that I wasn't aware of when I was young…it's being in a mixed-marriage. I might not have seen it so much if I'd married the blonde, blue-eyed Welshman…I might have ended up anti-Muslim like a lot of my friends there because I wouldn't have seen through everything…I understand at the age of 80, how colonialism has been a lot of evil in the world."

Lexie further relayed that her observation of Reggie's experiences as a Black male, particularly around anti-Black racism, has cultivated a "personal connection," as she is able to intimately observe the "pain" and "fear" stemming from his experiences:

> "When Reggie talks about Rodney King…he remembers minute by minute what happened…I remembered them as like events. Now, when we're looking and watching like George Floyd or Black Lives Matter…Breonna Taylor...I feel it more in my heart as a personal connection. If I was in a same-race relationship and I was watching what's going on in the world right now…I don't think I would feel it as profoundly whereas so close to my life, as like watching Reggie watch that…see the pain and I see the fear."

Similarly, Robert shared that his relationship with Lydia, who is Black, has enabled him to "see" racism, something he may have previously "minimized" or "downplayed" because of his privilege as a White male. Lydia also commented on the benefit of Robert's increased awareness and empathy. They stated the following:

> Robert: “It's something that took me some time to understand…it’s probably something that I may have minimized or downplayed. I don’t know what that feels like in her shoes…I think it comes again with that like you know invisible privilege that exist as a White man. She’s experienced racism…going through life together, I'm starting to see it again more from her perspective.”
>
> Lydia: “His overall awareness and knowledge and empathy obviously has evolved with it in time…that's been a huge benefit to me.”

Margriet, who is a White Canadian with Dutch and Italian ancestry, discussed having developed a deeper connection and concern for the contentions in the Middle-East and Lebanon, which stemmed from her relationship with Elias as well as having lived there together:

> “I've become more aware of the history of the Middle East and the geography of the Middle East from having lived over there and from also being with you…history of the politics of Lebanon…feeling a lot more pulled towards the issues that they're having…the financial crisis and a lot of their infrastructure issues…Syrian and Palestinian refugees who lived there and kind of the state of poverty and kind of pressure that they're living under.”

These participants spoke on how they developed profound cultural empathy from their interracial relationships. They proclaimed that they developed deep and heartfelt empathy through intimately bearing witness to their partner’s experiences, through immersion in their partner’s race and culture and through their own lived experiences of close affiliation with their partner’s race and culture.

2.4 Challenges Experienced by Mixed-Race Couples.

Participants chronicled the challenges they experienced as mixed-race couples, pertinent to race and culture. Some challenges were identified as deriving from racial and cultural differences between partners, and Lydia said that over time, some racial and cultural differences may become even more apparent and thus, “the real test comes in.” Participants also identified racism and prejudice experienced singularly and/or by couples as another challenge. For example, Elias identified his father’s initial objection to marrying Margriet because she was not

Arab or Lebanese as an initial "barrier." These commentaries resulted in the following sub sub-themes, respectively: (1) Racial and Cultural Differences, and (2) Discrimination, Racism and Prejudice.

2.4.1 Racial and Cultural Differences. A few couples identified their differences in race and culture as presenting some challenges; however many elaborated that these issues arose in the earlier stages of their relationships. In addition, most couples in this study also reported the challenges that initially emerged from racial and cultural differences have mostly been resolved. Some of these narrations are presented next.

Joy, who is Black and Nigerian-born, elaborated on two challenges she and Sam, who is White and French-Canadian, had to reconcile, namely, a language barrier and navigating dialogues around race and racism. She shared that Sam's family speaks primarily French and though they are welcoming, there were instances where she felt (unintentionally) excluded because of the language disparity. In addition, she identified the language barrier as limiting the degree of socialization with Sam's family:

> "I already knew they'd be a huge language barrier…Sam, he doesn't go home very often, so when he goes home, he just speaks French…he's so excited to like see everyone but then I feel left out…a lot of times I just felt like I'm sitting there…I have no idea what's happening...but he has a brother who I think wants to learn more English…every single time he would translate for me…continue translating as if I was in the conversation…that warmness and that people trying to like translate and get me into conversation really was very, very nice."

Joy also shared that during initial conversations around race and racism, Sam felt "attacked" because of his membership in the majority group. She elaborated on how they navigated these conversations, and she remarked on Sam's growth:

> "I've seen Sam grow and be more open to like some of the things that do go on with Black people…just some of our conversations I know we had…when I was…'all the White people do this'…I think that's part of his transition of feeling attacked…he's part of that group…I've always had to say, like, 'not talking about

> you, you're not the racist one,' but also realizing my language in and the choice of words that I'm using, it may not also be appropriate…he doesn't represent all White people, and I don't represent all Black people."

Another example provided by Jack and Jill centers around cultural membership and community. Jack shared that on one hand, they do not belong to a specific cultural or religious community, but later deliberated on the flexibility their mixed-race relationship has imparted, where they can "handpick" and create their own community. However, Jill's perspective differed where she identified her membership to various communities. They shared the following:

> Jack: "We don't belong to any community…she's not part of the Bangladeshi or Muslim community and I'm not part of the Jewish community. We basically have strays…we're strays too…we basically had to create our own community because we don't belong to any. Freedom of this is we don't have to live in a Jewish community…we have flexibility…when I said strays…I sort of meant creating our own community…I was able to handpick people who I thought were really…wonderful human beings"

> Jill: "I don't think that I don't have a community, I think I have multiple community…community issue is bigger for me…I kind of moved out of Bangladesh…if I go back there tomorrow…I'll be in a community…I went to school and then I went to work...my community was at work…others I choose not to be part of because I don't like certain things about it."

In addition, Curly, a Racialized Iranian-born Canadian, shared that mixed-race couples may be required to learn or "reacquaint" themselves with cultural expectations and traditions, as she did with the Christian traditions. She also emphasized the degree of agency extended family may possess based on their willingness to learn and embrace the culture joining their family:

> "If you're in the same culture…part of the same clan…you're one in the same so you kind of fall in line with all the cultural expectations…I had to reacquaint myself with what does Christmas mean, what does Easter mean. It's definitely a barrier especially if you're not willing as a whole family, as an extended family to learn from the culture of the person that's joining the family…whereas if you're all from the same culture then you don't have those adversities cause there's nothing to learn, you all know the same things."

These participants shared how their racial and cultural differences propagated some inherent barriers related to language and religion. Curly reported that the potential obstacles deriving from racial and cultural differences could be exacerbated by external factors, such as family. Many of these couples discussed the resolution of these challenges in a strength-based manner, as exemplified by Jack, who later conceptualized the lack of community as providing "flexibility" and "freedom."

2.4.2 Discrimination, Racism and Prejudice. Several couples in this study identified discrimination, racism and prejudice as a challenge they have encountered and had to navigate at some point or through the course of their relationship. The frequency and degree of encounters varied among couples. A few participants elaborated on racial discrimination perpetrated by family, and Lexie provided an example where she stated, "my mom didn't like Reggie because he was Black." In addition, some participants elaborated on experiences of racism inflicted by general society, and Henry described it as being "treated differently." These accounts resulted in the genesis of the following tertiary themes: (1) Experiences in Family and (2) Experiences in Society.

2.4.2.1 Experiences in Family. Most couples in this study shared that their experiences with their partner's family were welcoming and free from discrimination. They described their introductions, socializations and relationships with their partner's families as: accepting and welcoming, warm and loving, friendly and exciting, and open and comfortable. However, a few participants shared their experiences of discrimination, racism and prejudice perpetrated by family members. Many of these participants highlighted that these experiences occurred in the earlier stages of their relationships (e.g., dating, early years of marriage), while a few couples shared ongoing incidences of racism, particularly in the form of racial microaggressions.

Firehawk recalled memories from her wedding and early years of marriage. She stated that her mother was overtly racist to Wolf and disapproved of their marriage. She also said that, though the relationship with her mother improved to some extent, her mother continued to harbour racist and discriminatory attitudes towards Wolf and their son, and may have even blamed Wolf for their son's autism diagnosis. Wolf attributed the racism he experienced to his darker skin. They shared the following:

> Firehawk: "I took Wolf to Wales to get married…the worst mistake I ever made…my mother was not pleased…she called Wolf a 'flat footed coolie'…my mother took off…the night before my wedding…I didn't know if my mother would turn up. She used to come over and visit…because of the children…more of my daughter who was fair than of my son who was dark. Our son had autism…I'm quite sure that they blamed Wolf's side of the family for that…'well that's what happens when you marry a non-White, a colored guy, you get autistic kids, you get abnormal kids.'…my mother, she was very likely said that."
>
> Wolf: "If I was a light skinned person…I don't think I would have gone through that…I think it has to do with colour."

Another example is provided by Jack, who shared that as a consequence of historical tensions between Muslims and Jews, his Israeli-born father had preconceived notions about Muslims. He stated that marrying a non-White Muslim woman was a "nightmare scenario" and "the worst combination" for his father. Jack also disclosed "the turning point," where his father's views of Jill significantly shifted months before his death, when he received immense support from Jill. His father later referred to Jill as a "mensch," which translates to "angel on earth." Jill also elaborated on similar sentiments regarding her parent's reactions to Jack. Jack and Jill disclosed they were uncertain if they could reconcile their differences, which resulted in a temporary break-up during their courtship:

> Jack: "My parents, especially my dad…he had this like, nightmare scenario that I might date a non-Jew, but he never thought it would be a non-White…he automatically assumed if it wasn't, it would be Christian. Muslims…to him…they were taught you're under attack, they're trying to kill you…so a non-

> White person who was Muslim was like the worst combination from his perspective…we did end up breaking up for a couple years because we couldn't reconcile…commitment we kind of made to our respective families."
>
> Jill: "I honestly believed that the moment I tell my dad, he was going to have a heart attack."

Lydia further elaborated on the more covert "power dynamics" she has observed due to her Black and Racialized identity. She reflected on differential treatment between her and others in the family who are in same-race relationships. She also highlighted the lack of "acknowledgement and space" to "authentically express" herself, particularly on issues related to anti-Black racism in society:

> "I don't think this would necessarily arise in the same level when it comes to same-race relationships…the power dynamics…where respect and autonomy can be impacted as a racial minority…had I been, the same race as Robert, I'm confident I would not have faced the same dilemmas…I've had an intimate close-up look at how other same-race relationships in his family have played out…there's so much more respect, space, benefit of the doubt and permission to be authentic. Especially this year we've seen a lot of racial turmoil happening…I've also run into a lack of acknowledgement and space to be able to authentically express my thoughts and experiences with his family."

In addition, Sam disclosed that though his immediate family was accepting of Joy, he shared a racist remark made by his aunt. He further stipulated that his relationship with Joy has increased his awareness and exposure to "ignorance":

> "One of the challenges is probably for me is more like the judgment…the racism…when I went back home…I showed a picture of Joy to one of my aunt, her comment was, 'oh she looks good for a Black woman'…I think you get to experience a lot more ignorance as a White person dating someone who's…a racial minority."

These participants shared varying degrees of racial discrimination perpetrated by family, which ranged from overt racism, such as name calling, insults and rejection behaviours to covert racism such as differential treatment and prejudiced beliefs. Moreover, the implications of

having a darker skin tone were noted by Wolf, and Jack and Jill shared the temporary dissolution of their relationship as a repercussion of their family's initial objection to their relationship.

2.4.2.2 Experiences in Society. Participants also divulged their experiences of discrimination, prejudice and racism in the general society. Several couples shared that they encountered some form of discrimination and racism, either overtly or covertly. Racial discrimination was perpetrated by people in their social networks, police and airport security officers, coworkers/colleagues, mental health professionals and personal care workers. Some participants also conveyed that their experience was dependent on geographical location. A few of these narratives are presented next.

Firehawk, a Welsh-born Canadian, elaborated on their encounters with racial discrimination from co-workers and colleagues in the 1960s. She shared occurrences of overt racism towards Wolf, who is a Sri-Lankan-born Canadian, as well as experiences of being verbally attacked and ostracized for being in a mixed-race marriage:

> "Invited us to a party…there were all these White guys there…some of them were from Wales…they run the deck on me…lambasted me for marrying Wolf…saying that it was terrible…'what was I doing, married to a colored'…they all deliberately wouldn't ask me to dance and made me a wallflower…a colleague came up to me and said, 'I didn't know you were married to a camel jockey.'"

Firehawk also said that to this day, she occasionally ruminates on the remarks made by her son's psychiatrist in the 1970s:

> "Psychiatrist at Sick Kids…she was very concerned that I was in a mixed-marriage…she asked me, 'why was I in this mixed-marriage?'…'why did I betray my race?' She said…'if everybody does what you're doing, all the different races will disappear...we won't have our separate racial identities'…I guess she wants White people to be White…that goes along to what Trump feels and the followers of Trump…she left me with that thought, and I still haven't sort of solved it."

Another example is provided by Randy, who is Canadian-born with Italian and French ancestry, and Curly, who is an Iranian-born Canadian. Randy disclosed incidences where a teammate

joked about his mixed-race relationship, and Curly divulged an experience of being ostracized because she stood up for Muslim people in a conversation with Randy's friends. They shared the following:

> Randy: "I play sports…anything that anyone has going on in their life that's different, they're going to pick at…like they would just make a joke of like my relationship with Curly, like nothing too bad and I would typically just laugh it off…after a while, I was like guys…'we're still saying the same joke like let's move on'…sports culture."
>
> Curly: "Those groups of friends…they've blacklisted us to some extent…I remember the conversations…where cultural background has come up and I've said realistic responses to some of their questions and they're taken back by it…I was actually pretty close friends with one of their wives until…it was a whole conversation about Muslim people and I defended them."

Lydia, who identifies as Black Ethiopian-Canadian, shared how their encounters with racial discrimination and racism have been somewhat dependent on geographical location. When planning a vacation, for example, she often enquires about the "geo-political climate" of the region to assess their "take on mixed-race relationships" in order to safeguard both her physical and mental safety:

> "When we think about places to go or travel…I want to do research…what's the overall geo-political climate…the take on mixed-race relationships if I can gage that...it's not just a sense of physical safety, it's also mental safety…I don't want to go pay a lot of money to travel somewhere just to face racism although that's usually inevitable given its so ingrained in our global context…but it's something that we definitely factor in decision-making…like we went to Quebec…had a very different experience with more overt racism and discrimination as a mixed-race couple."

Jolanda shared that she has not experienced overt racial discrimination for being in a mixed-race relationship, however she described feeling "self-conscious" when in predominantly White spaces. She also expressed concerns about potential stereotypes surrounding interracial relationships, specific to Asian women and White men:

> "The only time that I felt a little bit self-conscious…a couple of trips to South Carolina…wondering if we would stand out…more like conservative down there and it was definitely very White. People might have pre-conceived notions around what an interracial relationship is and like why people would be in one…I've never really been confronted about it…why would an Asian woman date a White guy…she's in it for the money or the prestige…or why would a White guy date an Asian woman…yellow fever…exoticism, the fetishization…stereotypes that exist in society…I guess that bothers me, to think that people might think that about us."

Wendel, who is White Canadian with British ancestry, and Cassandra, who is a Racialized Pakistani-born Canadian with Goan ancestry, shared that though they have not experienced any overt racial discrimination as a couple, they often worry about the experiences of their children. Cassandra recalled an incident of potential racial profiling of their son by the police, as well as the skepticism she has encountered in situations where she identified herself as the mother of her children. They shared the following:

> Wendel: "Somebody saying something racist towards my son or daughter…the worry of it was more of a challenge for me."

> Cassandra: "Our son…he was driving…got pulled over…two cop cars came…coming after him kind of thing…he has a beard and dark hair…maybe…racial profiling. A challenge could be…if I go pick them up…I'm like, I'm so and so's mom…a lot of times people don't expect that I'm going to be the one picking them up…they do sometimes take a little step back, whereas, I don't think Wendel ever had that experience because I think they present, on first appearance…Caucasian."

These participants elaborated on various encounters of overt and covert racial discrimination inflicted by various members of society. A few shared that encounters of racist incidences may be dependent on geographical regions. Moreover, Lydia disclosed the potential repercussions on physical and mental safety, and Firehawk highlighted the unrelenting consequences, where she shared that she continues to contemplate the disparaging remarks made by her son's psychiatrist in the 1970s.

2.4.2.2.1 Experiences in Toronto. Participants also discussed their experiences of discrimination, prejudice and racism as interracial couples in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Many couples in this study described their experience as positive and attributed this to the racial and cultural diversity and the prevalence of mixed-race relationships in Toronto and the GTA. However, some participants disclosed experiences of racism, prejudice and discrimination. For example, Firehawk reflected on her experience of being in an interracial relationship in Toronto in the 1960s, where her neighbourhood was predominantly White:

> "It was hell…it was all White…nobody spoke to me on the street…the neighbour…a middle aged lady…I went and knocked on her door and said, 'could we get together for a cup of tea?' I expected everybody to invite me in for a cup of tea, like in Britain…and she said, 'well, you're married to that Indian man, aren't you? that Pakistani?'…I said, he's from Sri Lanka'…and she said, 'what did your parents think about it'?...she shut the door and never spoke to me again."

Another example is shared by Sam and Joy. Sam described an overall positive experience in Toronto and ascribed it to the "nature of Toronto." Joy reflected on how her experience is dependent on the racial configuration of specific neighbourhoods as well as social spaces. She drew parallels between 'pockets of diversity' in Toronto and diversity on various corporate levels, which she declared as having some influences on her experience. Joy further shared that at the beginning of their relationship she noticed gazes and was confronted with external bewilderment about having a White partner. They disclosed the following:

> Sam: "I work with people…they know I'm in an interracial relationship…I've never…treated any differently or any comments or anything like that, I think it has been more positive…because of the nature of Toronto."

> Joy: "I see Toronto different…there's pockets of more diversity versus others…especially in the corporate environment…I don't see diversity on all levels...so I think that when I stand with a White person, a lot of people are surprised…'oh, you're with a White guy'…I feel like they assume I would be with a Black person and not with a White person…sometimes when we walk…we see that everyone's looking at us."

Lydia, who also identifies as Black, shared similar perspectives where she described Toronto as "a much more accepting environment to be a mixed-race couple" but highlighted potential differences between Toronto and the GTA:

> "I haven't come into contact with too many scenarios where I can recall where we've faced notable instances of racism and discrimination which I think is largely tied to Toronto being a fairly diverse place. There's a lot of differences with Toronto versus the GTA or I'm thinking of outside of the province experiences."

Wendel also shared that his experience being in an interracial relationship in Toronto has been positive. He stated that he and Cassandra have discussed moving outside the GTA, but they have considered the impact on their experience, particularly Cassandra's:

> "The fact you know, that we are a mixed-marriage here in this city…you don't feel it, you don't sense it. You get outside, I don't know. It might lead to Cassandra being uncomfortable about it."

Many couples described an overall positive experience of being in a mixed-race relationship in Toronto. However, a few participants brought to light the following: experiences varied between Toronto and the GTA and/or between various regions of Toronto; encounters of racism ranged from overt racism (e.g., racist remarks) to covert incidences (e.g., "everyone's looking at us"); and experiences and perceptions may differ between partners as exemplified by Sam and Joy. Furthermore, Firehawk provided some insights on the racial demography and experiences of racism in Toronto in the 1960-1970s.

Summary of Core Theme Two. The second core theme was dedicated to presenting the lived experiences of couples relevant to race and culture in their mixed-race relationships. Couples first shared how they met and revealed the multitudinous factors that engendered romantic attraction. The role of race and culture on romantic attraction was presented where some participants asserted that attraction emerged from the 'individual' and was thus

independent of race and culture, while some shared that their partner's race and culture played a role, either openly, "unknowingly" or the difference in their partner's race and culture from their own contributed to attraction. Two noteworthy insights emerged, where one participant shared how a higher prevalence in certain types of interracial relationships may 'unconsciously' influence the pursuit of similar partnerships and another shared how religious difference served as an initial deterrence, particularly within the current geo-political climate.

Secondly, participants elaborated on the components of their race and culture they integrated in their interracial relationships. Children were revered as principal examples of integration, evident through transmission of racial/cultural knowledge and through their mixed-identities. Couples in this study 'mixed' their races and cultures in four ways, including: integrating both their races and cultures, integrating facets from both cultures but also singularly maintaining some other aspects of their own race and culture, integrating mostly one race/culture, and integrating elements from another culture. The integration styles were described as non-methodical and not mutually exclusive. Partners who integrated elements of their race/culture possessed stronger ties to their ancestral culture, and in instances where one partner singularly maintained some aspects of their culture, the non-practicing partner often held an auxiliary and supportive role. Of significance, one participant shared the importance of preserving his partner's minoritized culture, particularly within a Canadian context.

Thirdly, strengths stemming from these partnerships were presented including benefits to the individual, such as attainment of new experiences and knowledge, positive shifts in boundaries, critical reflection of personal values, procurement of resiliency, increased confidence in self, deeper connection to racial/cultural identity, and the development of profound cultural

empathy. Couples also identified relationship enrichment and their children's exposure to multiple experiences and worldviews as principal strengths in their partnerships.

Finally, core theme two concluded by presenting some challenges faced by couples, which included barriers stemming from their racial and cultural differences, such as language and religion. However, these barriers were identified as primarily emerging in the earlier stages of their relationship and were framed in a strength-based manner. Racism, prejudice and discrimination perpetrated by family and society were also identified as a challenge which included experiences of overt racism, shadeism and racial microaggressions. Repercussions of racial discrimination that were identified included impact on physical and mental safety and threats of relationship dissolution. Experiences of racism were discussed as being contingent on geographical location where Toronto was identified as generally positive; however one couple shared the challenges of being a mixed-race couple in Toronto in the 1960s-1970s.

The findings in core theme two provide further contextual foundation for the third core theme – *Critical Reflections on Lived Experiences: Negotiating Differences, Racism and Privilege, and Being in 'The Middle' of Two Races and Cultures,* which will be presented next.

3.0 Critical Reflections on Lived Experiences: Negotiating Differences, Racism and Privilege, and Being in 'The Middle' of Two Races and Cultures

The third core theme, *Critical Reflections on Lived Experiences: Negotiating Differences, Racism and Privilege, and Being in 'The Middle' of Two Races and Cultures* (*Figure 3*), expands on the narratives in core theme two by presenting some critical reflections pertaining to the lived experiences of couples relevant to race and culture. These in-depth reflections centred around the racial and cultural nuances and differences evident in these unions, which were not identified as presenting significant relationship challenges, but which necessitated some degrees of

acknowledgement, education and/or negotiation. These narratives led to the emergence of the first sub-theme, *Negotiating Racial and Cultural Differences in Mixed-Race Relationships*. Couples also elaborated on strategies they implemented to manage and cope with racial discrimination and prejudice, previously identified in core theme two, which resulted in the advent of the second sub-theme, *Coping with Discrimination, Racism and Prejudice*. Critical deliberations on how racism and privilege influenced their social location as interracial couples, as well as experiences of being in 'the middle' of two races/cultures and crossing racial and cultural borders, was captured in the third sub-theme, *Racism, Privilege, Social Location and Crossing Over Racial/Cultural Borders.* Core theme three concludes by sharing the recommendations and wisdom offered by couples on navigating race and culture in mixed-race unions, which led to the fourth and final sub-theme, *Commentaries and Recommendations on Navigating a Mixed-Race Relationship.*

3.1 Negotiating Racial and Cultural Differences in Mixed-Race Relationships.

Couples discussed the racial and cultural nuances and differences intrinsic to their mixed-race relationships. They distinguished naturally occurring differences, which were framed as non-problematic, from the challenges presented in core theme two. These inevitable nuances/differences were not conceptualized as challenges or barriers, but as "light stuff" as described by Sophia. Participants distinguished the various divergences and intricacies stemming from having diverse races/cultures in their romantic unions, such as differing "family dynamics" as highlighted by George. They also shared strategies and interventions they implemented to address and manage these differences, including "communication" as suggested by Jill and "learning" about each other's races/cultures as declared by Curly. These narrations

resulted in the creation of the following sub sub-themes, respectively: (1) Racial and Cultural Differences and Nuances, and (2) Strategies Used in Managing Racial and Cultural Differences.

3.1.1 Racial and Cultural Differences and Nuances. Participants identified several differences and nuances that surfaced in their interracial unions. These nuances and divergences included various elements of race and culture, such as "meal portions" as stated by Sophia, distinct ways of engaging and interacting with family, and diverse "parenting strategies" that are racially and culturally informed as suggested by Margriet. These elaborations resulted in the emergence of the following tertiary themes: (1) Racial and Cultural Factors, (2) Interacting and Socializing with Family, and (3) Race and Culture Informed Parenting Practices.

3.1.1.1 Racial and Cultural Factors. Participants shared elements of their races and cultures that surfaced in their mixed unions that differed from the racial and cultural practices and customs of their partners'. Jill remarked on these differences by saying, "I wouldn't call them a challenge," but they may occasionally require varying degrees of information sharing and negotiation.

For example, Tania shared that prior to introducing Alexander to her family, she provided him with some prefatory information on Filipino culture. She contrasted this to a former Filipino boyfriend with whom she did not feel such a preamble was necessary:

> "I feel like anytime I introduce anyone to my extended family, like my Filipino family, I have to do a…whole spiel like, 'okay, so you're going to meet my aunts, they might talk Tagalog around you and you won't understand, that's normal'…'they're not being rude, that's just how they are'…versus in the past, I actually dated somebody that was Filipino and I didn't actually feel like I had to do any of that…I guess it's interesting how culture played a role in that."

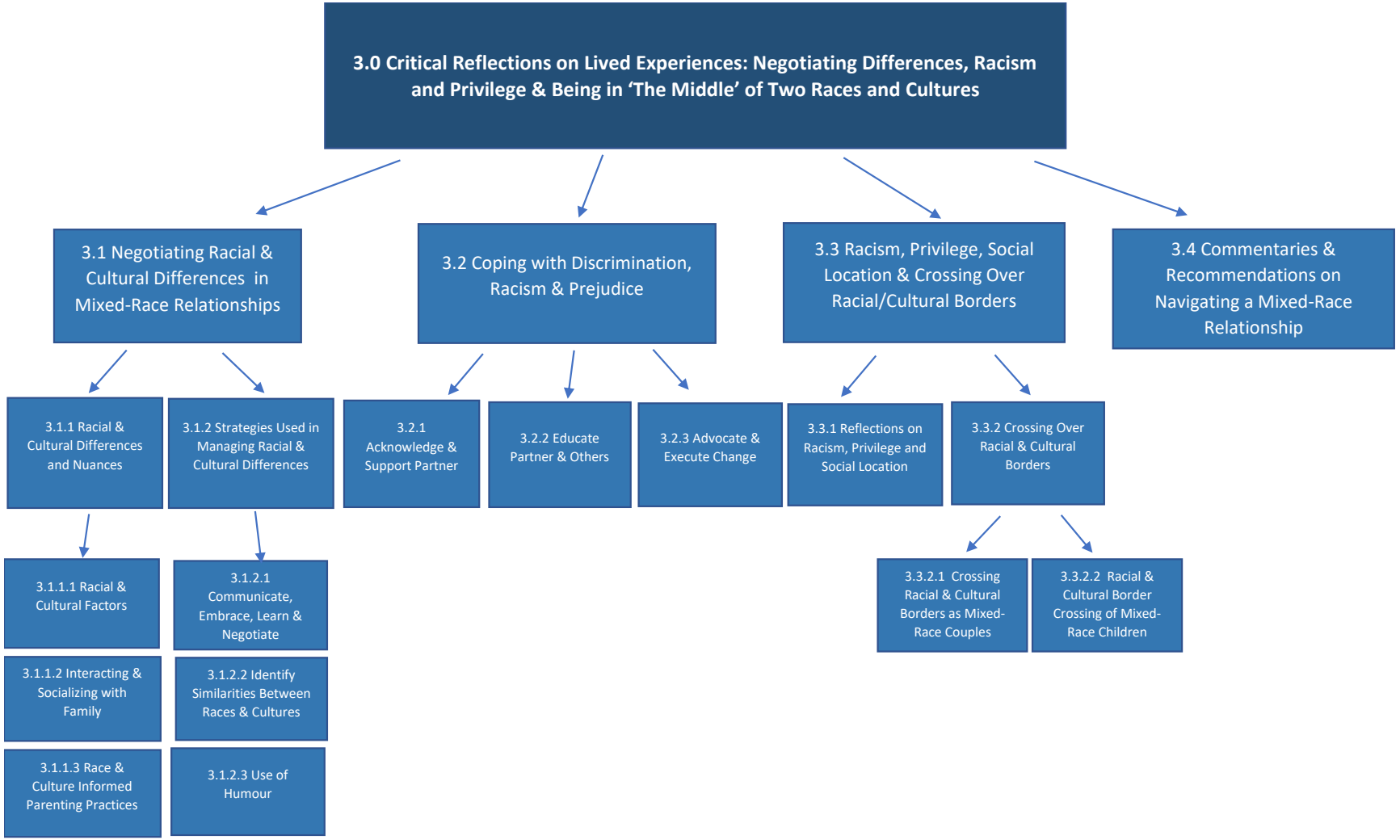

Figure 3: Critical Reflections on Lived Experiences: Negotiating Differences, Racism and Privilege, and Being in 'The Middle' of Two Races and Cultures

A few participants elaborated on differences in cultural foods and customs around eating. For example, Joy and Sam expressed indifference towards each other's traditional/cultural foods. However, Joy remarked on the efforts Sam makes to prepare food that she prefers, particularly when they visit Sam's family. They shared the following:

> Sam: "Nigerian food being cooked is very different for me and I don't really like it."
>
> Joy: "I guess it's just the food because…his food is very bland for me and I'm not used to that…Sam's always trying to cook something that I like when I'm there, but I think they're getting better."

In addition, Sophia shared further cultural differences, which she conceptualized as "light stuff," pertaining to portion size and the sharing of food when she contrasted the Korean culture to George's:

> "When we have dinner with your family I noticed that our meal portions are always smaller…then we realized, oh it's because White people snack all day long so when it's dinner time, you don't eat as much versus us Asians where we don't snack all day and then we're able to eat more like...little things like that or like you know like when ordering food we're just so used to sharing where White people are used to like 'no I'm ordering this one dish and it's mine'…just sort of the light stuff."

Lexie provided another example where she contrasted the customs between Jamaican and Italian funerals. She divulged that she was initially confounded by some of the celebratory traditions in Jamaican funerals in comparison to the more somber ones in Italian funerals. She remarked on using a "different lens" to conceive of these cultural divergences:

> "Other things are like really different and it just takes a different lens to look at it…for example, there was a funeral…somebody brought pictures of a funeral…in the Italian culture, you would never take pictures at a funeral...mourning, somber…whereas in the Jamaican culture, there's a lot of…reminiscing and celebrating and paying like respect to the person's life…for me that was a very stark difference…I'm like, I'm not taking pictures…to me, pictures are things you want to remember…so it's just a matter of just trying to understand that it's all just about paying respects."

Curly and Randy shared an example pertaining to the influence of culture on personality, particularly communication style. They highlighted that in the Iranian culture, personal matters are dealt with privately, whereas Randy's Canadian/Italian/French culture openly and immediately addresses disagreements. They shared the following:

> Curly: "Everyone carries a little bit of their culture…in our personality…Randy, if he feels a certain way, he'll just say it. It doesn't matter if there's a group of people around us…he'll tell me about it, whereas I'm like no, if you're in front of other people you need to hold it in and wait until we're in private to talk about it."
>
> Randy: "The tricky thing is we don't do that in our relationship…that's not our practice, we don't hold things in and let them explode, when we're upset, we let it out and then we move on…that's been successful for us…her culture it doesn't quite work that way."

These participants shared some differences that emerged in their mixed-unions, including variances in food preferences and customs around eating, dissimilarities around funeral customs, and discrepancies in communication styles. Curly also remarked that personality and thus communication style may be culture-driven. A few participants remarked on some strategies they utilized to address these differences, which included providing a cultural "spiel" as described by Tania and using a "different lens" to understand these divergences as remarked on by Lexie.

3.1.1.2 Interacting and Socializing with Family. Participants reflected on culturally diverse ways in which they and their partners interact and engage with their families of origin. For example, Sam shared several cultural differences he encountered with Joy's father, including suitable attire for meeting her father, culturally appropriate terminology for addressing her father, and parent-child relationship dynamics:

> "Her dad is extremely traditional…she told me 'you need to wear button up shirt the first time' and I was like 'holy crap'…I needed to make a good impression with a Nigerian father. I've been totally accepted by her father…I don't need to wear button up shirt anymore (laughs). I have to call him Mr. First Name…which

> is weird…in my culture, we call Mr. Last Name. I grew up in such a different family where my parents look up to me for answers…in her culture, there's no way a parent will do that…you look up to your parents, and what they say is golden and that's the end of it. So it's very different than what I'm used to."

Another example was shared by Tania, who reflected on diverse ways of family engagement and socialization. However, Tania deliberated on whether the differences originated from culture or family of origin:

> "The family get together is different than my family…my family, cousins hang out, speak English in the basement and everyone else upstairs speaking Tagalog really loud to each other…when we do come together…it's kind of messy (laughs) in a good way…versus Alexander's family, it's like everyone literally sitting in a circle talking to each other…together the whole time...it's just different…it's really nice…just a different type of family bonding…tied to I guess culture, I don't know."

Furthermore, Susan, who is White Canadian with mixed-European ancestry, shared her reflections on the distinct ways in which she and Henry, who is a Racialized Canadian with Filipino ancestry, interact with their respective parents. She described her approach as "more forward" compared to Henry's more tentative approach, particularly on receiving advice or recommendations from their families. Susan also contemplated whether this was personality- or culturally-derived:

> "The way we interact and talk with our parents on issues is different and that has come up…I don't know if it's cultural or personality related…it's really hard to say…I'm quite a bit more forward with my parents…I'm way more likely to sort of highlight to my parents…like, 'we don't really want to do that.'"

These narratives summarized the differences in family dynamics and interactions as described by participants. They identified divergences in the following: culturally appropriate ways of dressing around and addressing parents of their partners, differences in "family bonding," and dissimilarities in parent-child relationship dynamics as described by Sam.

Moreover, Susan identified differences in communication styles, but she also contemplated whether this was a derivative of culture or personality.

3.1.1.3 Race and Culture Informed Parenting Practices. Participants shared differences in their parenting practices that they attributed to their races and cultures. For example, Cassandra and Wendel remarked on the practice of massaging their babies with oil, which was credited to Cassandra's Goan heritage, and formal table etiquette, which was ascribed to Wendel's British-influenced culture. They reported the following:

> Wendel: "Rubbing the babies with the baby oil…I thought that was odd…like coating the kids with baby oil (laughs)."
>
> Cassandra: "It was massaged…that was a big thing. When we go to a restaurant, if the kids didn't take their napkin and laid it on their lap or cut up their bread…that would have bothered you."
>
> Wendel: "You use your outer fork first, pick up the bread, don't butter your bread in the air, put your napkin on your lap."

Another example was shared by Margriet and Elias, who reflected on their parenting styles and described them as "collaborative" and "authoritative," respectively. Elias questioned whether his style of parenting was culture-informed, but also highlighted that this authoritative style was common in Lebanon. Margriet and Elias shared the following:

> Margriet: "I think we parent the way we were parented, to some extent…your upbringing was much stricter…I'm always pulling…talk it through and acknowledge the emotions…kind of more collaborative parenting strategies."
>
> Elias: "Is that culture driven? I don't know if that's culture…maybe…maybe it's what I'm used to, because of my parents…that's what most kids in…Lebanon the way they grew up…yeah, maybe."
>
> Margriet: "It's like very rule based…authoritative…looking at your family, the way your dad would parent and your mom would kind of go along with it. I think that that's different than us. And that's not what you wanted for us…I do appreciate that sometimes…I feel like if we were both softies, our kids would be a lot brattier than they are (laughs)."

These couples reflected on how their cultures informed their parenting styles. Cassandra and Wendel offered concrete examples on child rearing practices related to personal care and dining etiquette. Margriet and Elias expounded on how a "rule based" approach may be associated with the Lebanese culture compared to the "acknowledge the emotions" and "collaborative" style ascribed to Margriet's Canadian and Dutch/Italian culture and heritage.

3.1.2 Strategies Used in Managing Racial and Cultural Differences. Couples shared approaches they used to manage differences stemming from their races and cultures. They highlighted that they often acknowledge and embrace their differences, as well as educate and compromise on these divergences, as exemplified by Henry, who described a "focus on communication" in his relationship with Susan. Some participants also shared that they often discern the similarities between their races and cultures, and Lexie remarked that a strength in their relationship is recognizing "how similar" their cultures are. In addition, some couples remarked on their use of humour in communication around racial and cultural differences. These accounts resulted in the creation of the following tertiary themes: (1) Communicate, Embrace, Learn and Negotiate, (2) Identify Similarities Between Races and Cultures, and (3) Use of Humour.

3.1.2.1 Communicate, Embrace, Learn and Negotiate. Couples shared common strategies they implement to manage differences emanating from their race and culture. They identified four primary approaches: communicate, embrace, learn and negotiate. For example, Henry and Susan shared that they are committed to strategies of active reflection, communication and embracing, to better understand and manage their differences. They said the following:

> Henry: "Focus on communication…even in times when our values are similar and strongly held but slightly different, we're able to create strong debates and fruitful debates about our different positions…there's differences in values, we're able to

> embrace each other's differences…regardless whether the difference in values are cultural or just personal."
>
> Susan: "Henry and I are very active in trying to do reflection…facilitated activities in our relationship, that helps us navigate…communication, value differences…so that we can continue to maintain like an openness and understanding of like where each other's coming from…those have really often like helped us…navigate through making decisions…for example…how to raise our son…help us maybe get out of our own stubbornness."

Similarly, Lydia shared that in her relationship with Robert, their ability to "effectively communicate" and be "open minded" have been two of their most significant "relationship assets in navigating" their mixed-race relationship:

> "It's so easy to come with that rigidity of 'I'm in my Ethiopian lane, you're in your Italian lane'…to just kind of constantly think about our own perspective, our own views, our own racial and cultural set of values. Being open minded, communicating effectively and having deep love for one another have been our biggest relationship assets in navigating the nature of our mixed-race relationship. The opportunities to communicate and debrief have strengthened our relationship and bond."

Another example was shared by Joy, who stated that in her relationship with Sam, they have embraced aspects of each other's culture and are also committed to learning various elements of each other's cultures, including language, cooking cultural foods and history:

> "I want to learn how to speak it so I can communicate more…I've taken like three French classes, tutor, doing the duo lingo app. Sam is a food person, he likes to cook…he's reached out to my aunt…wants to learn how to cook and have her come over and show some meals. Sam…he'll like research about Nigeria…he'll asked me questions…he bought a book…he's found ways to try to understand my culture a little bit more, understand you know what that's all about…at one point, we were thinking about going to Nigeria and he was open to doing that."

In addition, Curly and Randy reflected on the "learning curve" with regards to understanding each other's religious and cultural traditions. They also elaborated on strategies of communication and negotiation, specific to parenting:

> Curly: "It's been a huge learning experience for me…and similarly like the Persian new year…it's a big, big deal for my family…Randy, he knows about the

> significance of the different things now but you know it was a learning curve…he saw it as a positive thing."
>
> Randy: "A positive thing…it was cool to like tell my friends, family…I did Nowruz this past weekend...pretty cool to have that knowledge."
>
> Curly: "Before we had kids, we discussed the whole baptizing bit…things that were important like for me you know was to not baptize them…we discussed that right off the bat…I told Randy I wanted to talk to them in French…that originally was an issue with him because he couldn't understand what I was telling the kids and he couldn't understand what the kids were saying back to me but through the years he's learned to understand French."

These participants shared how communication, embracement, education and negotiation were used to navigate their racial and cultural differences. Curly and Randy described this process as a "learning curve" and conceptualized it as a "positive thing." Some participants denoted that these aforementioned strategies assisted with making decisions, assisted in understanding value differences, and as stated by Lydia, "strengthened our relationship and bond."

3.1.2.2 Identify Similarities Between Races and Cultures. Couples shared that throughout the course of their relationships, they uncovered similarities between their races and cultures. They regarded these parallels as derivations of strengths and resources for managing perceived differences. For example, George shared that the similarities in their values, stemming from Sophia's Korean cultural values and his family's values, represent some strengths in their relationship:

> "Where the strengths come from, like where the cultural values overlap…family and education and I'm sure there's more…I'd say education is probably more at the forefront traditionally in Asian families, like immigrant Asian families…rather than White families who've been there three or four generations…maybe that's even an additional strength on my side of the family."

Another example is Robert and Lydia, who shared that they too focused on the underlying similarities between the Italian and Ethiopian cultures. Robert reported that his family also

focused on inherent parallels and Lydia provided historical context for the source of connection between the Ethiopian and Italian cultures. They shared the following:

> Robert: "We try to really look at and focus in on those similarities…'hey your family does this and my family does this too'…it was a way for us to kind of connect further and bond...try to build on the similarities and make that work for us…my family, they focused on the similarities that our cultures had in common."

> Lydia: "Historical ties between Ethiopia and Italy, for context, there were two failed colonial attempts on the part of Italy on Ethiopia…the invasion and brief occupation of Italians led to long-term cultural influences, linguistic imprints on Ethiopia and its people which has made an impact…these historical events led to a lot of Ethiopians learning about Italians and Italian culture…there has been and still is a significant enough Italian presence even today in Ethiopia, leading to a high population of Ethiopian-Italian mixed-race relationships and families forming over several decades."

Furthermore, Jill shared that a strategy she and Jack used to reconcile their religious and cultural differences after a temporary separation during their courtship was a deep reflection on their religious values. She highlighted that they uncovered "a lot of commonalities" rather than differences between their Muslim and Jewish faiths:

> "The number one reason why we have been super strong as a couple…when we got back together and intentionally talked…we felt like, 'oh my God, our religions would never meet in the middle, our differences are too much.' But when we really dug deep…what does being a Muslim mean to you…what does being a Jewish person mean to you…I felt like there was a lot of commonalities than there were actually differences…we didn't intend to go write a contract…Jack was out of town and I was in Toronto, so we did it over email…it clarified every single thing in principle."

These participants shared how identifying parallels between their races and cultures served as sources of "strengths" as defined by George. Jill reported that they "dug deep" to overcome their perceived (religious) differences. Lydia and Robert further elaborated on the "historical ties" between their cultures, which resulted in some similarities and thus fostered further 'connection and bonding' between them and their families.

3.1.2.3 Use of Humour. Many couples in this study shared that they often use humour to acknowledge and address differences. For example, Curly reflected on the importance of having a jovial mindset towards some differences, and that she and Randy often "laugh about" some of their cultural differences among themselves:

> "I think what's really important is to make fun of the things that we don't like about the other culture…among ourselves we like laugh about it…like how ridiculous it is that my family is just so you know materialistic and comparative and how ridiculous it is that his mom cooks food in the microwave."

Another example was shared by Jack, who stated that in their relationship, they recognize his privilege as a White male and Jill's Racialized identity. He stated that they have humourously taken "advantage of racial stereotypes" and his privilege when engaging with society:

> "We joke about my White privilege...anytime she thinks White privilege would be handy, she's like, 'help the family out with your White privilege'…she's tried returning things and gotten 'no'…we take advantage of racial stereotypes when they're advantageous to us…we went traveling a little bit in Asia…she could get much better prices, as soon as they saw me the price triples."

Furthermore, some couples described positive use of humour by extended family members. Robert shared that when he first met Lydia's father, her father teasingly pointed out Italy's attempt to colonize Ethiopia:

> "I actually didn't learn about the attempted colonization of Ethiopia by Italy until I met her parents for the first time and her dad was like, 'oh you tried to colonize us'...and I was like, 'oh this is not good'…(laughs)."

Similarly, Susan shared teasing remarks made by Henry's extended family pertaining to her "Whiteness" and "privilege":

> "There's like lots of jokes…now that I'm in the family…they can join the curling club with me and things like that…different jokes here and there…highlighting my Whiteness…my privilege and my access to things."

These participants described how they utilize humour to acknowledge and contend with racial and cultural differences. Curly highlighted how significant it is to "laugh about" these

inherent differences and Jack shared that they jovially "take advantage of racial stereotypes." Susan further highlighted the use of "jokes" in Henry's family around her "privilege" and "access" as a White person.

3.2 Coping with Discrimination, Racism and Prejudice.

Participants elaborated on the ways in which they cope and provide support when confronted with discrimination, racism and prejudice. They identified several strategies. For example, Luca shared that he usually "acknowledges" incidences of racial discrimination and creates "space" for Jolanda to share her experiences. Alexander further stated that he attempts to "learn as much" as he can, and Sam and Joy shared that they utilize their "platforms" to incite change. These narrations resulted in the formulation of the following sub sub-themes, respectively: (1) Acknowledge and Support Partner, (2) Educate Partner and Others, and (3) Advocate and Execute Change.

3.2.1 Acknowledge and Support Partner. Participants highlighted the importance of acknowledging racism and prejudice, and the consequences of dismissing or minimizing these incidences. For example, Jolanda shared that though her experience of racial discrimination is rare, the increase in racism and discrimination targeting Asian people since the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant emotional impact. Luca elaborated on the importance of conversations, as well as the acknowledgement of these occurrences and their emotional implications:

> "These issues that are in the news affect so many of our friends, while some of those issues aren't directly affecting us…having a conversation about it is the most important thing…let's just talk about it, let's acknowledge it, acknowledge your feelings and just have a conversation about it…you need space to be talking about the things on the news or the things around us that are topical or worse…specific situations that hurt…open-ended questions can be great."

Similarly, Robert shared that he has learned over the years that in situations where Lydia experiences racism, "it's not about him or his feelings." He also emphasized the significance of not minimizing or dismissing her experiences:

> "I've learned…it's never about me and it's not about my feelings…what I learned the most is that she just needs support…somebody to listen…she doesn't need me to explain all the reasons why it's not racism and doesn't need me to explain all the reasons that she could be wrong…I'm just here to provide support…ask her if there's anything that I can do to help rectify the situation or if she just want to talk about it…recognizing that she doesn't need a problem solver to solve all the issues, sometimes she just needs somebody to talk to."

Another example was shared by Reggie, who stated that Lexie's knowledge of his culture has equipped her as a supportive 'sounding board,' evident in her non-generic responses towards Reggie's experiences of racial discrimination:

> "I've seen Lexie really get to know my culture…she's actually been someone that if I do have an issue that I can sound off on… and you know not get the 'White response'…for lack of a better term…I feel like she does really try to get where I'm coming from."

On the other hand, Wolf divulged that as a Racialized male, he "developed a thick skin." He and Firehawk recalled an incident of racial discrimination targeting Wolf's Racialized identity and their mixed-race relationship. Wolf stipulated that this incident had more of an adverse effect on Firehawk, where he assumed the supportive role. They shared the following:

> Wolf: "Growing up as a visible minority, you develop a thick skin…they have probably offended Firehawk more than they have offended me."
>
> Firehawk: "I cried and cried and cried in the car. Wolf said, 'oh, it doesn't matter, don't take any notice of them…just don't take any notice of them'…gradually, I got stronger and stronger."

These participants elaborated on some strategies they've utilized when acknowledging racism and providing support to their partners. Some included: creating "space" to "talk about" racism, asking "open-ended questions" about partner's experience, "acknowledge feelings"

stemming from racist incidences, and not assuming a "problem solver" role or explain "why it's not racism." Reggie further shared that Lexie has become intimately acquainted with his race and culture, thus possessing the capacity to 'get where he's coming from.' Moreover, Wolf shared an example where he provided support to Firehawk and stated that this stemmed from having developed "a thick skin" as a Racialized male.

3.2.2 Educate Partner and Others. Participants also elaborated on strategies of information sharing and education in addressing and managing incidences of racism, prejudice and discrimination. For example, Tania shared that in her relationship with Alexander, she previously felt "isolated" in situations where she felt discriminated against. She highlighted that by sharing her discomfort, along with Alexander's commitment to attending workshops on anti-oppression and watching anti-racist movies, he has developed the skills to provide the support that she needs and to stand up to others:

> "Sharing with him what people have said…talk about why it bothered me…that way if it happened again then I could lean on him more versus like some of the first times it happened I felt very like isolated…weird and uncomfortable…we've been together for a long time now, when he notices it…I don't even have to say anything…he's like, 'oh yeah, I didn't like how they said this.' He's working really hard to be a better support because I don't have the energy to always speak up…Alexander's been really great at attending like workshops to gain the tools…anti-racist movies…we talked about race almost every day because it's such a big part of my identity."

Another example was conveyed by Lydia and Robert, who shared that they have had conversations around power and privilege and microaggressions with Robert's family. Robert also remarked that Lydia challenged his thinking and growth, and imparted knowledge from her lived experiences as a Black woman. They shared the following:

> Lydia: "Moments where there's topic of conversation that comes up…hits home for me more than his family realizes or acknowledges...where it might be more of an educational conversation."

> Robert: "Open conversations about…use of language or stereotypes and microaggressions…tough conversations with my family about power and privilege…haven't always been easy…it's something that we're navigating through…we're both really passionate about and we've expressed to each other as well as to my family…we want to be inclusive…recognize and celebrate diversity…we challenge each other…if I say something that I'm like completely ignorant about…she'll be like 'no that's wrong and this is why I think it's wrong'…it kind of pushes me to think differently."

Susan described another approach to education, where she highlighted that she and Henry have an "intentionality" to expose their son to various forms of diversity, represented by children's dolls, games and books:

> "An intentionality to just kind of like expose our son…as an example…when we're choosing, which kinds of like dolls or games…to expose him to…we do try to make sure that he's exposed to different races…kids that look different in books…children that are represented from a number of different cultures or backgrounds…characters and things that look like him…so that he also identifies with some characters."

In the preceding narratives, participants shared various strategies of educating themselves, partners, families and/or others on racism and prejudice. They conveyed that education occurred through "tough" conversations, participation in workshops, watching anti-racist movies, and exposure to "different races" through diverse children's toys. They also shared that through education, they were able to "challenge" racist and prejudiced thinking, "gain the tools" and "lean on" their partners when confronted with racism.

3.2.3 Advocate and Execute Change. Participants shared experiences in which they advocated and executed change in response to discrimination, racism and prejudice. For example, Joy shared that through a conversation on their roles and responsibilities in affecting change, Sam was inspired to use his "platform" as a White male to join the "diversity and inclusion steering committee" at his work:

> "Sam and I had a really serious conversation…need to use our platforms, to bring more diversity, to talk about it, to stand up for people…he was like, 'what can I

> do?'…and I'm just like, 'use your platform, you're a White male, use that platform when you're in a room with other people who may talk about women, Blacks or different religion or gays and lesbians'…stop that, don't encourage that...that's when he's like…I want to join the diversity inclusion…it was really nice to see that Sam was not just like, 'are you okay,' but more of like, I want to get involved somehow and I want to see what I can do to help."

Similarly, Alexander revealed that through dialogues with Tania and witnessing her experiences of racial discrimination, he too was motivated to become involved in various committees in order to incite change from the "inside":

> "I've joined a few committees at work too to try and have a voice from kind of the inside and not just kind of criticizing from the outside. I can actually kind of steer it in the right direction."

Furthermore, Lydia shared that she and Robert have learned to instill "healthy boundaries" with others who may not "foster a positive space" for their growth as a mixed-race couple. She also added that Robert has 'shut down' incidences of racial discrimination and has educated members of his family, a burden she described as potentially "re-traumatizing":

> "Given the nature of our mixed-race relationship, not all relationships will evolve with us in terms of being accepting…we've learned more about the importance of managing expectations…instilling healthy boundaries…I've dealt with racism within his family and he's stood up for me…shoot it down but also go beyond…do the educational piece…it takes a lot of burden and weight off of me as a Racialized person…not having to you know carry the burden and weight of educating White people which can be sort of re-traumatizing…so I appreciate that he takes the lead, especially when it is coming from his family."

These participants shared actions they have engaged in to advocate against and execute change around racial discrimination. Joy shared that Sam utilized his "platform" as a White male to "stop" and not "encourage" racist discourse by joining a diversity committee at his work. Similarly, Alexander shared that he too joined a few committees to "have a voice" from the "inside." Lydia discussed Robert's actions of 'standing up' to his family and their efforts in constructing "healthy boundaries," particularly around those who are unsupportive of their mixed-race relationship.

3.3 Racism, Privilege, Social Location and Crossing Over Racial/Cultural Borders.

Participants shared some critical reflections on racism, privilege and social location within the context of their Racialized-White interracial unions. For example, Lydia shared that acknowledging the "racial power inequities" in society is important, particularly in the context of her mixed-race relationship. She also stated that "being side-by-side" with Robert has revealed how "pronounced and jarring" racism is, especially when they witness "how much easier Robert has it in life." Some participants also elaborated on their experiences of crossing socially constructed racial and cultural borders or boundaries by virtue of their mixed-race/culture relationship, and Alexander described it as "being in the middle." These commentaries led to the genesis of the following sub sub-themes, respectively: (1) Reflections on Racism, Privilege and Social Location, and (2) Crossing Over Racial and Cultural Borders.

3.3.1 Reflections on Racism, Privilege and Social Location. Participants shared their reflections and experiences of racism and privilege and its implications on their social location as mixed-race couples and as individuals. For example, Jolanda contrasted her experiences travelling alone and her experiences travelling with Luca. She shared that travelling with Luca provided a protective "shield" because of his privileged status as a White male. She also highlighted that external assumptions about her nationality changed when she travelled with Luca:

> "The interesting thing about travelling with Luca…I almost think of him almost like a shield in those situations…because I'm with you nothing will happen because you're a White guy and nobody's going to mess with you. In Europe, when I was by myself, people would be like, 'oh you're a little Chinese girl,' whereas when I'm with you…they think, 'oh you must be an American or Canadian couple.' It changes you, something about where you're from…people don't say Ni Hao to me, they say hello…when I'm with Luca whereas, I get that on my own."

Another example was shared by Margriet, who revealed she used her membership to the majority group as a "privilege icebreaker" to "spare" Elias, who is Lebanese-Canadian, the "discomfort" of being racially profiled by airport security:

> "When we go through airport security, I sometimes like to go first…I like for you to be carrying the kids…going to make it clear that we're a family…I guess of being part of visible majority culture that I expect airport security to be smooth for me…I want to kind of make that smooth for us as a family as well…I kind of use like a privilege icebreaker (laughs)…I'll just smooth the path…I just think if I can kind of like spare you the time or discomfort of being like not so randomly selected."

Margriet shared another reflection on how the experiences of people with Racialized or religious minority status may vary based on 'degrees of visibility.' She recalled an incident where one neighbour made racist and Islamophobic remarks about another neighbour, and realized that the neighbour assumed "sameness" because of their "shared Whiteness" and because of Elias's 'less visible difference' compared to the neighbour who was being racially targeted:

> "The neighbors beside us moved in…from the Middle East…more visibly so because the wife wore a niqab…very clear to the neighbours…these people were from another country…Muslim. The neighbour across the street…Dutch descent…didn't really know about me or my family…she was making some comments about the neighbours that were Islamophobic…maybe she had a sense that I would collude…because we had our shared whiteness…that really bothered me…the fact that other White people would assume…I'd just be cool with racism or Islamophobia…makes me aware of the fact that people who maybe are not as visible…can fly below the radar…and people kind of assume sameness."

Similar to Margriet's sentiments on the visibility of differences, Susan, who is a White Canadian with mixed-European ancestry and Henry, who is a Racialized Canadian with Filipino ancestry, shared that though they were both accepted by each other's families, they wondered if having darker skin tone would have potentially altered the degree of acceptance by both their families. They shared the following:

> Henry: "Susan was very accepted by my family but I have my reservations about if Susan was of darker complexion, how much, what the experience would have been."
>
> Susan: "Same with mine, I'm not confident that you would have been as accepted."

Furthermore, Tania, who is Racialized with mixed Filipino and Chilean ancestry, also shared that Alexander's 'Whiteness' may have advantageously contributed to the degree of acceptance and receptiveness shown by her aunt:

> "This is kind of weird…my aunt, she just loves Alexander…she knows Alexander is a great guy but like part of me feels like she just likes him a lot cause he's White...sometimes."

Participants shared some critical insights and experiences of racism, privilege and social location as Racialized-White couples. The privileges bestowed to White partners were shared by a few, where Jolanda described Luca as a "shield" in some context, Margriet shared that she uses her "privilege icebreaker" to protect Elias from potential profiling, and Tania shared how Alexander's race may have contributed to her aunt's acceptance of him. Moreover, Jolanda shared how assumptions about her nationality changes when she travels with Luca and a few participants highlighted how the degree of visible differences such as skin tone and religious clothing may impact one's experiences.

3.3.2 Crossing Over Racial and Cultural Borders. Couples shared their experiences and insights on crossing racial and cultural borders or boundaries by virtue of their mixed-race unions. They also elaborated on their experiences and perceptions of raising children who have traversed racial and cultural boundaries. These dialogues led to the formulation of the following tertiary themes: (1) Crossing Racial and Cultural Borders as Mixed-Race Couples and (2) Racial and Cultural Border Crossing of Mixed-Race Children.

3.3.2.1 Crossing Racial and Cultural Borders as Mixed-Race Couples. Some

participants shared that as a result of their mixed-race unions, they traverse racial and cultural borders and thus have some access and insights into their partner's race and culture. For example, Margriet relayed that being with Elias grants her access and understanding of Arabic and Middle Eastern cultural celebrations. She also remarked that her mixed-race relationship motivated her to learn Arabic, which has facilitated social connections with new Arabic friends:

> "When we go to an event…particularly in the Middle East or we'd go visit your family or a wedding, where most of the people were of Arab descent or Middle Eastern…I felt like you were kind of my ticket to get in there…I may not have been at that event…or may not have been as comfortable at that event without you to kind of guide me through…like, what was happening or what was expected. I've taken a class in Arabic…learn a few words in Arabic…always gets me in good graces with any new Arab speaking friends that I make…that's kind of been a fun, connecting point."

Similarly, Randy shared that his relationship with Curly serves as an 'ice breaker' when establishing new connections with other Persian people:

> "Whenever I meet someone, I could tell the last name and the accent, I'm excited to talk to them…sometimes I'd mention…I married a Persian lady and I know the culture very well…it sort of breaks the ice and like gets a nice friendly conversation."

Sophia, who is a Racialized Canadian with Korean heritage, further shared that her relationship with George provides her more comfort in geographical spaces that are predominantly White, and that his identity grants her access to these spaces with less external scrutiny:

> "Depending on where I am, if I go to an area that's predominantly say White, it's funny…like I feel more comfortable being with George because he is White. I feel like I will be more accepted in a way because sometimes I do think that…they look at me weirdly because I shouldn't be in this area, in this small little town that's all White…I'm like, 'at least I have George and like he is White so I guess I'm okay.'"

On the other hand, Alexander summarized his access to both the dominant culture and Tania's race and culture as "being in the middle." He shared that because of his White identity, he hears uncensored racist remarks:

> "They'll be comments…if you ever mention and say like 'woah you can't say that'…I guess it's kind of weird being in the middle where you hear both sides…one side I guess doesn't seem to listen very well where they just get super defensive…they can't admit that…what they [said] or done was racist in any way."

Another insight on traversing racial and cultural borders is shared by Joy, a Black Nigerian Canadian participant, who stated that others sometimes assume her relationship with Sam grants her more privilege:

> "Sometimes people are like 'oh you must be more privileged because you're with a White guy'…I don't really feel or see that or I don't experience it."

The preceding commentaries summarized the experiences and insights on crossing racial and cultural borders. Alexander described it as "the middle," where he "hears both sides" and Margriet described Elias as her "ticket in" to his culture. Both Margriet and Randy shared how their mixed-race relationships have facilitated greater connection with members from their partner's race/culture and Randy remarked that it "breaks the ice." Moreover, Sophia shared that she feels "more accepted" when in predominantly White regions with George, whereas Joy commented that crossing racial borders does not bequeath her with "more privilege."

3.3.2.2 Racial and Cultural Border Crossing of Mixed-Race Children. Some couples expounded on their experiences raising mixed-race children who traverse racial and cultural borders. Margriet shared that their children's physical characteristics may result in external assumptions about their identities. She also shared a conversation between her sons, now 6 and 8, that occurred a few years ago, where her son with a slightly darker skin tone proclaimed that he was "more Lebanese" because "he looked more like daddy":

> "The boys do have light hair and green eyes…people may make the assumption that they're White children or they may not be sure of their heritage…I really like for them to share…I am Lebanese and I'm proud of this part of myself…I'm really happy…they identify as that and that they're proud of that…the older one has slightly darker skin than the younger one…he said to the younger brother, 'I'm more Lebanese than you…because my skin is darker and I look more like daddy'…I was like…'you're equally Lebanese…you're equally from mommy side of the family too, you're equally European…different people look different ways.'"

Sophia also shared that during the summer months when her skin tone is darker, she may be misconstrued as the nanny because her son's physical traits may be categorized as White rather than Asian or mixed-race:

> "I feel like in the summer when I'm super tanned…I'm like 'oh my God I'm going to look like the nanny.'"

Another example was shared by Sam and Joy, who are expecting their first child. Joy believes the colour of their baby's skin may play a deterministic role in how they are racially characterized. They expressed hope for their child to acknowledge and identify with their multiple racial and cultural identities regardless of external assumptions and persuasions. They said the following:

> Joy: "If our babies are dark, like me…I feel like they might then just kind of say, maybe I'm Black, because society looks at them as Black. I want to make sure our kids know that I am…White, Black, African, French Canadian…be able to say all those things, be proud."

> Sam: "We don't want our kids to see themselves as what the society see them…society is more on surface...if they're dark…I don't want them to just identify as I'm a Black guy or Black girl…it's going to be our work to try to put that into them right and teach them…our baby is going to be just as much White as they are Black, even though they might have a darker skin...it's important."

In addition, Tania shared that in conversations with Alexander on raising mixed-race children, she disclosed to him that he would have to engage in dialogues around racial identity, something his White counterparts in same-race relationships would not have to navigate:

> "We're reading a new book, *Me and White Supremacy*…it references a list where it talks about like privilege…we were trying to check off how much privilege we were holding…one of them was 'I don't have to talk about…like my racial identity with my kids or…talk to them about their racial identity'…I was like talking to Alexander about that…this is something now that you will have to do that your White counterparts who are also with other White people don't have to do."

These participants spoke about how society makes "assumptions" about the identities of their children based on physical features and may mislabel the parent, such as in Sophia's case where she often worries about being misidentified as "the nanny" because of some physical differences between her and her son. Margriet also shared deliberations that mixed-race children may face where, for example, one of their sons proclaimed to be "more Lebanese" because of his "slightly darker skin" compared to his brother. Furthermore, Tania commented on how interracial couples have to talk to their children about racial identity, unlike White couples with children.

3.4 Commentaries and Recommendations on Navigating a Mixed-Race Relationship.

Couples shared concluding thoughts on their lived experiences in their mixed-race relationships relevant to race and culture near the end of each interview. Many spontaneously offered their discernments, recommendations and wisdom on navigating their partnerships. For example, Joy shared that the strengths of these partnerships will stem from "the individual themselves" and will require them to be "open and willing to hear somebody else's experiences." Below are additional commentaries shared by some participants.

Wendel, a White Canadian of British ancestry, reflected on the strengths of his mixed-race relationship and emphasized the benefits of 'mixing up' diverse races and cultures from an early age:

> "I'm always an advocate that when kids go to school, they should be mixed…we shouldn't have certain dominant cultures in our classrooms. I don't think that's beneficial at all…we should make a point to be mixed up in that environment."

Jill, a Racialized Bengali-born Canadian, elaborated on the significance of having "courage of your own conviction," particularly in circumstances where interracial couples are confronted with insistent antagonism from family:

> "I think some challenges are...until you have the courage of your own conviction that this is something you really want…these are very emotional decisions and these are life decisions and being with another person, living with them, getting married to them, making life long decisions is hard enough…to have your family and everybody else around you telling you 'don't do it' just makes it so much worse."

Joy remarked on the cruciality of communication, particularly in mixed-race relationships because of the intricacies of mixing unique races and cultures. She relayed that healthy mixed-race relationships require openness and conversations that "make the uncomfortable comfortable":

> "When you have two very different…I'm African Nigerian, there's a whole culture there and Sam is French Canadian, there's also a whole culture there…the people that will have healthy relationships and will last are the ones who are open and want to have that communication and talk about some of those difficult things…having more and more of those conversations allows you to make the uncomfortable comfortable and I just think communication is so important in every relationship but in a mixed one, communication is so crucial."

Margriet, a White Canadian of Italian and Dutch heritage, shared that interracial couples may face more challenges if there is rigidity on how culture is maintained and preserved. She recommended "a spirit of openness and embracing" in integrating and maintaining each partner's distinct racial and cultural identity:

> "If you're very kind of stuck…very rigid on how you preserve a culture…it can make things tough…that has to be done with like a spirit of openness and embracing and realizing that not everything is going to be the same and that there's no one best way to do things."

In addition, Lexie shared that in her relationship with Reggie, their past relational challenges stemmed from individual and value differences rather than their Italian and Jamaican racial and cultural divergences:

> "Reggie and I have done couples therapy…more based on values…us growing as people…rather than saying well, like 'my culture or my race tells me this.'"

The preceding excerpts captured some of the insights and recommendations offered by mixed-race couples. Some suggested that strengths may stem from the "individual" and challenges may stem from "value differences" and "being rigid." Some shared that successful mixed-race relationships are contingent on "communication," "a spirit of openness and embracing" and "courage." Wendel shared the significance of 'mixing' races and cultures from an early age.

Summary of Core Theme Three. The third core theme built on the findings presented in core theme two. First, participants shared the racial and cultural differences that emerged in their relationships, such as communication styles, culturally distinct ways of interacting with family, and culturally informed parenting styles and practices. A few participants deliberated on whether some of these divergences stemmed from culture/race or the individual. Though these differences were not considered challenges, participants imparted strategies they utilized to address these variances such as communication, embracement, education and negotiation, identifying parallels between their races and cultures, and using humour. These strategies were also specified as relationship strengths that cultivated deeper connection and bond.

Second, participants critically reflected on their experiences of racial discrimination, previously identified in core theme two, and shared their approaches in managing these encounters. They specified the criticality of acknowledgement and support which included creating "space" to process feelings stemming from racial discrimination. They also relayed

strategies of education and learning, which they believed better equipped them to identify racism, provide support and confront racial discrimination. Some conveyed their engagement in advocacy and change, such as utilizing their privileged platforms to challenge and change racist discourse and establish healthy boundaries.

Third, participants shared some critical insights on the impact of racism and privilege on their social location. A few shared that the privileges inherent to White partners served as a "shield" against external scrutiny and racial profiling. One Racialized participant discussed how her interracial union altered external assumptions about her nationality, and a few participants emphasized how the degree of visible differences may influence judgements and experiences in society. The experiences of crossing socially constructed racial and cultural borders were described as "the middle" where it allowed some access to their partner's race and culture. This access was identified as creating greater acceptance by one participant and another participant shared that it did not increase their access to "privilege." Some participants discussed that raising mixed-race children who traverse racial/cultural borders resulted in external assumptions and categorization of their children's identity based on phenotype, and may also result in mislabeling the parents. Conversations about (mixed) identity were deemed a task interracial couples have to undertake with their children.

Core theme three concluded by presenting some recommendations and wisdom offered by mixed-race couples, where they emphasized that the strengths and challenges in these relationships may actually stem from the individual and their core values. They conveyed the importance of communication, openness and courage, particularly within the context of mixed-race relationships.

The preceding core themes were all dedicated to presenting the lived experiences of mixed-race couples relevant to race and culture. The final core theme – *Lived Experiences of Mixed-Race Couples Beyond Race and Culture* – will offer further understanding of these unions with a focus on intersectionality and core relationship values evident in these partnerships.

4.0 Lived Experiences of Mixed-Race Couples Beyond Race and Culture

In the fourth core theme, *Lived Experiences of Mixed-Race Couples Beyond Race and Culture* (*Figure 4*), participants expounded on their lived experiences that extended beyond the boundaries of race and culture. These elaborations showcased the multifaceted and rich intricacies of these unions that surpassed race and culture. Participants divulged their experiences surrounding their intersecting identities inclusive of race and culture, as exemplified by Jolanda, who discussed potential "safety issues" when she travels as a "solo female" compared to feeling safer when she travels with Luca. Participants also identified their core values that were analogous to their partners' and were deemed central to their partnership, such as "family connection" as identified by Joy, "compassion" as specified by Lexie, and "communication" as declared by Sam. These narratives resulted in the evolvement of the following sub-themes, respectively: (1) *Beyond Race and Culture: Intersectional Identities and Experiences in Mixed-Race Relationships* and (2) *Shared Values in Mixed-Race Relationships.*

4.1 Beyond Race and Culture: Intersectional Identities and Experiences in Mixed-Race Relationships.

Participants elaborated on their lived experiences in their mixed-race relationships specific to the intersection of their race/culture with other dimensions of their identity. They shared how the geographical region in which they reside as well as their country of birth and immigration influenced their experiences in their mixed-race relationships. Participants

elaborated on the intersectionality of race and culture with native language and religion. Couples also discussed the intersections of race/culture with gender as well as age and generational influences. A few couples elaborated on the intersectionality of their race/culture with their (dis)abilities, socio-economic status and the current socio-political climate. These narratives resulted in the emergence of the following sub sub-themes, respectively: (1) Race/Culture and Geographical Region of Residence, (2) Race/Culture and Country of Birth and Immigration, (3) Race/Culture and Native Language, (4) Race/Culture and Religion, (5) Race/Culture and Gender, (6) Race/Culture and Age, (7) Race/Culture and (Dis)abilities, (8) Race/Culture and Socio-Economic Status, and (9) Race/Culture and Socio-Political Climate. Some of these intersecting identities are attributable to ethnic and cultural factors, and were presented in the preceding core themes. However, to ensure clarity and a comprehensive presentation of all intersecting identities, the intersection of race/culture with all social identities identified by participants will be presented in this sub-theme.

4.1.1 Race/Culture and Geographical Region of Residence. Mixed-race couples shared how their experiences were influenced by the geographical regions in which they lived. For example, Wendel shared positive experiences of being in a mixed-race relationship in Canada, particularly in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), compared to other countries, as well as rural parts of Ontario and Canada. He divulged that they have considered relocating outside of the GTA, but deliberated on the potential impact on Cassandra's feelings of discomfort due to the lack of diversity and the lack of mixed-race couples in these rural regions:

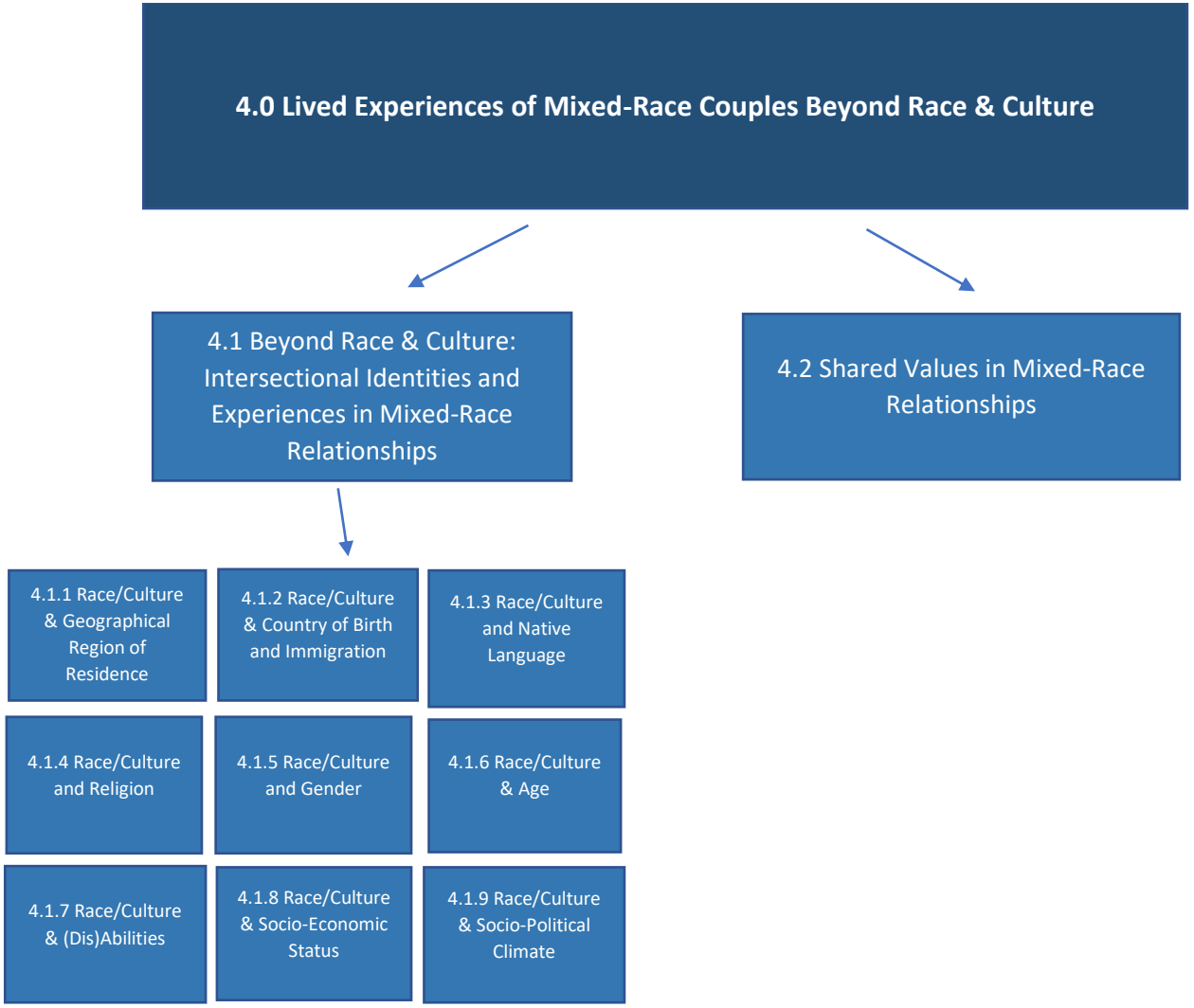

Figure 4: Lived Experiences of Mixed-Race Couples Beyond Race and Culture

> "I keep saying to myself and saying to Cassandra, 'thank God we're Canadian.'…any way out of the GTA and it's not the case…the unfortunate thing is that you get outside the outskirts of the city, it's not the same…we're thinking about…moving on to maybe one of these communities, where it might be very much more noticeable. The fact you know, that we are a mixed-marriage here in this city…you don't feel it, you don't sense it. You get outside…it might lead to Cassandra being uncomfortable…that's rural Ontario, that's rural Canada."

Similarly, Jack described Canada as a "tolerant community" for mixed-race couples, particularly for his White-Jewish and Racialized-Muslim mixed-race partnership. He mentioned feeling a sense of being "buffered" in comparison to the United States:

> "In Canada we're so blessed to have such a tolerant community…I think we're really buffered...like the fact that what's happening in the US, I can never imagine it here."

Another example was shared by Margriet, who contrasted her experience between Canada and the Middle East. She described mixed-race relationships in Canada as "more common" and expressed that though they did not experience any 'barriers or hardships' in either country, she described a greater "sense of difference" in the Middle East due to various forms of segregation:

> "We lived together in the Middle East for 9 years and the kids were born over there…there was maybe more of a sense of difference, for me as a mixed-race couple over there than there was in Canada. I feel like in Canada, maybe that's a lot more common…where we were living in the Middle East…people were often quite segregated based on the type of work they were doing or the type of culture that they shared…it was just something I was more aware of…it wasn't necessarily a barrier or anything that we faced…any particular hardship."

These participants reflected on their lived experiences as interracial couples relevant to geographical region. They described Toronto, the GTA and Canada as "tolerant," where mixed-race couples "don't feel" as different. They shared that interracial unions are "more common" in Toronto and the GTA relative to rural Ontario, rural Canada and other countries.

4.1.2 Race/Culture and Country of Birth and Immigration. Participants shared how their country of birth as well as immigration had some influence on their mixed-race

relationships, particularly in the early stages of their relationships, including partner choice and courtship. For example, Sophia characterized her family of origin as "nontraditional" relative to other Korean families and George articulated that this may have contributed to an "easier transition" into Sophia's family, relative to had they been recent immigrants:

> "Your parents have been here…like your mom speaks English...we had a lot of things in common…it was a lot easier transition than would have been if she, you know, was new to Canada and her parents had just arrived…I think that would have a step that would be a lot harder for me to take, like a sort of a bigger leap of faith in the early stages…I don't know if I ever would have gotten that far…but it was fairly easy, like a fairly easy transition."

Similarly, Wendel highlighted that Cassandra immigrated to Canada at age 2 and he remarked that it "might be a different situation" if they had met soon after she immigrated at an older age:

> "I'd just like to make mention of, Cassandra came here at 2, she was raised here. I think if I had met Cassandra and she just come over from Pakistan, you know, and she was 20…it might be a different situation with her and probably with her parents as well."

Randy further communicated his beliefs that 'differences' diminish when both partners are Canadian-born irrespective of country of ancestry, race and/or culture:

> "Experiences are different with everyone…like their background's Indian but…they're born in Canada and you know, there's no difference really."

These participants reflected on how time of immigration and country of birth influenced their experiences as mixed-race couples. For example, George described having an "easy transition" into Sophia's family because they were not "new to Canada" and Randy postulated that there is "no difference" when both partners are "born in Canada," regardless of race and culture.

4.1.3 Race/Culture and Native Language. Participants elaborated on their experiences navigating native languages in their mixed-race partnerships. Native languages were mostly defined as strengths within the boundaries of mixed-race relationships; however, several couples

identified some limitations specifically when engaging with extended family members. For example, Randy and Curly emphasized the advantages of having multi-lingual children; however, they also shared some challenges, where Randy is unable to participate in some French speaking conversations between Curly and their children, as well as Farsi speaking conversations between Curly and her family. They said the following:

> Curly: "I told Randy I wanted to talk to them in French…that originally was an issue with him because he couldn't understand what I was telling the kids and he couldn't understand what the kids were saying back to me but through the years he's learned to understand French more."
>
> Randy: "It's awesome for them to learn, to have these two languages and then at least maybe some comprehension on the Farsi side as well…the one barrier…just thinking about culture…the language…like especially with her grandparents they don't speak a lot of English. I don't know if that's like considered a barrier…I'll be in the conversation and all of a sudden they start talking in Farsi and I'm wondering what's being talked about…it took getting used to."

Another example was shared by Joy and Sam. Joy commented, "I already knew they'd be a huge language barrier" when reflecting on the initial limitations in communicating with Sam's family, who are primarily French speaking. Sam highlighted that within his family, he is the only one who lives his "life in English" and is married to a Racialized person. He also shared initial barriers in communication with Joy's father, whom he described as having a strong Yoruba accent:

> "I'm the one who's like, live my life in English and then after that live my life with, you know, a non-White person…her dad has an extremely strong Yoruba accent…his main language is their home language…at first, I could barely understand what he was saying…so Joy had to translate a lot of what he was saying…at first I was shy, I didn't want him to repeat. I didn't want to insult him…now I can actually just tell him like speak slowly and repeat."

Sophia further remarked on the hindrance in communication between George and her father, who primarily speaks Korean. However, she also elaborated on the language barrier between herself and her father because she does not speak Korean:

> "My dad, his English isn't very good either so the relationship between us is actually a bit weird because I don't speak Korean and he doesn't really speak English, so really it's like my mom who sort of translating for us."

These participants described native language as both a strength, particularly when transmitted to children, and also a "barrier." Some shared how it hindered socialization to some degree with their own family as described by Sophia and their partner's family as shared by Sam who stated, he "could barely understand" Joy's father's accent.

4.1.4 Race/Culture and Religion. Participants discussed the role and influence of religion on their experiences as interracial couples. Margriet and Elias highlighted that their shared Catholic faith allowed their families to "come together" and suspected it could have presented some challenges if they were of different religious backgrounds. Furthermore, Elias speculated that, had he been an Arab-Muslim, he potentially would have experienced more racism and discrimination. They shared the following:

> Margriet: "They can kind of come together on that point…the shared faith…being of a different [religion], that would have been more challenging…even when we were dating, it was good to have us of the same religious background…I think it would have been much more challenging from the Arab Muslim friends that I have, if I were to date you and you were Muslim…that would be much harder for me, I think, to…get in with your family."

> Elias: "When people are being racist, it's less about Arabs and more about Muslims…so if I was a Muslim-Arab, I suspect I would feel differently."

Another example was shared by Alexander, who stated that although he and Tania are not religious, they had a Christian-influenced upbringing. Therefore, had Tania been of "a really different religion," he hypothesized that they could have experienced challenges from extended members of his family who were devoted Christian missionaries:

> "I think it's possible on my end…just because I've got some family members who are extremely religious and were missionaries…they actually travelled to the Philippines…spread the word of God there for half their lives…if it was a really

> different religion as far as different religions go, maybe that would have played a role."

Jack also shared that the intersection of Jill's race and religion contributed to his father's initial objection to their relationship:

> "A non-white person who was Muslim was like the worst combination from his perspective."

These couples shared their experiences with religion. Margriet proclaimed that their shared religion allowed their families to "come together" and Elias further stated, "if I was a Muslim-Arab," he may have encountered more discrimination. Similarly, Alexander shared that if Tania was from a "really different religion," they may have faced some opposition by his extended family, and Jack described how Jill's "non-White" and "Muslim" identities were initially perceived as the "worst combination" by his father.

4.1.5 Race/Culture and Gender. Participants elaborated on gender differences and commented on gender-specific experiences in their heterosexual mixed-race relationships. For example, Jolanda and Luca shared that in their relationship, they often engage in more conversations around the "female/male perspective" relative to experiences pertaining to their racial/cultural differences. They shared the following:

> Jolanda: "It's more often the female/male perspective that is different I think. Like you'll be like… 'I've never had to think about how to express myself in a way that is not going to be like emotionally burdensome to other people whereas I think that like women do that all the time, like how can I say this thing without making the other person feel bad.'"

> Luca: "Her experiences about being a woman, being a woman in the workplace or just walking down the street…there's things that I have never experienced or never even thought…or how I have never ever had to do that in my life…I've had some enlightenment."

Similarly, Susan shared that in her relationship with Henry, particularly following the birth of their son, discussions around gender roles are more frequent compared to dialogues around race:

> "I think we sometimes talk…less about race and maybe more about our gender roles in our relationship, in terms of the conversations we've had. I think probably been more about gender than it has been about race as of recent."

Furthermore, Cassandra shared an experience where she felt subjugated because of both her gender and her racial/cultural identity. She shared that she frequently debriefs and seeks support from Wendel during these experiences:

> "He sort of like was…male though trying to shut me up… feel like they can butt ahead of a woman…and then to me, I felt more so culturally, because I was East Indian, he was Caucasian, that you know, he had more of a privilege. I pointed out the culture and the gender as the reason why this man felt like he could go ahead of me."

These participants described the implications of gender, where Susan shared that in her relationship, they have more conversations about their "gender roles" and "less about race." Cassandra shared an example where both her race and gender were "the reason" a White male attempted to 'shut her up.'

4.1.6 Race/Culture and Age. A few participants reflected on the influence of age and generational factors on their experiences in their interracial unions. For example, Wolf, a Racialized Sri-Lankan born Canadian, contrasted their experience in the past to present day. He described present day as 'more accepting' and 'readier for change' compared to the 1950s and 1960s:

> "It's a lot easier today, for people of mixed-marriage, than the 50s or 60s. Today, things are more acceptable and I think the world is far more readier for this, for change, than when we were young…the young people today are more accepting, they're more understanding…the old people are…not going to make change."

Furthermore, Firehawk reflected on their experience on a recent trip to Sri Lanka. She remembered they were treated with "great respect" because of their age. Wolf further added that Firehawk's experience may also be due to more respect afforded to White people in mixed-race relationships in Asian countries:

> "I think a White person marrying somebody of a visible minority, sort of darker complexion is harder in these countries than in Asian countries. It would be reversed if a White person is marrying there, people accept them more."

Another example was shared by Henry, who revealed that most of his high school and university friends and acquaintances were in mixed-race relationships. However, when juxtaposed with the previous generation, he remarked that mixed-marriages were rare:

> "Meeting all my friends' parents…can't think of a single one whose parents are mixed-race."

Firehawk, Wolf and Henry shared their insights on the influence of age and generational differences on their experiences. Wolf described younger people as "more accepting" and Henry remarked on the difference in the prevalence of interracial relationships between his generation and the previous. Moreover, Wolf shared that the "great respect" he and Firehawk experienced in Sri Lanka was due to their older age and his belief that White people in mixed-race relationships are "more accepted" in Asian countries.

4.1.7 Race/Culture and (Dis)Abilities. Experiences related to the intersectionality of race/culture and (dis)abilities were shared by two couples. Reggie and Lexie elaborated on the roles their disabilities played through the course of their relationship, starting from courtship to currently navigating the "bureaucracy of disability." Lexie shared that though Reggie also identifies as a person with a disability, his mother initially disapproved of their relationship because of Lexie's disability. Lexie disclosed that this was a source of contention earlier in their relationship. They shared the following:

> Lexie: "My mom didn't like Reggie because he was Black and Reggie's mom didn't like me because I was disabled…whenever we would have discussions or arguments about it, he'd be like 'your mom doesn't like me because I'm Black' and I'd be like, 'your mom doesn't like me because I'm in a wheelchair,' so we're even."

> Reggie: "My mom thought it was going to be very difficult for the both of us to be together because we're both disabled…she was worried…she always thought that maybe if I was with somebody able-bodied, it would be a lot easier because they could help me out a lot more…I told her [mom], I dated able-bodied girls and it never went to where Lexie and I are going…it was actually a lot harder because…they didn't really understand what it was like to be a person with a disability…Lexie does, so we didn't have that part to worry about."

Lexie also emphasized that because of their "shared oppression," she is better able to understand Reggie's experiences of "double" oppression because of his identity as a Black man with a disability:

> "I feel like we have a shared oppression right, as being disabled people. And so it's easy or easier I think to understand oppression…I understand what it's like for people to look at you and think that you're less than just by looking at you because I know that I get those looks as well. And I know that Reggie gets those looks for double reasons."

Furthermore, in reflecting on their lived experiences as a mixed-race couple, they both underscored the prominence of their disability as perceived by society:

> Lexie: "I think we are a unique couple in the sense that people are more surprised by us being a disabled married couple rather than a racially mixed couple."

> Reggie: "Not only that, a working disabled couple, that we both have jobs and that we're both you know productive for a lack of a better term…they're more surprised at that, than they are our races."

Another example on the intersection of race and culture with (dis)ability was shared by Firehawk. She divulged that her family, who initially disapproved of her mixed-race marriage to Wolf, may have blamed Wolf's Sri-Lankan heritage for their son's autism diagnosis:

> "Our son…he was autistic and I'm quite sure that they blamed Wolf's side of the family for that."

Firehawk also shared that her son is unaware of his mixed racial and cultural identities because of his autism:

> "My son is autistic…he has no idea that he's Sinhalese. He has no idea that he's part Welsh…don't care or really notice, if someone's Brown or even Black or White. One thing he's drawn to…if you're kind and good to them."

These participants shared their experiences relevant to the intersection of race and (dis)ability. Lexie and Reggie stated that they initially encountered objections to their relationship because of their disability and race. Lexie stated that their "shared oppression" helped them to better "understand" each other, and they both proclaimed that others are "more surprised" that they are a "disabled married couple" than a "racially mixed couple." In addition, Firehawk shared how her family may have "blamed Wolf's side" for their son's autism.

4.1.8 Race/Culture and Socio-Economic Status. A few participants reflected on the intersectionality of their racial/cultural identity, mixed-race identity and their socio-economic status. For example, Jill reflected on experiences of racism and discrimination, and described a sense of 'protection' because of her career and their socio-economic standing:

> "Have I experienced racism? I'm very protected in the things that I do…I work for companies…it would be zero tolerance…I happen to be in a field where no one's going to mess with me…we're very fortunate that way…I think we're in a socio economic setting where I'm very protected. Maybe naively so…I don't know that I experienced that a whole lot. But that's how we designed our lives, we surrounded ourselves around people, we choose to be where I wouldn't encounter that daily…I can't come up with one example, where I would have experienced racism…now that I've just said it out loud to you, that is an incredible privilege."

On the other hand, Joy shared her experience in the corporate environment where she holds a senior position. She reflected on being the "only Black person" and the lack of diversity "on all levels," resulting in "surprised" reactions about her mixed-race union:

> "I'm usually the only Black person, especially in the corporate environment…there's not much, I don't feel diversity on all levels. So I think that when I stand with a White person, a lot of people are surprised."

In addition, Susan elaborated on the privilege she and Henry possess when she reflected on their international development work in Africa, particularly when they were able to quickly secure employment upon their return to Canada:

> "A huge privilege…contextualized to that kind of working and living in Africa…and then that ended up transpiring…back in Canada, as well, when you sort of realize the privilege that you have…the systemic nature of privilege…even with…coming back to Canada and being able to find a job relatively quickly."

These participants shared their experiences related to the intersection of their race and socio-economic status. Susan remarked on the "systemic nature of privilege" and Jill stated that because of their "socio-economic setting," they feel "very protected" from racism. Joy pointed out that though she holds a senior role, she recognized the lack of diversity 'on all corporate levels' which results in "surprised" reactions about her interracial partnership.

4.1.9 Race/Culture and Socio-Political Climate. Some participants reflected on current socio-political incidences/climate on their mixed-race relationships. They shared the effects of the increased awareness and prevalence of anti-Black racism and the Black Lives Matter movement, COVID-19 pandemic and an increase in anti-Asian racism, and politics in the United States on their individual and relationship identities and experiences.

For example, Lydia shared the impact of the "racial turmoil" in North America and the impact on their relationship, specifically the personal consequences of 'seeing and reliving' incidences of "emotional and physical violence" targeted at Black and Racialized people:

> "Especially this year, we've seen a lot of racial turmoil happening worldwide specifically in the North American context…that's definitely played a part…it impacts us because of course as a Racialized woman, as a minority, as a Black female...I'm seeing a lot of people that look like me facing significant emotional and physical violence and that's very difficult, distressing situation to…see and relive over and over and over again."

In addition, Curly shared the influence of American politics on her experiences of discrimination in Canada. She contrasted her experiences of discrimination before and after the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States:

> "I do get discriminated against interestingly you know, it's more since...okay it's happened just a couple times, not a lot, but it's been since Trump was elected, before then, no."

Additionally, Jolanda reflected on the increase in anti-Asian racism since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. She reported that although she has no direct experience, witnessing and observing the prevalence of anti-Asian racism has had a lasting emotional effect:

> "What is actually interesting is COVID. I have some Asian friends…felt strongly sort of negatively affected by the press around it being called the Chinese virus or the Asian flu…discrimination about Chinese people maybe being more likely carriers…we didn't really go anywhere so I can't really say that I felt anything directly…but it did make me sad to read like the coverage and to read the stories about Chinese people facing, like, hatred…just to read some of the stuff like they're eating, I don't know, animal feet or eating bats…I don't know…that kind of stuff does stay with you."

Lexie shared that having a partner who is Black and witnessing the increase in anti-Black racism, particularly in the United States, has had a more personal impact:

> "I don't know if I've grown more aware of the issue or if the issues have been more like prevalent in media…when we're looking and watching like George Floyd or the Black Lives Matter… Breonna Taylor...I'm definitely more, like I feel it more in my heart as a personal connection."

These participants shared the influence of current socio-political incidences/climate on themselves and/or their relationships. For example, Lydia described the "racial turmoil" in North America as "difficult" and "distressing" and Lexie said, "I feel it more in my heart" in reference to having a Black partner and witnessing anti-Black racism. Jolanda further shared that the increase in anti-Asian racism since the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in sadness and she said, "that kind of stuff does stay with you."

4.2 Shared Values in Mixed-Race Relationships.

Throughout the interviews, as couples elaborated on their lived experiences relevant to race and culture, many identified and discussed their relationship values. They characterized these core values as paramount to the success of their mixed-race relationships. A few participants insinuated that these values may have manifested from their race and/or culture, as exemplified by George who said, "our value system are similar" and attributes this to the "overlap" in their "cultural values." On the other hand, some participants conceptualized their values in a manner independent to their race and/or culture. In this study, couples identified the following core relationship values: (1) communication: respect, trust and honesty, transparency and openness, (2) value of service: environmentally conscious, service to others, humanity, (3) being good parents, (4) time together: support growth of self and partner, laughter, balance time between self and partner, (5) family, (6) education, (7) kindness and compassion, (8) physical health and adventure, (9) responsibility, and (10) faith and spiritual beliefs. Further explorations of these core values are presented in the excerpts below.

Randy elaborated on some of the common values he shares with Curly, including concern for the environment, "being good parents," and kindness:

> Being good, you know citizens of this planet we live on…that's very close to both of our hearts…to help with making this a better place…we love being outdoors…we hate it though when we see litter everywhere, so often we'd bring a garbage bag and clean stuff up…the general concern…where our planet is going. Being good parents…being nice to others like being generally kind…trying to get the most out of our time together."

Tania and Alexander also shared their foundational relationship values:

> Tania: "We value…our family…time for ourselves, like our personal passion projects, like that's really important to us…trust."
>
> Alexander: "Things like honesty...humanity."

Another example was shared by Luca and Jolanda, who elaborated on their core relationship values that they deemed pivotal to their partnership:

> Luca: "Respect and trust…sense of adventure…commitment to like being physical and being active, like taking care of oneself and family."
>
> Jolanda: "Being committed…being honest and being willing to communicate like openly and patience. Family…I think like being responsible…doing the things that you know are the right things to do…we have a shared sense of value like planning for the future but also not letting that take away from what we do today."

Luca also reflected on his former mixed-race relationships and attributed past relationship dissolutions to divergence in core values:

> "Having dated other cultures before…the struggles I had in those relationships were about those common values…the deeper you got into a relationship, you started to butt up against some of the assumptions…not that they weren't able to overcome but it would have been a little bit of a challenge and ultimately those were the things that, you know, made us go different ways."

George recognized similarities in core values between his family of origin and Sophia's family of origin, namely, family and education, which he attributed to culture. He pointed out that though their perspectives and opinions may differ, they often 'start from a similar perspective':

> "My parents are still married; Sophia's parents are still married…we start from that same kind of perspective…our value system are similar in that sense so we talk about politics and stuff. I think a lot of the time not so we agree on everything but a lot of things are you know we sort of start from a similar point…like education will be another one…where the cultural values overlap…family and education…I'm sure there's more."

These participants shared the core values and principles they considered central to their relationships. Some included: family, communication, concern for the planet, adventure and trust. Luca attributed the divergence in "common values" to the dissolution of a former mixed-race relationship. Moreover, George stated that he and Sophia often "start from a similar point," which he attributes to the "overlap" in "cultural values."

Summary of Core Theme Four. The fourth core theme presented the lived experiences of mixed-race couples that extended beyond the boundaries of race and culture. Couples discussed their experiences pertinent to various intersectional identities, including geographical region of residence where, for example, Toronto, the GTA and Canada were extensively described as more accepting of diversity and mixed-race unions compared to rural Ontario, rural Canada and other countries. The implications of birth country and immigration history was also suggested to have some bearings on courtship and relationship experiences, where being Canadian-born or having immigrated early was said to result in fewer variances and easier transition into each partner's family. Native language was characterized as a strength by many couples but was also said to elicit minor barriers, including hindrance to socialization with extended family by virtue of language differences and/or accents. The reverberations of religion were also discussed, where religious homophily was perceived as a 'connecting point' for some and religious heterophily was posited to produce some challenges, including relationship rupture. Moreover, the degrees of disparity between religions and having both a Racialized identity and belonging to a minoritized religion were assumed to generate more perplex challenges. Differences in gender and gender roles were highlighted. Some couples shared that in their relationship, there were more discussions and negotiations around gender roles compared to discussions about their race and culture. One participant divulged incidences of safety concerns related to being female and another participant shared how the intersectionality of her race and gender proliferated her experiences of oppression. The age and generation of couples were shown to have some influence on their experiences, as exemplified by a couple who remarked on the high prevalence of racism in the 1960s and the repercussions on their relationship. Younger people were revered as more tolerant of mixed-race unions and one couple shared that being

White and older bequeath them greater respect, particularly in Asian countries. The intersection of race and (dis)abilities was framed as a 'double oppression' and one couple shared that they are confronted with more bewildered reactions because of their disability status more so than their mixed-race status. Socio-economic status was considered a protection against racism by one participant. However another Racialized participant in a senior position highlighted the lack of diversity on 'all corporate levels,' which influenced their individual and relationship experiences. Lastly, the emotional repercussions of the current socio-political climate and current events surrounding racial discrimination and inequity were conveyed by both Racialized and White partners.

Core theme four concluded by presenting the core values that were considered pivotal to mixed-race relationships. These values were viewed as key relationship strengths and pivotal to relationship success. Core values were conceptualized as either stemming from 'the individual' and/or a derivation of one's race and/or culture.

Conclusion

Grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1965) was implemented to understand the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto with regards to issues of race and culture. This results chapter presented the lived experiences of twelve couples organized through four core themes. These core themes emerged directly from the narratives of participants and, consistent with grounded theory principles, the researcher attempted to avoid too much subjective interpretations at this stage of the research. The core themes were presented in a format reflective of the natural progression of these partnerships.

As such, core theme one, *Lived Experiences of Race and Culture Prior to Mixed-Race Relationships,* was dedicated to the experiences of participants prior to their current mixed-race

partnerships. In this core theme, participants shared determining factors that influenced the formation of their own racial and cultural identities. They also commented on their acquisition of cross-racial and cultural understanding and awareness. Core theme one also encompassed their perceptions of interracial relationships and experiences in dating inside and/or outside their racial and cultural groups, prior to meeting their current partners.

The understanding of participants' pre-relationship experiences relevant to race and culture presented in core theme one provided contextual data for the presentation and comprehension of core theme two, *Lived Experiences of Race and Culture in Mixed-Race Relationships*. Core theme two showcased the lived experiences of race and culture from the commencement of these unions to the current status of these partnerships. Henceforth, through four sub-themes, couples elaborated on elements of their courtships, including how they met, factors contributing to romantic attraction, and the influence of race and culture on attraction. Following, the elements of race and culture that are being 'mixed' in these unions were identified, as well as the degrees in which couples integrate their racial and cultural identities, practices and traditions in their mixed-race unions. Couples also conferred the influence of 'mixing' in interracial partnerships on their individual and couples' identity. Next, a presentation of strengths was delivered, including benefits to individual and relational growth and enhancement, contributions to individual identity, intrinsic advantages to children of mixed-race unions, and attainment of cultural empathy. Core theme two concluded with the challenges experienced by these couples, pertaining to contentions stemming from racial and cultural divergences and the experience of discrimination, racism and prejudice inflicted by family and society.

Core theme three, *Critical Reflections on Lived Experiences: Negotiating Differences, Racism and Privilege, and Being in 'The Middle' of Two Races and Cultures,* was comprised of a constellation of sub-themes dedicated to summarizing the critical reflections of couples pertaining to how they negotiate and work through their racial and cultural differences, how they manage and cope with experiences of racial discrimination and prejudice, and their experiences and acumens of crossing racial and cultural borders. In this core theme, we learned about the cultural nuances and differences intrinsic to these partnerships that were not framed as challenges, but required varying degrees of acknowledgement and support, education, and advocacy and change. Couples bestowed their critical insights on racism and the influences on their social location by virtue of their Racialized-White mixed-race partnerships. They shared their lived experiences of crossing racial and cultural borders and experiences of accessing their partner's racial and cultural communities. Core theme three concluded by presenting the recommendations and commentaries offered by these couples on their lived experiences relevant to race and culture.

The fourth and final core theme was devoted to the experiences of couples that transcended the boundaries of race and culture. The first sub-theme was dedicated to the intersectional identities apparent in these relationships, including intersectional experiences of geographical region of residence, country of birth and immigration, native language, religion, gender, age, (dis)abilities, socio-economic status and socio-political climate. Core theme four concluded by summarizing the core relationship values identified by couples, which were considered pivotal to their unions.

Collectively, the four emergent core themes presented in the results reflect the lived experiences of twelve heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto specific to

race and culture. The next chapter will critically discuss these findings in connection to past research, explore evolving theories and propose culturally relevant and informed recommendations for the field of counselling and psychotherapy when working with Racialized-White mixed-race couples and their families.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Introduction

This study aimed to explore and gain insights into the lived experiences of mixed-race couples as they pertain to race and culture. To respond to the paucity in Canadian research and psychology on interracial relationships, this study implemented a grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1965) situated within critical race, feminist and post-structural paradigms to answer the following research question: *What are the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto with regards to issues of race and culture?* The data presented in the results chapter emerged directly from semi-structured interviews of 12 mixed-race couples and four core themes unfolded from their narratives. Collectively, the four core themes, including the sub-themes, sub sub-themes, tertiary themes and quaternary themes, traced the relationship journey of mixed-race couples by uncovering their intra- and inter- racial and cultural awareness and conceptualization prior to the advent of their relationships, influences on relationship formation, and their approaches of integrating race and culture in their relationships. These themes also epitomized the strengths inherent to these unions and challenges met by mixed-race couples, as well as strategies frequently employed to cope with racial/cultural divergences and racial discrimination, shifts in social location, and experiences of racial/culture boundary/border crossing. Collectively, the themes concluded by delineating the lived experiences of mixed-race couples that transcended the boundaries of race and culture, including core relationship values and other intersecting social identities evident in these partnerships.

This chapter will undertake a critical analysis of the major themes by situating the data from this study within the context of existing scholarly writing. The hope is for readers to

extrapolate a deeper understanding of these relationships supported by extant studies, but also detach from prior discriminatory assumptions promulgated by some of these studies in order to obtain a more complete, fair and equitable conceptualization of the lived experiences of mixed-race couples. This chapter will conclude by proposing a mid-level theory grounded in the experiences of 12 mixed-race couples who shared their lived experiences of navigating race and culture in their partnerships.

Before Mixed-Race Couples Meet: Lived Experiences of Race and Culture

Prior to the commencement of mixed-race relationships, partners of exogamous unions typically engage in some degree of introspection and deliberation pertaining to the development of their own racial and cultural identities, as well as the acquisition of critical cross-racial and cultural experiences and understanding. The collocation of these two variables imparts a prefatory foundation for understanding mixed-race partners' perception of interracial unions and experiences of mixed-race dating, prior to the commencement of their own exogamous relationships. These pre-relationship constituents offer unique contributions to research on interracial relationships, since there are limited existing studies on the racial/cultural identity and cross racial awareness of individuals prior to their exogamous partnerships. The pre-relationship experiences relevant to race and culture are invaluable. Research by Leslie and Letiecq (2004) showed that the resolution of quandaries around one's race and culture and the attainment of positive intra-racial/cultural attitudes are requisites for relationship success. They also found that the procurement of cross-racial awareness and acceptance was "foundational for a successful interracial marriage" (p. 570). Further deliberations on these three key pre-relationship components will follow.

The growth and evolution of intra- racial and cultural identities prior to the advent of mixed-race relationships are multifaceted, dynamic and relationally-influenced. The delineation of the complex and multi-layered influences on racial and cultural identity are analogous to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 2005). Bronfenbrenner's theory proposes that there are a myriad of environmental determinants on identity formation. When the findings from the present study are juxtaposed with Bronfenbrenner's theory, it elucidates the multi-system influences on racial and cultural identity. For instance, microsystem influences, which Bronfenbrenner considered the most salient, were evident in this sample (e.g., cultural transmission through family, exposure to religion, ceremonies and celebrations, exposure to native language, exposure to cultural foods), as well as exosystem influences (e.g., demographics of geographical spaces, exposure to ancestral homeland), macrosystem influences (e.g., discrimination, racism and/or privilege), and chronosystem influences (e.g., generational influences) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 2005; Chan, 2017; Tudge et al., 2009). The conglomeration of similar variables or systems that influence the development of racial and cultural identity have been corroborated by several studies over the last decade (Chan, 2017; Daha, 2011; Eng & Tram, 2021). For example, Eng and Tram (2021) identified family maintenance of ethnic practices and values, including exposure to cultural events and native language, racial/cultural composition of geographical regions, and experiences of discrimination, as factors that precipitated the development of racial and cultural identity. More specifically, the data in the present study revealed that Racialized partners more readily identified variables that shaped their racial/cultural identity compared to White partners. This may be attributed to weaker racial, ethnic and/or cultural identity in White

participants, ascribable to minimal transmission of ethnic and cultural variables by their parents and ancestors (Juang & Syed, 2010).

A similar contrast was also evident in the expression of racial, ethnic and/or cultural identity between White and Racialized participants. White participants predominantly claimed a Canadian identity (e.g., "White Canadian") and expressed weaker attachment to their ancestral heritage and culture, whereas Racialized participants more frequently claimed an ancestral informed racial/cultural identity (e.g., "Black Canadian Ethiopian"), and had stronger attachment to their ancestral heritage and culture. There were exceptions where a few Racialized partners maintained a stronger connection to their Canadian identity, which was attributed to disengagement from their ancestral heritage/culture and stronger attachment to Canada and the Canadian culture. There were also exceptions among a few White partners who integrated their ancestral heritage into their identity (e.g., "White Italian Canadian") on account of recent immigration by one or both parents of the mixed-race partner and greater exposure to their ancestral culture and customs. A further exception was shared by a White French Canadian partner, who described a long history of settlement in Quebec where the Quebecois French culture remained unadulterated; this bolstered a steadfast connection to his French Canadian heritage and culture. One plausible interpretation of the difference in identity expression between Racialized and White partners was proposed by Thomas (2005), who stated that "the likelihood of reporting 'Canadian' increases with the number of generations the respondent's family has spent in Canada" (p. 7). The correlation between identifying as primarily Canadian and having a long history of settlement, and subsequently more prior generations in Canada, may result in greater dissonance between people's ancestral homeland and culture (Boyd, 1999; Thomas, 2005). The results in the present study are consistent with this premise, wherein many

participants who identified as White with European ancestry, particularly British and French, claimed a Canadian identity and described an early history of settlement in Canada with nominal attachment to and transmission of their ancestral heritage/culture. It is noteworthy that the expression of a Canadian identity by early British and French settlers is also imputable to the racialization of Canada's immigration strategies that originally targeted 'favoured' British and French migrants (Thobani, 2000). Moreover, the concomitance of early settlement, along with the exclusion of White people from the tenets of Canadian multiculturalism, may have also incited a switch from a European identity to a primary Canadian identity in White Canadians with European origins (Boyd, 1999). Of further significance, White identity is complex within a Canadian context where, for example, central Europeans, including Italians and Greeks, were prohibited from immigrating prior to World War II for fear of 'soiling' British imperialism (Cohen, 1994). Thus, in addition to Jewish and Irish Catholic people, they were not considered White but rather "semi-coloured," and faced racism and discrimination (Kapetopoulos, 2016, para. 3). The preceding historical chronologies may serve as additional context for understanding the identity classification of some White participants in this study, such as Italian-Canadians. Some of these participants shared more recent immigration histories by their ancestors, who may have also been subjugated to discrimination and 'othering' within a British and French post-colonial Canadian context. The identity expression of some White Canadians with more recent immigration histories, primarily those of non-British and non-French origins, may therefore bear closer resemblance to the identity expression of Racialized Canadians.

Racialized participants in the present study primarily claimed an ancestral-informed identity by virtue of having more recent immigration histories, fewer preceding generations in Canada, and greater attachment to their ancestral country and transmission of their culture. The

theory proposed by Thomas (2005) on the influence of immigration history on identity expression is also consistent with these findings. Thomas (2005) postulated that, in Canada, Racialized people are less likely to identify as chiefly Canadian, and found that people of landed immigrant status, naturalized Canadians and non-Christian and non-Jewish people less often claimed a Canadian identity. Some similarities were evident in the current sample, where most Racialized participants had more recent immigration histories and some were born outside of Canada. Though all of the Racialized participants in this sample had more recent immigration histories, the fallacy of solely attributing early settlement to a Canadian identity is a consequence of "historical amnesia," (Creese, 2019, p. 1480) as it is important to note that Indigenous peoples, who preceded colonialism, and African and Black Caribbean Canadians who have been present in Canada for centuries have been obliterated from Canadian historical consciousness (Creese, 2019; Library & Archives Canada, 2021; Walker, 1984).

To summarize thus far, the development and expression of racial and cultural identity of partners in mixed-unions is attributable to immigration history and subsequent connections to and transmission of salient cultural factors. However, the contrast in identity classification between Racialized and White partners may also represent a microcosm of how post-colonial structures position White people at the centre of 'who is *really* Canadian' and Racialized people at the borders (Dalmage, 2018). The question, 'where are you *really* from?' is a rampant racial microaggression (Fleras, 2016) directed at Racialized and some White Canadians, which "reinforces this basic binary structure of 'white Canadian' and 'non-white Cultural Other'" (Paragg, 2015, p. 26). In addition to race and skin colour, further markers of belonging or unbelonging to Canada frequently include language, accents and clothing. The unremitting scrutiny around these markers of belonging/unbelonging creates a discourse of otherness and was

found to have consequences on feelings of belonging and thus the articulation of identity (Careese, 2019). Therefore, in order to procure an accurate understanding of the lived experiences relevant to the development and expression of racial and cultural identities of Canadian partners in mixed-race relationships, researchers and mental health providers need to consider the ramifications of colonialism, systemic racism and the racialization of Canada's immigration policies.

Further to obtaining an understanding of the development of racial and cultural identity, the data also uncovered factors that facilitated interracial and intercultural exposure and awareness prior to participants' current mixed-race relationships. The degree of diversity in geographical regions served as an impetus for increased socialization among diverse peers, particularly in school. Additionally, exposure to diversity catalyzed some of the first opportunities to interact and socialize with people outside of participants' racial and cultural groups. This finding is commensurate with prior United States-based research by Heaton and Jacobson (2000), Merlino et al. (2019), and Van Zantvliet and Kalmijn (2013), who posited that diversity in geographical regions and diversity in school and amongst peer groups cultivates cross-racial/cultural awareness and knowledge. Socialization between diverse groups is believed to improve social relations and decrease prejudice according to the Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1958). Moreover, models around intercultural competence (Hansell, 2000; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009), were shown to increase awareness, insight, empathy, flexibility and acceptance towards races and cultures outside of one's own racial/cultural group. These aptitudes are purported to be critical for the success of exogamous relationships (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004), and as was narrated by some participants, intergroup socialization prior to their mixed-race relationships increased their knowledge and broadened their perspectives on diverse

races/cultures. However, the acquisition of cross-racial and cultural awareness and knowledge is said to be attainable only after a person socially locates themselves and reflects on their own racial and cultural values and beliefs (Baltes et al., 2015; Bennett, 2009). As previously noted in the results chapter, participants in this study not only engaged in varying degrees of immersive self-reflection on the development of their own racial and cultural identity, but they also engaged in conscientious introspections on diverse races/cultures, racism and privilege, and their family's attitudes towards diverse groups, prior to the commencement of their mixed-race relationships. The amalgam of these two components (i.e., intraracial/cultural development and interracial/cultural awareness) provides the rudiments necessary for understanding participant's perception and experiences related to mixed-race relationships and dating prior to their current exogamous unions.

Exposure and attitudes towards interracial relationships prior to the commencement of participants' own mixed-unions were found to be influenced by similar factors that fostered cross-racial socialization, namely diversity and prevalence of interracial unions in geographical places, school and amongst peers. These findings are congruent with data from extant studies on the correlation between interracial socialization and open attitudes and/or pursuit of interracial relationships (Heaton & Jacobson, 2000; Merlino et al., 2019; Van Zantvliet & Kalmijn, 2013). Interracial socialization was found to facilitate greater acceptance and mitigate trepidation towards races and cultures outside of one's racial/cultural group. Furthermore, the present study found that favourable attitudes held by families also influenced participants' own commendatory attitudes towards exogamous unions. Most families held positive attitudes towards mixed-unions, although a few families held adverse attitudes towards all or some mixed-race unions. This finding not only confirms the ubiquity of race-specific prejudice and racial hierarchies and

stratification (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Lin & Lundquist, 2013), but demonstrates the influence of possessing strong positive convictions on diversity and interracial relationships on refuting negative perceptions by society and family. It highlights the saliency of maintaining positive personal convictions towards diverse groups and mixed-race unions in opposition to family and societal objections, and offers some insights on how intrinsic, ardent convictions could serve as an antithesis to negative perceptions held by family and/or society.

Additionally, experiences of mixed-race dating and racial/cultural preferences prior to the advent of current exogamous partnerships varied in the present study. Some participants shared that they had no racial and/or cultural preferences and thus dated both within and outside their race/culture, while others shared that they only dated outside their race/culture. Racial motivation theories may conceptualize the preference in out-group dating as grounded solely in an attraction to racial differences. However, racial motivation theories exceedingly emphasize physical and sexual attraction and "rebellion" against "social norm" as principal incentives for these partnerships (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993, p. 243). The social construction of race within a post-colonial society indeed warrants the consideration of sexual racism and racial hierarchies on partner preference (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Buggs, 2017; Lin & Lundquist, 2013; Curington et al., 2021), since specific racial preferences (i.e., "color*boundness*") is posited to be a "bold, unapologetic defense of racial exclusion in dating practices" (Jonahs, 2021, p. 13). However, in the present study, physical attraction to race-specific features was only identified by a few participants as one of several incentives to date outside their racial/cultural group. Rather, out-group preference largely stemmed from having greater interest and connection and more overlapping values with out-groups, and negative experiences and perception of potential dating partners within one's own race/culture. The latter might be inferred as having less affinity to

one's racial/cultural group (Boratav et al., 2021) or "countercultural" according to racial motivation theories (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993, p. 250). However, as was evident in the sample, many participants who only dated outside their race/culture also housed positive attitudes towards numerous aspects of their own race and culture.

In summary, three pertinent pre-relationship constructs evident in mixed-race unions were discussed. These pre-relationship experiences serve as key building blocks for understanding the motivation and pursuit of mixed-race relationships and offer important context for discerning the multifaceted relationship dynamics and processes of integrating race and culture in exogamous partnerships. Moreover, analogous with the tenets of counselling and psychotherapy, which positions developmental trajectories and historical experiences at the centre of understanding human behaviour, the conceptualization of partners' racial and cultural identities, cross-racial awareness and previous relationship history, within critical race and post-structural paradigms, offers a more accurate and equitable profile of these unions. Next, a critical analysis of key experiences pertinent to race and culture since the commencement of these partnerships follows.

Once Couples Meet: Key Relationship Experiences of Race and Culture

The autobiographical accounts of race- and culture-related experiences from the onset of mixed-race relationships to the time of interviews offered historical and current insights at various stages of these partnerships, rendering a complete and impartial delineation of these unions. In this section, an appraisal of key experiences since the advent of mixed-unions will be presented and the discussion will adhere to the sequence in which the data was presented in the results chapter. The experiences of courtship will be deliberated on, followed by a critical analysis of how and to what degree couples 'mixed' or integrated race and culture in their

partnerships. Additionally, in an effort to maintain an unbiased presentation of these unions, both strengths and challenges will be critically considered.

The pre-relationship constructs discussed in the preceding section insinuate that the conglomeration of intra-racial and -cultural attitudes, cross-racial knowledge and beliefs, and perception and experiences of mixed-race dating largely influence the pursuit and initiation of mixed-race relationships. More specifically, positive cross-racial attitudes and perceptions of interracial relationships appear to largely contribute to open and (partially) unbiased dating/relationship preferences. In addition to these pre-relationship constructs, the diversity, prevalence of mixed-unions in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and opportunities for intergroup socialization, allowed mixed-race couples to meet through conventional methods and settings, similar to endogamous couples. Couples in the present study met through online platforms, post-secondary institutions and/or the neighbourhoods of their post-secondary campuses, social events, and work/work related functions. The places of encounter for mixed-race couples in this sample are similar to the findings in a study by Houston et al. (2005) who identified comparable places of encounter for interracial couples. The commonality between these points of encounter was racial and cultural heterogeneity, which increased opportunities for interracial contact and socialization (Heaton & Jacobson, 2000; Van Zantvliet & Kalmijn, 2013). For instance, in the current study, diversity in post-secondary campuses and relocation to racially and culturally diverse regions established the necessary context for meeting. Moreover, existing studies posited that increased racial/cultural socialization is ameliorated by further advancements in access to neighbourhoods, education and employment for Racialized peoples (Heaton & Jacobson, 2000; Iceland & Nelson, 2010; Porterfield, 1982). The formation of mixed-race relationships is therefore contingent on multiple variables, ranging from the individual's intra-

and inter- racial/cultural consciousness and attitudes to the racial/cultural diversity and prevalence of mixed-race relationships in geographical regions. Furthermore, these variables are largely determined by equitable accession to social spaces for Racialized people, who have been subjected to systemic racial and social stratification.

Similar to places of encounter, the diverse attributes that kindled romantic attraction were largely described as conventional and were characterized as primarily non- race and -culture related. Many of these traits are archetypal of romantic attraction and antecedents for the pursuit of most romantic relationships (Lynch & Blinder, 1983). However, the 'why' of mixed-race unions has been relentlessly scrutinized with an undervaluation of love as the foundation of these partnerships. The insistent suspicion on attraction stems from racist discourse that has historically positioned exogamous unions at the periphery of White endogamous relationships (Kenney & Kenney, 2009; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013; Wehrly et al., 1999), such that same-race couples are not confronted with the same degree of psychoanalytic scrutiny on the 'real' and 'unconscious' drive for attraction. For instance, the status caste exchange theory (Merton, 1941) posits that mixed-race relationships are centred around the bi-directional exchange of higher racial status for higher socio-economic status. However, education homophily (i.e., commensurate educational achievements) was evident between partners in the present study, which refutes the status caste exchange theory. Similarly, Rosenfeld (2005) described mixed-race partners as "status homogenous" (p. 1286). Racial motivation theories also devalue love in exogamous unions by proposing that attraction in mixed-unions primarily stems from racial differences, such as exoticism or "heightened sexual interest" and defiance of social norms (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993, p. 243). Conversely, findings from the present study identified personality characteristics, common interests, physical attraction, intellect, similar life path,

connection and the development of a friendship as factors that kindled romantic attraction and the pursuit of a relationship. Though race and culture did play a role in romantic attraction for a few participants, many described them as supplementary and a conglomeration of several variables, but not race and culture alone. Moreover, some scholars argue that mixed-race partners are not sufficiently integrated into their race/culture and may be fraught with internalized prejudices (Boratav et al., 2021; Porterfield, 1982). However, in contrast, though a few participants in the present study possessed negative perceptions of in-group dating, many held positive attitudes towards other/most aspects of their own race/culture. This research therefore proposes that mixed-race couples pursue and initiate romantic partnerships and fall in love for reasons typical of all romantic unions. Traits that incite attraction in mixed-unions are consistent with structural theories (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993), which theorize that exogamous relationships occur "when the community structure sanctions such unions" through reduced segregation, and thus, "interracial couples marry for the same reasons that racially homogeneous couples do" (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993, p. 242). These reasons include love, compatibility and similarities in values and worldviews (Boratav et al., 2021; Porterfield, 1982).

The present study also illustrated how and to what magnitude couples 'mixed' their races and cultures in their partnerships. Cultural food was identified as the most common integrated cultural element. Children of mixed-unions were also identified as exemplars of integration via culturally-informed parenting practices and dissemination of cultural knowledge and practices. Furthermore, four integration methods emerged from the sample, and when juxtaposed with the results from a research by Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) on how mixed-race couples organize their race and culture *(Table 2)*, both consistencies and divergences were evident.

Table 2: Comparison between Seshadri and Knudson-Martin's Structure of Organization (2013) and the Integration of Race and Culture in the present study.

Seshadri & Knudson-Martin's Structures of Organization (2013)	**Integration of Race & Culture in Interracial Relationships in the Present Study**
Integrated - elements from both cultures are celebrated and maintained	Elements from both races and cultures are integrated and maintained
Co-existing - cultures are rarely integrated but individually maintained	Elements from both races and cultures are integrated as well as individual maintenance of some other aspects of culture
Singularly Assimilated - one partner's culture is more assimilated in the relationship	Only one partner's race and culture is primarily integrated
Unresolved - couples are confounded with racial and cultural differences, resulting in conflict	Elements from races and cultures outside the relationship are integrated

For example, Seshadri and Knudson-Martin's (2013) *integrated* structure was similar to couples in the present study who integrated both their races/cultures, and their *singularly assimilated* structure was analogous to couples who primarily integrated only one partner's race/culture. However, their *coexisting* structure differed, in that couples in their study rarely 'mixed' their race/culture, whereas in the present study, some couples integrated elements from both races/cultures but also individually maintained other aspects of their own race/culture. A distinctive integration method evident in the present study is that some couples incorporated elements from races/cultures outside their relationship. This is attributable to the flexibility afforded to mixed-race couples, since they are not operating within established racial and cultural boundaries. A further hypothesis is that the expansive diversity and cultural mosaic in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) creates a global worldview, and may catalyze such cultural exchange and/or borrowing. A further difference is that no couples in the present study described an *unresolved* structure, which may be attributed to differences in sample. The methods of racial/cultural integration ascertained in the present study and those in Seshadri and Knudson-Martin's (2013) sample, illustrate the multiple ways in which integration may occur, suggesting that 'mixing' or integration is unmethodical and diverse and 'what works' is unique

for each couple. Additionally, couples who individually maintained elements of their own race/culture as well as integrated aspects of each other's cultures, may be considered 'culturally integrative' which, according to Singh et al. (2020), are couples who "resist ethnocentrism and cultural chauvinism" and "do not subscribe to the discourse of homogamy" (p. 167). Moreover, whose culture (or aspects of culture) is integrated may be contingent on attachment and saliency of one's culture, and as noted in the previous section, may be largely influenced by the racial/cultural identity of the partner.

Regardless of integration style, the influence on individual and collective identity varied. Most couples shared that being in a mixed-union did not conjure predicaments about their individual and/or collective racial/cultural identity, such as being 'reraced' by external others (Afful, et al., 2015). This may be ascribed to the population density, vast diversity and prevalence of mixed-race couples in Toronto and the GTA (Hamplova & Le Bourdais, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2014), where discourse of exogamous normalcy may be becoming more pervasive in Toronto and the GTA. For example, a participant described being an interracial couple in Toronto as "normal" and "non-noteworthy" due to the vast diversity and large number of mixed-unions. Similarly, Afful et al. (2015) posited that the social construction of racial and cultural identity may be influenced by population density, diversity and history of a geographical region. The time in which mixed-race relationships occur and the history of racism in geographical places are also important considerations, as was exemplified by a participant who expressed feelings of ambivalence around identity, subsequent to pervasive experiences of racism in the 1960s. Moreover, the influence of identity may also be contingent on the individual's own intra-racial/cultural identity structure and their cross-racial/cultural receptiveness. For example, a White male participant shared the reclassification of his identity

by integrating his partner's race, ethnicity and culture into his identity expression because of acceptance by and assimilation into her culture. This process could be referred to as 'reciprocal assimilation,' where partners from the dominant culture are influenced by and thus adopt their minoritized partner's culture (Bhugun, 2017; Singh et al., 2020), resulting in the formation of an 'affiliative ethnic identity' (Jiménez, 2010) through regular engagement in their partner's culture.

The integration of race and culture in mixed-unions also resulted in several distinct strengths, including individual and relationship growth and enrichment, development of racial and cultural empathy, and benefits to mixed-race children. More specifically, partners in exogamous unions procured new experiences and knowledge, positive changes in boundaries, introspective reflections of ideological perspectives and values, development of resiliency and increased confidence. These aforementioned benefits are congruent with prior research that affirmed the meaningful growth and psycho-social development accrued by partners of mixed-unions (Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Usita & Poulsen, 2013; Wehrly et al., 1999). However, they are inconsistent with an American-based research by Wong and Penner (2018), who found that mixed-race partners in their sample do not garner the same "psychological health benefits" as same-race partners (p. 8). The findings in the present study also evince how the embracive process of integrating race and culture may ameliorate pride, appreciation and reconnection to a partner's race and/or culture, and according to Leslie and Letiecq (2004), sustaining positive intraracial attitudes is crucial for healthy relationships. For example, a White French Canadian participant shared that his relationship encouraged him to reconnect to his ancestry, and another White Canadian participant shared that being in a mixed-race relationship allowed her to feel more connected to a "unified cultural identity," something she felt was previously missing. These examples illustrate that mixed-unions have the potential to foster self-growth and self-

actualization by reinstituting the racial and cultural self that was previously detached or disowned.

Another key strength of mixed-unions is the development of racial and cultural empathy. For example, one participant described the growth in empathy as the "biggest win" in her interracial relationship. Profound racial and cultural empathy was attainable through intimate contact, participation and observation of a partner's race and culture. Thus, navigating life together rendered unmediated lived experiences of their partner's race and culture, including experiences of racism and inequity, White privilege, and the geopolitical affairs of their partners' country of ancestry. The acquisition of profound empathy precipitated vested interest around issues of geo-politics and social justice, as was exemplified by a White participant who stated, "I feel it more in my heart as a personal connection" when witnessing anti-Black racism. Similarly, a study by Willow (2008) showed that interracial contact between diverse racial/cultural groups resulted in deep empathy, "universal principles of justice, liberty and equality," and increased interest in social justice (p. 46). Empathic attunement and communication are not only essential for successful relationships (Boratav et al., 2021; Schmidt & Gelhert, 2017), but participation in social justice actions, particularly in mixed-unions, may facilitate deeper connection, intimacy and healing. Rosenblatt et al. (2005) found that mixed-race relationships can be a supportive vessel for healing the wounds of racism and race-based trauma. Similarly, the present study showed that through deep empathic understanding of systemic racism and inequity, Racialized partners may regain agency in confronting their own internalizations as well as external oppressive systems. For example, a participant shared, that through her mixed-relationship, she felt more comfortable to authentically "show up" in predominantly White spaces without the social pressure to acquiesce to "Western" ways of being.

Another preeminent strength of interracial relationships was mixed-race children. Children of mixed-unions were revered for merits they derived from their diverse racial and cultural experiences, rich multidimensional identities and inclusive worldviews. For example, one of the participants stated, "the real value in us being from different cultures has come about when we've had kids." Similarly, a research conducted by Rosenblatt et al. (1995) found that mixed-race couples in the United States considered their children a key strength and they expounded on the advantages of multi-racial children "knowing two worlds and having dual perspectives" (p. 196). However, some previous studies have indicated that mixed-race children are presented with increased mental and behavioural challenges (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2013) and may be confronted with circumnavigating their identities and racial/cultural membership (McFadden, 2001; Nuttgens, 2010), due to post-colonial racial hierarchies that socially construct racial identity within a non-White – White binary (Paragg, 2015, p. 29). Consequently, this may result in experiences of racism, 'othering,' quandaries regarding identity and feelings of isolation (McFadden, 2001; Nuttgens, 2010). The data in the present study did not echo similar concerns related to the identity of mixed-race children. However, it demonstrated that exogamous couples may have to provide guidance to help their children navigate their multi-racial identities based on how phenotypic features are conceptualized within a non-White – White discourse. Interracial couples are therefore tasked with the critical role of supporting their children's multi-racial identities through racial literacy and understanding and validating their children's unique experiences. This may result in adaptive psychological functioning (Crawford & Alaggia, 2008; Nuttgens, 2010; Townsend et al., 2012), increased self-esteem and positive attitudes towards identity (Kenney & Kenney, 2009; McFadden, 2001; Song, 2010; Wehrly et al., 1999), and post-racial resilience (Joseph-Salisbury, 2018).

Though the strengths in mixed-race relationships in this sample exceeded the challenges, barriers emerging from cultural differences between partners and experiences of racial discrimination by external others were identified as primary challenges. However, cultural differences between partners were shown to create minimal challenges relative to experiences of racial discrimination; they were identified in the early stages of interracial relationships. This is typical of most relationships where early phases of both exogamous and endogamous marriages may require more negotiations and compromises (Odell & Quinn, 1998). Successful negotiations and problem-solving in relationships may foster resilience and growth, and strengthen relational bonds, as was evident in this sample. It is important to clarify that in the present study, the challenges that occurred between partners, as opposed to those that were externally precipitated, stemmed from differences in culture/cultural constructs such as gender, religion and language as opposed to race and ethnicity. The aforementioned findings are comparable to the results from a study by Wehrly et al. (1999) who found that challenges in exogamous unions did not arise from racial or ethnic differences, but instead arose from differences in gender and religion, which may stem from culture specific gender roles and expectations (Singh et al., 2020). There is however, an abundance of past scholarly research and literature stipulating that exogamous relationships are beset with more dissentions, instability and dissatisfaction (Hohmann-Marriott &Amato, 2008), greater risk of dissolution (Leslie &Letiecq, 2004) and fewer psychological benefits compared to same-race couples (Wong & Penner, 2018). Although the present study did not measure relationship satisfaction, couples expounded on their partnerships in a manner that evinced relationship fulfillment and satisfaction, and challenges were shared in a normalized and matter-of-fact tone.

In comparison to cultural differences between partners, encounters of racism, prejudice and discrimination posed greater challenges. The frequency and magnitude of racial discrimination varied, ranging from no encounters of racial discrimination to overt racism, shadeism and racial microaggressions perpetrated by family and the general society. Racial prejudice and rejection by family was found by past research to be a primary source of difficulty for interracial couples (Greif & Saviet, 2020; Wehrly et al., 1999), particularly when compounded with common relationship challenges encountered by all couples, including endogamous couples. However, most couples in the present study described their experiences with family as positive and void of racial discrimination, but a few couples and Racialized participants encountered racism, as exemplified by a White participant who shared her mother's initial belief that "races should not mix." This belief may be rooted in White supremacy's sanctioning of racial hierarchies, in which White people are situated at the top, and thus 'mixing' would 'soil' the 'purity' of the White race (Demerson, 2004). Moreover, differential treatment by families of mixed-race couples may correspond to skin colour. This is corroborated by Chan and Wethington (1998) who found that racial configuration in mixed-unions and the skin colour of Racialized partners may influence experiences of racial discrimination. A Racialized-White couple in the current study shared that, had they both been darker, they predicted both their families would not have been 'as accepting,' which demonstrates the pervasiveness of shadeism among both Racialized and White groups. Although a comparative analysis of skin colour and experiences of racism was not executed in this study, the Racialized participants who disclosed either minimal or no encounters with racial discrimination were of Korean, Bangali, Pakistani/Goan and Arab/Lebanese backgrounds. Those who remarked on experiencing racism 'all their life' were of Black Ethiopian, Black Nigeria, Black Jamaican, Sri Lankan and

Filipino/Chilean backgrounds. The preceding observations are not intended for generalization purposes, as some participants remarked on their obliviousness to racism. Moreover, this is not intended to diminish the experiences considered 'minimal,' nor is it intended to dismiss experiences of Racialized people of lighter skin colour. However, this research proposes that racial configuration and skin colour are key considerations in understanding the experiences of mixed-race couples pertaining to racial discrimination. This inference is corroborated by the triracial hierarchy theory (Bonilla-Silva, 2004), which states that certain races are situated closer to the top of the hierarchy with White people, often dubbed "honorary Whites" or "model minorities" (Curington et al., 2021, p. 100), by virtue of White heteropatriarchal racism. Therefore, experiences of racism and acceptance are (partially) dependent on the racial configuration of the mixed-race relationship and the skin colour of the Racialized partner.

In addition, experiences of racial discrimination were found to be dependent on geographical location and time period. Experiences of racial discrimination varied between different regions in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), neighbourhoods in Toronto and even social spaces, such as in corporate environments. For example, in the present study, many participants described Toronto as generally inclusive and accepting in comparison to rural parts of Ontario, Quebec, Canada and the United States. However, when making such comparisons, particularly with the United States, it is critical to consider the culture of politeness in Canada. Hekiert and Igras-Cybulska (2018) state that Canadians may experience "the pressure to express contentment irrespectively of internal state," (p. 2) which may impact honest disclosures on the perception of mixed-unions by Canadians. This was exemplified by a Racialized participant, who stated that "Canadians are very polite and they don't say too much," sheltering him from (some) experiences of racism. Moreover, the time period in which mixed-race relationships exist is a key

consideration in understanding the experiences of discrimination by exogamous couples. For example, a couple in the current study who met in the 1960s elaborated on the lack of diversity and prevalence of racial discrimination in Toronto during that time period. Though there is limited prior research on the experiences of exogamous couples in Toronto, these findings correspond to some existing studies, which found that neighbourhoods (Wehrly et al., 1999) and time period (Afful et al., 2015) play deterministic roles in the experiences of racial discrimination by interracial couples.

In summary, critical race and culture related experiences were examined from the commencement of mixed-unions. Romantic attraction was influenced by numerous factors; however race and culture variables were adjudged non-central and supplementary to attraction. The methods of integration were found to be unique for each couple, elucidating the diverse configurations of race and culture within these partnerships. Strengths emerging from these unions superseded the challenges; however experiences of racial discrimination were a key challenge and were contingent on the race/ethnicity/culture of Racialized partners, racial configuration of couples, skin colour, geographical region and time period. Next, a critical examination of the strategies implemented by couples to contend with racial/cultural divergences and challenges will be presented, followed by shifts in social location and experiences of racial/cultural boundary/border crossing.

A Deeper Dive: Critical Experiences of Race and Culture

As mixed-race relationships progress, couples typically implement various strategies to manage their non-contentious racial/cultural differences, as well as challenges stemming from racial discrimination. The amalgamation of their diverse races and cultures is often conceived as traversing socially constructed racial and cultural boundaries for partners, couples and/or children of mixed-unions, resulting in subsequent shifts in social location when contextualized

within prevalent racist and endogamous discourses. Critical consideration of these key experiences is next.

Non-conflicting racial and cultural variances in mixed-unions were differentiated from differences that resulted in relationship challenges. Several differences that naturally emerged from having diverse races and cultures were conceptualized as 'normal.' These non-malignant differences were described as "light stuff" by a participant. These included divergences around food and ceremonies, culturally-informed ways of socializing and engaging with family of origin, and race/culture-influenced parenting practices. However, several studies construed some of these racial/cultural differences as matters of great contention, including views on child-rearing (Boratav et al., 2021; Bures, 2020; Usita & Poulsen, 2013) and challenges posed by family (Brooks & Ogolsky, 2017; Chan & Wethington, 1998; Greif & Saviet, 2020; Henderson & Brantley, 2019; Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008; Van Zantvliet & Kalmijn, 2013). Notwithstanding the fact that in the present study, some racial/cultural differences (e.g., language, religion) and prejudicial behaviours by family were indeed sources of relationship challenges, a distinction was made between challenges and non-malignant variances that were considered 'normal' and framed within the paradigm of 'it goes with the territory.' One such example in which racial/cultural differences were not conceptualized as a challenge was culture-specific ways of engaging with parents, including culturally respectful ways of addressing parents of partners. It is noteworthy that the aforementioned differences framed as 'normal' and unchallenging could potentially present measurable barriers for some mixed-race couples; however generalizing all differences as problematic contributes to further stigmatization of exogamous unions. Henceforth, the conceptualization of challenges is far more complex and is contingent on numerous variables, including possessing positive intra-racial/cultural attitudes

and cross-racial awareness and acceptance (Leslie &Letiecq, 2004), social network and family support (Brooks & Ogolsky, 2017; Greif & Saviet, 2020; Henderson & Brantley, 2019; Tubbs & Rosenblatt, 2013), diversity and geo-political climate of regions of residence (Dalmage, 2018), and relationship resources and coping strategies.

There were several coping strategies commonly implemented to manage both relational discords and challenges, including communication, embracement, education/learning and negotiation. Communication was not only considered a significant asset in negotiating racial/cultural variances, but was also found to reinforce relationship bond. Mixed-couples and partners encountered a racial/cultural learning curve following the integration of their diverse races and cultures, which most couples in the current study considered positive. Furthermore, negotiations on cultural differences such as decisions regarding which language and religion to pass on to children occurred in early stages of these partnerships, as is typical of all relationships (Odell & Quinn, 1998). An American study by Bannon et al. (2020) postulates romantic partners are inundated with daily experiences and stressors, thus "placing a premium on efficient communication" (p. 387), which has the capacity to reduce relationship distress (Reiter & Gee, 2008). Even more so, interracial partners have the added dimension of racial and cultural differences and, thus, communication, learning and negotiation are even more paramount for maintaining a strong relationship bond and intimacy. For instance, a study conducted by Foeman and Nance (2002) showed that intimate communication across racial/cultural boundaries was fundamental in all stages of exogamous relationships, such as integrating new information in the relationship and negotiation along racial and cultural lines. Foeman and Nance (2002) also remarked on the use of humour in communication and, similarly, many couples in the present study used humour to acknowledge their racial and cultural differences and its ensuing social

implications. This was exemplified by a couple who humourously talked about 'taking advantage of racial stereotypes.' The appropriate use of humour in communication, particularly in exogamous unions, may have the capacity to attenuate personal, relational and social tension (Wise, 2016). In addition to humour, some couples regarded identifying parallels between their diverse races and cultures as a relationship strength and strategy for contending with perceived differences. A poignant example was shared by a Muslim-Jewish mixed-race couple who, during courtship, considered their differences to be "too much" and thought they would "never meet in the middle." However, through immersive self-reflection on 'what it means to be a Muslim person and Jewish person,' they identified numerous commonalities and regarded the resolution of this initial impasse as the genesis of their relationship strength. The identification of congruencies between partners was speculated by Killian (2001) to allow "partial compliance with or conformity to the principle of homogamy" (p. 16), allowing partners to (partially) evade the relentless public appraisal of their differences (Killian, 2003). Moreover, perceived similarities were found by Lemay Jr. and Ryan (2021) to predict greater motivation to think and care for one's partner's needs in interracial unions. Though this was not explicitly specified in the present study, conformity to the discourse of endogamy via the emphasis on similarities may be an unconscious adaptive strategy to manage and cope with external scrutiny.

Similarly, the approaches used to manage and cope with racial discrimination and prejudicial attitudes also centred around communication, such as acknowledgement of racism and provision of support, education, and engagement in advocacy and behavioural change. These strategies enabled the 'uncomfortable to become comfortable,' which cultivated an atmosphere where race-talk was normalized and became commonplace. This is particularly crucial because in this researcher's own psychotherapy practice, experiences of racism and

prejudice often trigger heightened anxiety, sadness, pain, discomfort and shame. A study by Steyn et al. (2019) posited that "informal policing" (p. 1681) of mixed-unions is commensurate with formal sanctions against exogamous unions during apartheid South Africa, and may result in internalized assumptions about the 'abnormality' of one's union. Moreover, the denial and minimization of racial discrimination in exogamous partnerships was found by Tubbs and Rosenblatt (2013) to result in feelings of isolation and disintegration of relational bond. The emotional impact of racial discrimination, the paramountcy of acknowledging these incidences, and the repercussions of repudiating these occurrences were also underscored in the present study. This was exemplified by a Racialized participant, who conveyed feelings of isolation and discomfort when she experienced racial microaggressions because, early in their relationship, her White partner had not yet possessed the skills and techniques to identify and respond to these covert incidences. The experience of this participant is unsurprising according to Killian (2001), who stated that, "the functions and influence of race and racism go largely unnoticed by white people because whiteness is not a self-conscious racial identity or social signifier in most white people's minds" (p. 21). The colonial positioning of White people consequently results in a disconnection from racial identity and fortification against racial discrimination. Therefore, White partners may be confounded with an even steeper racial/cultural learning curve. Though most participants possessed significant cross-racial knowledge prior to their relationships, having an intimate relationship with a Racialized partner called for deeper cross-racial awareness and competency and a critical understanding of systemic racism and White privilege. Couples and/or partners in mixed-unions may therefore need the supportive and reparative strategies of acknowledging distressing emotions, 'holding space' for dialogue, validation of the experiences and repercussions of racism, imparting meaningful responses and empathy, constructing

boundaries, and assertive dialogues with family. The execution of these strategies within the milieu of exogamous partnerships may affect considerable healing from current and historical racial discrimination and race-based trauma (Rosenblatt et al., 2015). A similar study conducted by Seshadri and Kundson-Martin (2013) in the United States substantiated the benefits of constructive feedback and engagement in advocacy, establishing boundaries, and communicating the emotional effects of racism and prejudice. Of relevance, several White partners in the present study elaborated on using their privileged platforms to advocate for systemic change through participation in committees focusing on anti-oppression, inclusion and diversity. Though this finding was not documented in previous research, the ardent participation in advocacy in this sample may be partially ascribed to the current socio-political climate, the Trump-era (Baker, 2021) and its impact on Canadians, and the emergence and/or eminence of social justice groups such as Black Lives Matter (Black Lives Matter, 2021).

Additionally, since Racialized partners are perpetually the target of racial discrimination and prejudice, the data on how couples offer support is frequently presented from the perspective of White partners supporting Racialized partners (Killian, 2001; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004). The data in the present study offered some insights into the emotional repercussions of racial discrimination on White partners, as was exemplified by a couple where the Racialized male partner and the couple as a mixed-unit were targets of racial discrimination. The Racialized male partner conveyed that he was unscathed and thus able to support his emotionally distressed White female partner, which he attributed to having "thick skin" due to his visible minority status. This vignette also illustrates the potential implications of the intersectionality of race and gender in exogamous unions, particularly in encounters of racial discrimination. More specifically, developing a "thick skin" may be imputable to heteropatriarchal expectations of

masculinity, where masculine discourse sanctions men to be protectors and providers, at the expense of their own emotional needs. Therefore, understanding the impact of racial discrimination in mixed-unions may require a critical understanding of the intersection of race and gender, where heteropatriarchal discourse may influence the response to racism along socially constructed gender lines.

Furthermore, research by Afful et al. (2015) and Leslie and Letiecq (2004) showed that White partners in mixed-unions may be confronted with the reality of their White identity (e.g., White privilege) for the first time because of more intimate and realistic insights into systemic racism by virtue of having a Racialized partner. Encounters and exposure to racism within a dominant endogamous discourse may be experienced as emotionally distressing for White partners, and according to DiAngelo's theory on White Fragility (2018), White people have been "socialized into a deeply internalized sense of superiority" and "become highly fragile in conversations about race" (p. 19) and "the smallest amount of racial stress is intolerable" (p. 20). Moreover, encounters of racism in interracial unions may also disconcert identity due to some loss of privileges by virtue of a White partner's mixed-race status. For example, White partners may be seen as 'less White' because of their membership in a Racialized-White partnership, and may therefore experience grief related to changes/shifts to identity and loss of (some) privileges (Rosenblatt et al., 2015; Tubbs & Rosenblatt, 2013). Henceforth, the supportive, reparative and healing strategies identified in managing racial discrimination may benefit the couple as a unit, as well as Racialized and White partners alike.

Furthermore, the mixing of race and culture in exogamous relationships is conceptualized as traversing socially constructed racial and cultural boundaries for partners, couples and/or their children, resulting in shifts in social location within dominant racist and endogamous discourses.

Crossing racial and cultural boundaries was considered the "ticket in" by a participant, granting access to communities and social spaces that would normally have been out-of-bounds. The space in which 'mixing' occurs was described as "the middle" by a participant and may be conceptualized as a 'third space' in which diverse races, ethnicities and cultures meet. This 'third space' permits access to (some) in-group narratives and experiences otherwise reserved exclusively for in-group members (Foeman & Nance, 2002). However, the opposite may also transpire, where access may be denied and redacted for both partners in mixed-unions because their racial, ethnic and cultural identity may be considered weaker by other in-group members by virtue of their mixed-race partnership (Rosenblatt et al., 2015). According to Killian (2001), this notion is considered the "outsider within," (p. 22) where dominant endogamous and racist discourses socially re-locate partners and the mixed-race couple as a whole into this 'third space,' where identity and access may be altered and social location and positionality of partners and couples may change. Additionally, patrolling of racial borders may be experienced more pervasively by women due to heteropatriarchy's expectations of women as keepers or conduits of cultural traditions (Dalmage, 2018; Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2013) and their attempted sovereignty over women's bodies, sexuality and reproductive rights.

Moreover, traversing socially sanctioned boundaries may also have implications on the identity and thus positionality of mixed-race children. Assumptions about the identity of mixed-race children may be socially imposed based on phenotypic characteristics, as well as suppositions about parentage. According to Killian (2001), "mixed children present a genuine conundrum to persons who are invested in the social status quo, where categories of persons remain discrete and mutually exclusive" (p.25). Mixed-race children challenge the dichotomous discourse of identity and social location by their inherent mixed identities (Killian, 2001; Qian &

Lichter, 2007). In the present study, some couples discussed how the phenotypic traits of their children may result in preconceived assumptions about identity, experiences and social location. This was exemplified by a couple who shared that their Black-White mixed-race child may think, "I'm Black" since "society looks at them as Black." Varying phenotypic traits in mixed-race children, such as skin colour, hair texture and facial features, may result in differential evaluation and positionality, guided by racist Eurocentric standards of beauty and colour-caste hierarchies, which socially positions mixed-children with phenotypic features similar to White peoples' closer to the top of the hierarchy (hooks, 1995).

As previously noted, traversing socially sanctioned boundaries may result in reassessment and re-racing of partners in mixed-race relationships by external others (Afful et al., 2015). The reconstitution of identity may influence the social location and experiences of the couple. For example, some couples in the present study expounded on how the inherent privilege of White partners may serve as a "protection" and "shield" against potential racial profiling and discriminatory behaviours. The protection against racial discrimination may occur through conscientious intentionality by the White partner, where they may deliberately apply their privilege to assuage impending prejudicial behaviours and discriminatory assumptions enacted by society. This was exemplified by a participant who remarked on using her "privilege" as an "ice breaker" by going through airport security ahead of her Lebanese/Arab husband to covertly "smooth the path" and spare him the "discomfort" of potential racial profiling. The privileges bequeathed to White people and the intrinsic power to influence identity, social location and experiences of their Racialized partners may convey a quality of Teju Cole's White Saviour Industrial Complex. However, the act of protection epitomized by this participant was grounded in love and the innate drive to safeguard her Racialized partner and

mixed-race children from emotional pain and discomfort, and not by the "power relations that privileged outsiders…try to reinforce" when enacting White saviourism (Schneider, 2015, p. 9). Safeguarding against racism may also occur unintentionally by virtue of the mere presence of the White partner, where the White partner may indicate to society a perception of 'neutrality.' This inference builds on the data from a study conducted by Rosenblatt et al. (2015), where partners in Black-White unions were perceived as 'less Black' or 'less White' by way of their interracial unions. Henceforth, in the present study, Racialized partners may be subjected to borderism (Wright et al., 2013), where they are seen as 'less Racialized' and having greater camaraderie with White people because of their mixed-race relationship. For example, a Chinese participant shared that she felt safer when travelling with her White male partner because "nobody's going to mess" with him because of his privileged identity. This participant also conveyed external assumptions about how her nationality and nativity shifted when she travelled with her White partner, where society imposed an identity of "an American or Canadian couple" compared to when she travelled alone, where society deemed her a "little Chinese girl." This example illustrates the prevalent racial hegemony of White identity being attributed to Canada and non-White identities being racially, culturally and ethnically situated outside of Canada or North America (Paragg, 2015). It also highlights the influence of the White partner on external assumptions about the Racialized partner's identity, nationality, positionality and experiences, as well as White heteropatriarchy's racist and sexist stereotypes of women, particularly Asian women, who are often deemed infantile and submissive (i.e., "little Chinese girl") (Fernbrant et al., 2017; Killian, 2001). This example also illustrates the double objectification faced by Racialized women by virtue of their gender and race (Curington et al., 2021). Moreover, Afful et al. (2015) posited that the opposite could also transpire for White partners, where they may lose

some of their privileges after being re-classified as 'less White' because of their interracial relationship, and thus subjected to prejudicial assumptions and negative societal reactions. For example, a White woman in a mixed-race union may be stereotyped as 'easy' (Curington et al., 2021) as she 'strays' from White heteropatriarchy's assumptions of White femininity. Furthermore, a study by Stillwell and Lowery (2020) reveals that White women and mixed-unions involving White women may face greater prejudice and status change (i.e., 'lower status') compared to White men and mixed-unions involving White men in the United States.

Conversely, the perceived 'positive' shift in social location and experiences for Racialized partners described above is not always observed. This was shown by two Black female participants who reported that their encounters of racism and access to privilege remained unchanged with no commensurate shifts in social location. Instead, a Black female participant conveyed, "being side-by-side" with her White partner unveiled the blatancy of how "pronounced and jarring" racism really is, and thus membership in a mixed-relationship may in fact highlight the saliency of racism (Afful et al. 2015). In contrast to the shifts in positionality of the non-Black Racialized partners noted above, these findings also attest to the triracial hierarchy theory and color-caste hierarchies, which posit that colonial racism and colourism hierarchically ranks races by measures of 'superiority'; White people are situated at the top, Black people are positioned at the bottom and non-Black Racialized people in the middle (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; hooks, 1995; Lin & Lundquist, 2013). Thus, since whiteness is hegemonically considered the epitome of civilization and superiority, White people are bequeathed with unearned privileges and preferential treatments, and Black people continue to be confronted with the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism (Backhouse, 1999; Paragg, 2015; Thobani, 2000). Henceforth, experiences of racism and prejudicial attitudes and shifts in social

location and positionality for partners and couples in exogamous unions appears to be contingent on the racial configuration of the mixed-race couple (Chan & Wethington, 1998). To put it frankly, the ubiquity and potency of anti-Black racism in society may limit similar shifts in positionality as experienced by non-Black Racialized-White mixed-race couples. It is also noteworthy that experiences and changes in social location among Black and Racialized partners in mixed-race relationships may also vary and depend on the degree of visible differences such as skin colour, hair texture, religious and cultural garment, and accent (Creese, 2019; hooks, 1995; Killian, 2001).

In summary, the preceding section offered insights into contextual factors that differentiated challenges from 'normal' variances in exogamous unions, both requiring some degree of intervention. The strategies for managing and coping with non-contentious variances and challenges offer supportive, reparative and healing benefits and are particularly important as mixed-unions have the added dimensions of race, ethnicity and culture to contend with relative to endogamous couples. Pervasive racist, endogamous and heteropatriarchal discourses are critical considerations in understanding experiences of racism, traversing socially sanctioned racial and cultural boundaries, and shifts in social location for mixed-race couples, partners and/or their children. Next, a critique of the key experiences evident in these partnerships beyond the boundaries of race and culture will be offered.

Lived Experiences Beyond Race and Culture

There are key constituents in exogamous unions that transcend the boundaries of race and culture. Similar to endogamous unions, shared relationship values are often deemed foundational and in many mixed-race relationships, they are considered more salient relative to race and culture. A study by Boratav et al. (2021) highlighted the primacy of overlapping personalities and values, relative to cultural differences. Congruous values play an influential

role in the compatibility of mixed-race partners and the success of exogamous unions. In addition, other non-race related social identities may also play a more deterministic role in the experiences of mixed-race couples. Thus, a critical analysis of intersectionality (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019; Moodley, 2011) is imperative so as to obtain a comprehensive and holistic cross-section of these unions.

Non-race and non-ethnic social identities and factors may have significant implications on the experiences of mixed-race couples. The intersection of race and culture with geographical region of residence, country of birth and immigration, native language, religion, gender, age, (dis)abilities, socio-economic status, and current socio-political climate may influence the lived experiences of mixed-race couples. Some of these social constructs or identities may "impose imbalances of power and privilege" (Killian, 2001, p. 2). Thus, in addition to racism, couples and/or partners in mixed-unions may also encounter sexism, nativism, classism, ablism, religious imperialism and/or ethnocentrism based on their social identities. This was exemplified in the present study by a couple who shared that having similar religions was a point of convergence for their families. The Arab/Lebanese partner surmised that, had he been an Arab Muslim he might have encountered discrimination in the form of Islamophobia. Furthermore, the degree of visibleness in social identities is also a key consideration, such that greater visible differences may result in more frequent experiences of prejudice and discrimination. The phenomenon of "passing," (Medina, 2011, p. 141) where some minoritized identities may bear closer resemblance to some dominant groups may result in external assumptions about 'sameness,' and thus more advantageous treatment for some mixed-race couples and partners (Killian, 2001; Medina, 2011). According to Medina (2011), greater degree of visible difference may signal membership to "a minoritized and stigmatized social group with ever-decreasing mainstream

social capital" (p. 139). This is evident in the differing experiences between Black-White and Asian-White couples or Racialized partners with lighter skin pigmentation in the present study and prior research (Chan & Wethington, 1998; Lin & Lundquist, 2013; Wright et al., 2013), where darker skin colour is often subjected to increased encounters of racial discrimination. In addition to skin colour, further indicators of visible difference may include religious and cultural clothing and symbols, certain accents, hair texture and visible disabilities. Moreover, the presence of multiple marginalized social identities in mixed-unions may result in even more experiences of discrimination and prejudice. Medina (2011) further state that, "otherness is layered" by the "intersection of many isms" (p. 139). This was emphasized by a participant in the present study who stated that a "non-White" and Muslim partner was perceived as the "worst combination" for his father during the early stages of their relationship. Multiple layers of underrepresented social identities may therefore impact the experiences of mixed-race couples as they are confronted with multiple dimensions of marginalization. For instance, a Black-White couple with a (visible) (dis)ability in the present study remarked on the "double" oppression faced by the Black male partner because of his dual underserved identities. Moreover, this couple experienced more frequent (dis)ability discrimination compared to racial discrimination. Theorists of critical race theory argue for the primacy of racism in understanding "how oppression operates" (Gillborn, 2015, p. 284); they postulate that although intersectionality is imperative in understanding oppression, "race remains the dominant and consistent, yet sometimes elusive, factor that influences laws, policies, relationships, and practices in education" (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019, p. 5). Conversely, as depicted in the preceding example, ableist discourse had more of a negative impact on the experiences of this couple, which according to Ford (2009), "in many contexts, intolerance that occurs against persons with disabilities remains

more permissible or palatable than racism based on color" (p. 16). Henceforth, in some mixed-race unions, the saliency of race may be subsidiary to other marginalized identities and an inquisition into the experiences of all social identities is thus warranted.

Similarly, the socio-economic status (SES) of exogamous couples and the socio-political climate in which mixed-unions exist may substantially influence their lived experiences. Higher socio-economic status may serve as a 'protection' against racism and prejudice since higher SES may result in changes to social location. The notion that "money whitens" and "poverty darkens" was used to describe the influence of SES on social location by Schwartzman (2007, p. 942); this study found that Racialized people of higher SES in Brazil marry White people more frequently than Racialized people of lower SES. This study also reported that mixed-race couples with higher education more often classify their children as White compared to interracial couples with lower educational credentials. Some of these findings are similar to the data from the present study, where all participants in this sample reported a minimum of a post-secondary education and most couples reported an annual income of over 100K; however in the present study, most couples primarily classified their children as mixed-race/culture. What might be of greater relevance in the present sample with regards to "money whitens" and "poverty darkens" (Schwartzman, 2007, p. 942), is that higher SES may have facilitated greater access to White-dominated spaces and places, such as neighbourhoods, educational institutions and recreational opportunities. The ingress into these spaces and places may also serve as a safeguard against some racial discrimination and prejudice. It should be noted that higher SES does not equate to immunity against racism, as was exemplified by a participant who holds a senior position but continues to experience racial microaggression (e.g., contested gazes and surprise reactions) due to the lack of diversity at senior levels within her organization.

Another critical consideration on lived experiences is the influence of current socio-political climate in which mixed-race relationships exist. During the period of data collection and analysis, the years 2020 and 2021 have been fraught with several notable phenomena and events relevant to the discourse on race and racism. Some include a global pandemic; cessation of the Trump-era (Baker, 2021); the death of George Floyd and the subsequent "collective moral injury" (Barbot, 2020, p. 1253) and global revival of social justice advocacy to bring awareness and intervention to anti-Black racism; and discovery of the remains of hundreds of Indigenous children at former residential schools across Canada (Dickson & Watson, 2021). Ominous events and circumstances as noted above may acutely influence the experiences and emotions of mixed-race partners and couples based on the nature of the events and affiliation to a collective consciousness. For example, a few participants and couples in the present study noted an increase in racist encounters since the Trump-era, an increase in anti-Asian racism since the COVID-19 pandemic, and profound motivation to engage in decolonized learning and social justice and advocacy. Extant studies have examined the impact of community disasters on social, psychological and health outcomes (Adams et al., 2006) and the social and relational impact of natural disasters (Rendall, 2011). Moreover, research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on romantic relationships has been conducted (Stanley & Markman, 2020; Williamson, 2020); however, little is known about the impact of community and colonial racism and its rippling effects on mixed-race couples. The data in the present study gave some insights into the possible impact of socio-cultural and geo-political events and climate on the lived experiences of mixed-race couples.

In summary, the exploration of race and culture in mixed-race relationships has often resulted in the omission of non-race and culture variables, such as the primacy of shared

relationship values and experiences stemming from other intersecting social identities. The preceding section contributes to the integrity of these relationships by offering a more complete and holistic cross-section of these partnerships.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion offered a critical analysis of some of the key findings that emerged in this study. A comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of race and culture in endogamous unions is only attainable through the discernment of pre-relationship intra- and inter- racial and cultural consciousness as well as knowledge on intersectionality, both of which have been largely omitted from extant studies. The criticality of race and culture in mixed-unions is manifold where, for example, race/culture are often perceived as non-central and supplementary to attraction/pursuit of romantic unions and relationship success, while on the other hand, race/culture are often considered central to exogamous integration and relationship strengths. Moreover, the lived experiences of race and culture pertinent to relationship strengths, challenges, and shifts in identity and social location can only be ascertained when contextualized within colonial, racist, heteropatriarchal and endogamous discourses. Nevertheless, what is strikingly apparent is that mixed-race unions are tremendously heterogeneous, and to fully grasp the lived experiences of mixed-race couples, a multitude of variables must be critically considered.

Mid-Level Theory of Understanding the Lived Experiences of Heterosexual Racialized-White Mixed-Race Couples

The present study was guided by several theories, including Critical Race (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019; Gillborn, 2015); Feminist (Allen, 2018) and Post-structural theories (Gannon & Davies, 2014). In addition, the data from this study was juxtaposed and contextualized with some extant theories, including Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 2005), Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1958), Status Caste Exchange Theory (Merton, 1941), Triracial Hierarchy Theory (Bonilla-Silva, 2004), and Racial Motivation theories (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993). Thus, though the formulation of the *Mid-level Theory of Understanding the Lived Experiences of Heterosexual Racialized-White Mixed-Race Couples (Figure 5)* predominantly emerged through the integration of the four core themes (i.e., Lived Experiences of Race and Culture Prior to Mixed-Race Relationships; Lived Experiences of Race and Culture in Mixed-Race Relationships; Critical Reflections on Lived Experiences: Negotiating Differences, Racism and Privilege, and Being in 'The Middle' of Two Races and Cultures; Lived Experiences of Mixed-Race Couples Beyond Race and Culture), some of the aforementioned theories were instrumental in its development.

The mid-level theory proposed by the present study answers the research question by providing a visual representation for discerning the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples. It offers a graphic illustration for mental health clinicians and researchers in conceptualizing the multilayered influences on and experiences of heterosexual interracial couples. The mid-level theory depicted below *(Figure 5)* encompasses all key components characteristic of the research question and are represented by four concentric ovals.

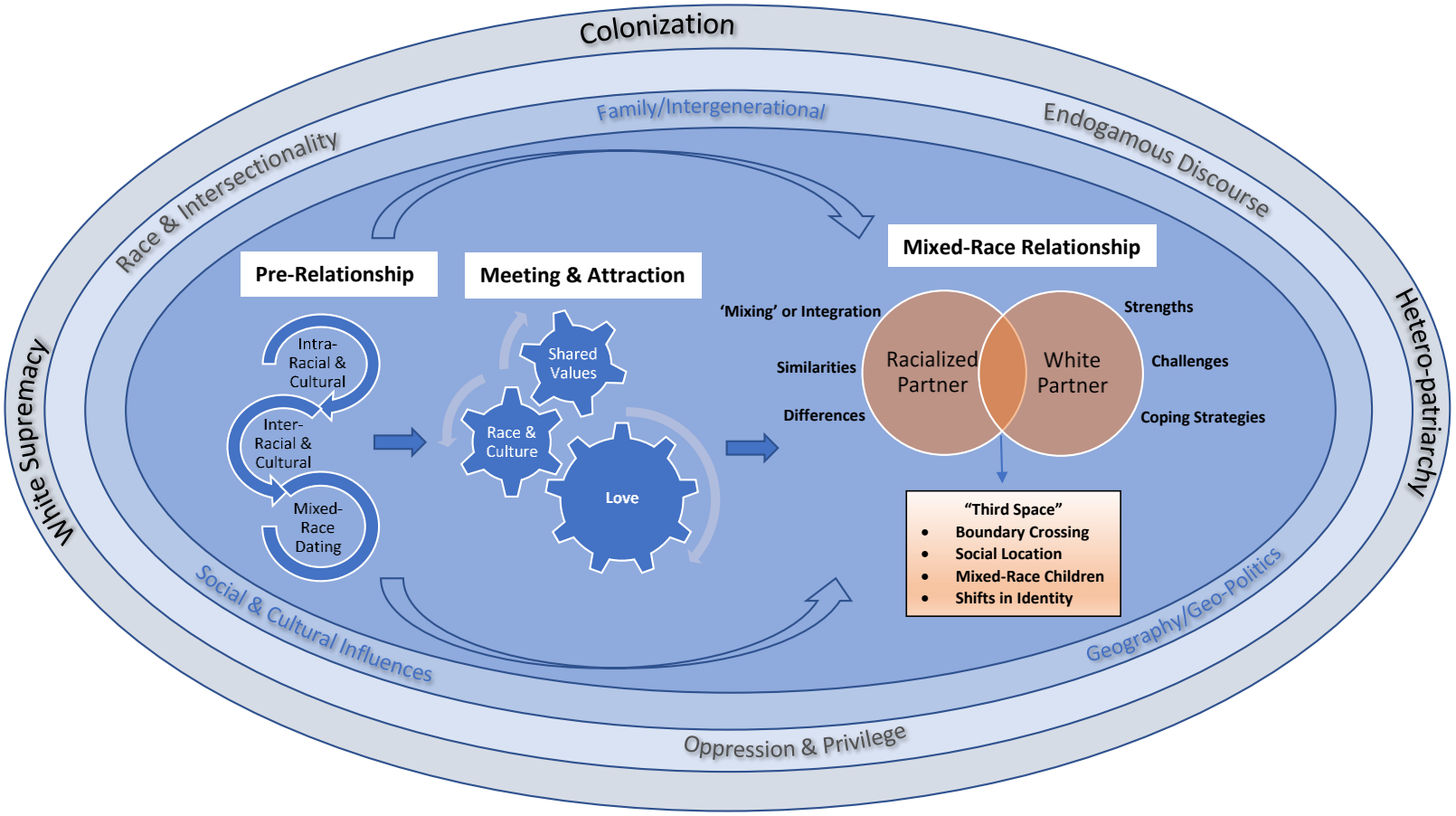

Figure 5: Mid-Level Theory of Understanding the Lived Experiences of Heterosexual Racialized-White Mixed-Race Couples

The concentric ovals represent the relational context of influential variables and processes evident in mixed-unions. The innermost oval shows the evolution and progression of mixed-race relationships, as well as key experiences and processes evident in these partnerships. In the far left of the innermost oval, the *Pre-Relationship* experiences are represented by three linked arrows and they summarize the findings in core theme one. These three key pre-relationship experiences (i.e., I*ntra-Racial and Cultural, Inter-Racial and Cultural, and Mixed-Race Dating*) denote that prior to the conception of exogamous unions, partners are often engaged in intra-racial/cultural development, acquisition of some inter-racial/cultural awareness, and obtainment of insights and/or experiences in mixed-race dating. These pre-relationship constructs have been largely excluded from extant studies, yet procurement of positive intra-racial/cultural attitudes and attainment of critical cross-racial knowledge are considered prerequisites for successful mixed-race partnerships (Leslie &Letiecq, 2004). Additionally, the three linked arrows signify that a conglomeration of intra- and inter- racial/cultural variables may influence the perception and/or receptivity towards mixed-race dating/relationships. The mid-level theory further demonstrates that the three pre-relationship variables are influenced by multiple factors, depicted by the remaining three concentric ovals. The second inner most oval shows that *Family/Intergenerational*, *Geography/Geo-politics,* and *Social and Cultural Influences* may significantly shape intra-racial/cultural identity, cross-racial awareness and attitudes, and perceptions on mixed-race dating and relationships. Additionally, this model also illustrates that these aforementioned variables are further influenced by *Race and Intersectionality*, experiences of *Oppression and Privilege,* and/or dominant *Endogamous Discourse,* depicted in the second outermost oval, which are largely shaped by *Colonization*, *White Supremacy*, and *Heteropatriarchy*, represented by the outermost concentric oval. To clarify with an example, the

connection to and expression of racial/cultural identity was shown to vary between Racialized and White partners in the present study. This model offers a mid-level theory on how transmission of culture through family, exposure to racial/cultural factors (e.g., native language, cultural foods) and the diversity and geo-politics of geographical regions may impact identity formation and expression. It further highlights that race and intersectionality of other socio-cultural identities including the 'group of seven' (Moodley, 2011) and subsequent encounters of oppression and privilege may play an overarching role, regulated by colonial, White supremacy and heteropatriarchal discourse. Similarly, according to this model, attitudes towards heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples and experiences of mixed-race dating prior to the formation of mixed-race unions may be influenced by the prevalence of interracial unions in geographical spaces, as well as familial attitudes and perception towards exogamy. Moreover, these variables are largely impelled by dominant discourses on race/racism and endogamy, governed within the context of colonialism, White supremacy and heteropatriarchy. The mid-level theory bears some parallels to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 2005), which posits a multi-system influence on identity development. However, the mid-level theory proposed by this research expands on Bronfenbrenner's model by not only outlining the influences on intra-racial/cultural development, but it also expounds on the multifaceted influences on cross-racial and interracial awareness and insights, within critical race, anti-oppressive and feminist paradigms. Additionally, this model proposes a connection between pre-relationship variables and experiences in mixed-race relationships as depicted by the two arrows extending from *Pre-relationship* to *Mixed-race Relationship* in the innermost oval. The arrows illustrate that the three pre-relationship variables play an influential role in mixed-unions, such as the methods in

which race and culture are integrated, how interracial strengths and challenges are conceptualized, and shifts in racial/cultural identity, to name a few. For example, the degree of intra-racial/cultural attachment, identity and expression in a partner prior to the commencement of their mixed-union may stipulate the extent in which elements of the partner's race/culture are integrated in their relationship.

Furthermore, the mid-level theory demonstrates that a constellation of the three pre-relationship variables may influence the pursuit and initiation of interracial unions, shown by the arrow extending from *Pre-Relationship* to *Meeting and Attraction* in the innermost oval. *Meeting and Attraction* shown to the right of *Pre-Relationship* in the inner most oval, suggests three principal motivations for mixed-race relationships – *Love*, *Shared Values*, and *Race and Culture* (depicted by the three interrelated gears). *Love* and *Shared Values*, represented by two of the gears, also encompass attributes of attraction such as personality characteristics, common interests, physical attraction, intellect, similar life path, connection and friendship. *Love* is intentionally depicted as the largest gear, insinuating its primacy in mixed-race relationships. Similar to endogamous unions, love and compatibility are considered the principal motivation for exogamous relationships (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993; Porterfield, 1982). *Race and Culture*, depicted as one of the three gears, is recognized for its role (though minimal) in the pursuit of some mixed-race relationships via out-group dating preferences. This stems from possessing unfavourable intra-racial/cultural dating perceptions and/or having specific racial/cultural out-group preferences. Moreover, similar to the pre-relationship constructs previously discussed, this model demonstrates that meeting, attraction and the formation of mixed-unions are also shaped by several other variables, represented by the three outer concentric ovals. For example, family attitudes on exogamy, prevalence of interracial unions in geographical regions, and/or

colonial, heteropatriarchal and White supremacy's social positioning of racial groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; hooks, 1995) are proposed by this model to have some implications on where mixed-race couples meet, romantic attraction and/or the pursuit of mixed-unions.

Once heterosexual Racialized-White interracial couples establish a romantic partnership, the *Mixed-Race Relationship* in the far right of the innermost oval illustrates the complex and multifaceted dynamics present in these unions. The model suggests that couples may experience *Similarities* and *Differences* deriving from either individual and/or racial/cultural differences, may engage in various methods of mixing or integrating their unique races/cultures (i.e., *'Mixing' or Integration*), may experience *Strengths* and *Challenges*, and may incorporate *Coping Strategies*, all of which are depicted in the far right of the innermost oval under *Mixed-Race Relationship*. The two intersecting circles represent the 'mixed' union between a *Racialized Partner* and a *White Partner*. The point where the circles overlap, depicted in dark orange, serves as a symbolic representation of racial/cultural 'mixing,' which is conceptualized as a *'Third Space'* where diverse races, ethnicities and cultures intersect. In this *Third Space,* couples may be construed as crossing racial/cultural boundaries or borders (i.e., *Boundary Crossing*), experience *Shifts in Social Location*, shifts in racial/cultural identity (i.e., *Shifts in Identity*), and/or their *Mixed-Race Children* may challenge the bipartite discourse on identity by virtue of their mixed identities (Killian, 2001; Qian & Lichter, 2007). These aforementioned variables that stem from the *Third Space* are represented in a textbox below the two overlapping circles. Moreover, the areas in which the circles do not intersect suggest that though couples may experience shifts in privileges and/or marginalization due to boundary crossing and shifts to social location, their Racialized, White and/or intersecting identities continue to play a significant role in their individual experiences. This is particularly salient when contextualized

within the factors noted in the three outer concentric ovals. For example, a Racialized female partner may be considered 'less Racialized' and may be (temporarily) shielded from racial discrimination when in certain geographical spaces with her White male partner. However, her Racialized and other underrepresented intersecting identities (e.g., female, religious minority status) may continue to endure racial discrimination, sexism and religious prejudice within the dominant colonial, White supremacy and heteropatriarchal discourses. It is noteworthy that the experiences of couples and partners may be contingent on multiple variables outlined in the outer concentric ovals, and thus the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples may be vastly heterogeneous and diverse.

In summary, the *Mid-level Theory of Understanding the Lived Experiences of Heterosexual Racialized-White Mixed-Race Couples* serves as a guide in understanding the unique experiences of Racialized-White couples. This model is not intended for generalization purposes, but instead offers critical insights on the multiple variables, processes and experiences evident in these partnerships. In this model, the constellation of the four concentric ovals points to multiple factors that require critical consideration when conceptualizing the lived experiences of exogamous unions and when offering equitable and culturally-informed counselling and psychotherapy services to heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This study was an attempt to respond to the paucity in Canadian research on interracial couples, since scholarly literature on Canadian interracial couples is disproportionate to the steadfast rise in this population (Hamplova & Le Bourdais, 2010; Lee & Boyd, 2008; Oriola, 2008). The present study explored the multifaceted experiences evident in interracial relationships by implementing a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1965) situated within critical race (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019; Gillborn, 2015) and feminist (Allen, 2018) paradigms to answer the research question: *What are the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto with regards to issues of race and culture?*

Four core themes emerged from the findings, revealing the intricate, multifaceted and diverse lived experiences of interracial couples, which ranged from pertinent pre-relationship racial and cultural experiences to key experiences of intersectionality. In the final reflections of this research, this chapter will offer concluding remarks by first discussing the strengths and unique contributions of this study, followed by implications for counselling psychology. The limitations of this study will then be presented, followed by recommendations for future research. This chapter will conclude with a personal reflection by the primary researcher on her experience conducting this study.

Strengths and Unique Contributions

This study possessed several strengths evident in the research methodology, demographics of participants and significant contributions to the literature. Further elaborations will follow.

A qualitative grounded theory inquiry (Charmaz, 2006) allowed for in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White couples in Toronto. Engaging in semi-structured and open-ended interviews allowed for authentic and spontaneous unfolding of emic and idiographic narratives (Hoyt & Bhati, 2007; Morrow, 2005, 2007). This enabled the researcher to access thoughts, emotions, lived experiences and subjective interpretations (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019; Morrow, 2007) pertinent to race and culture, as well as garner race/culture-specific undertones, otherwise unattainable through quantitative methodologies or even some structured qualitative interviews (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Morrow, 2005). Moreover, the over-problematization of mixed-race unions in past research has contributed to prejudicial assumptions and stigmatization of these relationships (Kenney & Kenney, 2009; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013; Wehrly et al., 1999). Thus, situating the research question within critical race (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019; Gillborn, 2015), feminist (Allen, 2018) and strength-based paradigms elicited open dialogues on a wide range of experiences, including challenges, facilitated by the non-pathologizing methodological framework of this study.

The demographics of the research participants were another key strength of this study. Since there are limited Canadian studies on mixed-race relationships (Hamplova & Le Bourdais, 2010; Lee & Boyd, 2008; Oriola, 2008), there has been an overreliance on American-centric research, which has predominantly focused on Black-White mixed-race unions. Henceforth, the diverse racial and cultural identities of participants and racial composition of interracial couples in the present study is a more accurate representation of the population in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), as well as other metropolitan cities in Canada. The extensive diversity in race, ethnicity, culture and other intersecting social identities provides a more accurate representation of mixed-race couples in Toronto, the GTA and Canada (Aathavan,

2019; Statistics Canada, 2014), which allowed the researcher to access the rich labyrinth of lived experiences. In addition to the extensive diversity of participants, the sample size of 12 was conducive to data saturation (Vasileiou et al., 2018), leading to the formation of a mid-level theory.

Henceforth, through the strength-based constructivist qualitative methodology, the narratives of 12 mixed-race couples offers significant contributions to the literature. First, the findings reduce the gap between the steadfast increase in Canadian heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-couples (Milan et al., 2010; Statistics Canada, 2014) and the exiguous Canadian intercultural research on this population (Hamplova & Le Bourdais, 2010; Lee & Boyd, 2008; Oriola, 2008). The scarcity in Canadian research has resulted in overgeneralizations from American, British and South African studies (Brooks & Ogolsky, 2017; Buggs, 2017; Dalmage, 2018; Kenney & Kenney, 2009; Savage, 2012; Song, 2010). This has inadvertently overlooked Canada's distinct history of colonial racism and White supremacy, including the racialization of Canada's immigration policies (Thobani, 2000) and historical regulation of mixed-race intimacy (Backhouse, 1999). Therefore, the research findings of this study not only impart comprehensive insights into the experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White Canadian couples, but the extensive literature review and appraisal of the results in the discussion chapter proffers key context for critically understanding their lived experiences.

Moreover, although pre-relationship racial/cultural experiences are considered paramount to the success of mixed-race relationships (Leslie &Letiecq, 2004), most extant studies have overlooked the pre-relationship racial/cultural experiences of partners. Thus, another unique contribution of this study is the exploration of three pre-relationship racial/cultural factors (i.e., intra-racial/cultural development, inter-racial/cultural awareness, mixed-race dating and

perception) and their influences on the lived experiences of mixed-couples. This is particularly relevant within the context of counselling and psychotherapy, since historical and developmental experiences are deemed central in understanding human behaviour and relationships.

Another significant contribution of this study is the holistic presentation of mixed-race couples, exemplified by a critical consideration of intersectionality (Moodley, 2011), and the influences of geo-political and socio-cultural factors on lived experiences. Similar to race, other social identities are subjected to imbalances of power and privilege (Killian, 2001; Moodley, 2011); these were found to significantly impact the experiences of couples. Intersectionality in mixed-race relationships has been largely left out of scholarly research, however this study emphasized its saliency, offering a more complete and nonpartisan profile of these partnerships. Moreover, the diverse racial configuration of couples in this research goes beyond the binary and dichotomous discourses often emphasized in past studies (e.g., Black-White, Asian-White relationships). Instead, the diverse racial/cultural composition of couples conveyed the influence of racial identity and/or racial configuration of couples on lived experiences, specifically when contextualized within colonial racism, heteropatriarchal and endogamous discourses.

Implications for Counselling Psychology

The discord between the increase in Canadian heterosexual Racialized-White interracial couples (Hamplova & Le Bourdais, 2010; Lee & Boyd, 2008; Mahoney & Alphonso, 2005; Milan et al., 2010; Oriola, 2008) and the paucity in Canadian research on mixed-race couples called for immediate response and action. The field of counselling psychology in Canada has relied heavily on non-Canadian research and Eurocentric psychotherapeutic frameworks to support this growing population. Thus, this study has notable implications for the field of counselling and psychotherapy in Canada. In addition to the literature review, research findings

and critical appraisal of the results, the mid-level theory proposed by this study has the capacity to foster the decolonization of pedagogy in counselling psychology programs and impart intercultural knowledge and competency for mental health clinicians and clinical supervisors. The findings also challenge current stigmatizing and pathologizing case conceptualization frameworks, by offering a multisystem model contextualized within decolonial, anti-racist and strength-based paradigms for understanding interracial couples and their families. Furthermore, the mid-level theory suggests that in order to fully grasp the lived experiences of exogamous couples, a historical understanding of intra- and inter- racial/cultural factors and the lived experiences pertinent to intersectionality must be considered. This contributes to a more holistic, inclusive and culturally relevant clinical conceptualization of interracial unions. The aforementioned culturally-informed framework is recommended for all therapeutic modalities, and not just a select few, allowing for broad applicability. In addition, the methodological framework and research outcomes of this study are in compliance with the College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario's (CRPO) code of ethics, which advocates for "justice and fairness" and to take a "stand against oppression and discrimination" (College of Registered Psychotherapist of Ontario, 2021, para. 5). Thus, this study not only establishes a precedent for conducting ethical research and engaging in culturally-informed counselling and psychotherapy practice in Canada, but its application has the capacity to empower and cultivate dignity in interracial couples and their families.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations, some of which are inherent to a qualitative grounded theory methodology and some specific to this research. Further details are presented below.

In grounded theory inquiry, purposeful sampling is typically implemented in the early stages of data collection and the inclusion criteria are guided by the research question (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Morrow, 2005). Theoretical sampling is then introduced once codes and themes emerge from the initial set of data to confirm or disconfirm rudimentary theories (Charmaz & Bryant, 2010). The shift between purposeful and theoretical sampling requires experience and finesse, in order to avoid simplicity in theory development (Sifat, 2018). Though the primary researcher committed to grounded theory principles of sampling, the time constraints imposed by a doctoral degree may have prematurely hindered an 'ideal' transition from purposeful to theoretical sampling, thus limiting the scope of the research findings and development of the mid-level theory.

An added limitation is identified in the interpretive role of the researcher. Constructivist grounded theory encourages researchers to "construct an *interpretive rendering* of the worlds we study rather than an external reporting of events and statements" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 184). The co-creation of data is grounded in subjective epistemology, which posits that knowledge is co-created (Rieger, 2019). While the researcher made an ardent commitment to authenticity, transparency and reflexivity, engaged in memo-writing and consulted with her supervisor throughout the research process, her membership in a Racialized-White mixed-race relationship may have influenced and biased the interpretation of the data.

Another limitation is evident in the demographics of the participants. Although the research sample consisted of diversity relevant to race, gender, age, (dis)ability, religion, country of birth, and language, all participants reported a minimum post-secondary diploma and/or degree and most couples reported a minimum household income of 100K (with the exception of two couples, where one did not answer and another reported a retirement status). The

homogeneity in educational attainment and socio-economic status in this sample may not reflect the experiences of interracial couples of lower socio-economic statuses, particularly those relevant to financial barriers/challenges. It is also important to note that there were no Indigenous participants in this sample. In addition, a voluntary sample that was partially recruited through word-of-mouth and snowball techniques is not representative of all heterosexual interracial couples in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), as it does not evince the experiences of non-voluntary couples (e.g., couples experiencing life interfering challenges, couples experiencing relationship ruptures or dissolutions). The 2-year inclusion criteria also excluded mixed-race couples whose relationships ended, resulting in potential survivorship bias in the data (Mathews, 2015).

Moreover, although virtual data collection allowed for greater efficiency and access to participants, interviews conducted virtually may have limited additional disclosures and elaborations of narratives that might have been possible through in-person interviews (Krouwel et al., 2019).

Recommendations for Future Research

The data and mid-level theory that emerged from this study offered critical insights into the lived experiences of heterosexual mixed-race couples. However further studies are recommended to obtain even greater understanding of this under-researched and under-served population. Though replication studies have been criticized for lacking originality (Heirene, 2021), future research on similar samples would enhance generalizability and ameliorate the mid-level theory proposed by this study. Furthermore, since couples in this study are likely to describe their relationship as healthy, positive and happy, an investigation of exogamous relationships that experience life-interfering challenges and those that have dissolved would

yield crucial data. The narratives of the aforementioned samples would critically inform the field of counselling and psychotherapy on key issues that threaten mixed-unions and better guide clinicians in supporting interracial couples and their families.

Another recommendation for further research is grounded in the racial composition of mixed-race couples. Although there is a larger number of Racialized-White relative to Racialized-Racialized interracial relationships in Canada, in 2011 Statistics Canada reported a total of 54, 970 interracial relationships where both partners identified as Racialized with distinct racial identities (Statistics Canada, 2014). There are no updated census data; however, this number is predicted to have increased due to a rise in racial, ethnic and cultural diversity and greater interracial socialization (Heaton & Jacobson, 2000; Statistics Canada, 2014; Van Zantvliet & Kalmijn, 2013). Thus, since the triracial hierarchy theory (Bonilla-Silva, 2004) described the hierarchical positioning of various races and differential experiences of racism, the lived experiences of Racialized-Racialized couples may be unique. Racialized-Racialized exogamous couples may also encounter a 'double whammy' of challenges based on their social positioning, as Racialized individuals and as Racialized couples. This study therefore recommends future exploration of the lived experiences of Racialized-Racialized interracial couples.

Similarly, same-sex interracial relationships have been on a rise in both Canada (Milan et al., 2010) and the United States (Jayson, 2012; Savage, 2012; Singh et al., 2020), yet there is limited scholarly literature on the lived experiences of same-sex mixed-race couples. Notwithstanding the fact that there may be some parallels in experiences in both heterosexual and same-sex exogamous couples, the intersectionality of race and sexual orientation will uniquely shape the experiences and challenges of same-sex interracial couples when situated

within colonial racism, White-heteropatriarchal and heterosexist discourses. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore the experiences of same-sex interracial couples and interracial couples of diverse LGBTTIQQ2S identities.

A Personal Reflection on Conducting This Research

As I reflect on my journey as the primary researcher of this study, I am overcome with an abundance of emotions. In the early stages, I experienced a great sense of curiosity, excitement and anxiety because I felt personally, professionally and academically committed to this research endeavour. As previously mentioned in chapter one, my personal investment stemmed from my own membership in a Racialized-White mixed-race relationship. My professional and academic fervour stemmed from my determination to ethically give voice to mixed-race couples, in order to meaningfully contribute to research, academia and the field of counselling and psychotherapy.

My disquietude escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic at the realization that this study would be conducted entirely virtually, and I feared there would be lack of interest by participants and truncation of narratives. However, I was overwhelmingly disproven by the volume of interested couples and the generosity of their time and the depth of their disclosures. I felt deeply honoured and privileged to have had access to personal and relational narratives that conveyed love, joy, commitment, pain, resilience and pride, to name a few. During data collection and analysis, I reflected on my own interracial marriage and noted parallels and divergences in experience. I also wondered about the impact of my insider position (Holmes, 2020) as a researcher holding membership in a Racialized-White relationship. For instance, did my own lived experience facilitate greater trust and as a consequence deeper and more authentic dialogue or did it truncate genuine disclosures due to my biased safeguarding of mixed-race relationships, such as avoidance of difficult questions or participants not stating the obvious?

Nevertheless, in accordance with the principles of reflexivity, authenticity and transparency in grounded theory (Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005), I engaged in memo writing and consulted with my supervisor on the personal impact of this study. Additionally, during the process of writing the discussion where I critiqued the results in relation to existing scholarly literature, I experienced 'imposter syndrome,' (Lumsden, 2019) where I doubted my qualifications to critique the renowned work of great scholars. A critical turning point was having a candid discussion with my supervisor, who encouraged me to take greater risks, especially as a Racialized female in academia.

Of further significance, this research was conducted in 2020 and 2021, years that were not only inundated with the COVID-19 pandemic, but where we also witnessed the end of the Trump-era (Baker, 2021), the death of George Floyd (Barbot, 2020), the Black Lives Matter movement (Black Lives Matter, 2021) across North America and Europe that started to fervently challenge coloniality and White supremacy, the discovery of unmarked graves in former residential schools across Canada (Dickson & Watson, 2021), and the murder of a Muslim family motivated by Islamophobia in London, Ontario (Hager & Perreaux, 2021). In light of these events and many others, I was even more motivated by social justice to use my social location as a researcher and psychotherapist to justly convey the lived experiences of this underserved population in research and counselling and psychotherapy.

Concluding Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto relevant to race and culture. The research question emerged from the paucity in Canadian literature on mixed-race unions and the overdependency on American-based studies. A qualitative constructivist grounded theory

methodology was implemented to obtain thorough understanding of the lived experiences of exogamous couples, since little is known about Canadian mixed-race couples. Four core themes emerged directly from the narratives of 12 interracial couples, which collectively conveyed their intra- and inter- racial and cultural development and awareness, factors influencing their attraction, methods of integrating race/culture in their relationships, strengths, challenges, strategies of managing differences and challenges, experiences of boundary crossing, shifts in social location, and experiences of intersectionality. These findings reflect the heterogeneity of interracial unions and the vast diversity in experiences, which can only be fully understood when contextualized within the dominant discourses of Canadian coloniality, racism, White supremacy, heteropatriarchy and endogamy. The formulation of the *Mid-level Theory of Understanding the Lived Experiences of Racialized-White Mixed-Race Couples (Figure 5)* is relevant to the field of counselling psychology, as it offers a culturally-relevant, strength-based, dynamic and multisystem framework in which to conceptualize the lived experiences of mixed-couples.

The implications of this study extend beyond culturally relevant research and mental health services for interracial couples. An equally important objective was to uphold and impart greater integrity and acceptance of mixed-race couples and their families. More specifically, the hope is for integrity and acceptance of exogamous unions to transcend the measures set forth by coloniality and White supremacy (Fanon, 1967), which is often situated within the colonizer-colonized binary (Drabinski, 2019), but instead for mixed-race couples and their families to create their own standards of acceptance, integrity and humanity.

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Appendix A

Advertisement of Research

Research Participants Needed for a Study Examining Heterosexual Racialized-White Mixed-Race Relationships

My name is Shivon Raghunandan and I am a Doctoral student in the Counselling Psychology program at the University of Toronto. My doctoral research is *examining the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto with regards to issues of race and culture*.

Couples interested in this research must meet the following criteria:

- Self-identify as a Racialized-White mixed-race couple
    - One partner identifies as Racialized, person of colour or a racial minority and the other partner identifies as White with European ancestry
- Dating, cohabitating or married for a minimum of 2 years
- Heterosexual couples
- Both partners self-identify as cis-gender
- 18 years or older
- Proficient in English
- Living in Toronto or the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)
- Can commit 1 – 1 ½ hours for an interview via MS Teams

Information collected during this research will be kept in the strictest confidence. If you are interested in more information and/or wish to take part in this research, I would be happy to be contacted at:

shivon.raghunandan@mail.utoronto.ca OR (416) 268-3025
Counselling Psychology, APHD Department, OISE, University of Toronto

Appendix B

Research Information Letter

Hello,

My name is Shivon Raghunandan and I am a Doctoral student in the Counselling Psychology program at the University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). My research will examine the lived experiences relevant to race and culture of couples who identify as interracial/mixed-race where one partner self-identifies as Racialized and the other partner self-identifies as White. My research is supervised by Dr. Roy Moodley who is a professor at the University of Toronto. Below you will find more information about my research.

Title of Research: Navigating Race and Culture: The Lived Experiences of Heterosexual Racialized-White Mixed-Race Couples in Toronto

Why this research?

The number of mixed-race relationships, particularly Racialized-White relationships is growing and there is an even greater increase in metropolitan cities including Toronto. However, there is limited research and education within a Canadian context for supporting mixed-race couples. Mental health professionals may see an increase in this population in their practice and may rely on clinical interventions grounded in Eurocentric psychotherapies and philosophies that are culturally insensitive, inappropriate and unethical.

My research is therefore an attempt to respond to the gap in research, education and culturally-informed practices in counselling and psychotherapy for this demographic. It has the potential to critically contribute to theories and interventions relevant to this population from an empowerment-focused, anti-racist and decolonial framework. This research also holds the capacity to dismantle colonial and racist discourse by raising awareness, inclusion and credence for mixed-race couples.

Who can participate?

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples, I am interested in interviewing couples who meet the following criteria:

- Self-identify as a Racialized-White mixed-race couple
    - One partner identifies as Racialized, person of colour or a racial minority and the other partner identifies as White with European ancestry
- Dating, cohabitating or married for a minimum of 2 years
- Heterosexual couples
- Both partners self-identify as cis-gender
- 18 years or older
- Proficient in English
- Living in Toronto or the Greater Toronto Area
- Can commit 1 – 1 ½ hours for an interview via MS Teams

What does my participation involve?

Couples who express interest in this research will undergo a brief telephone screening to determine inclusion eligibility. Couples who meet the eligibility criteria will be invited for an interview via MS Teams. The choice of conducting interviews via MS Teams was informed by the recommendations of Toronto Public Health related to the health and safety guidelines for COVID-19. Interviews will be conducted by myself and will last for approximately 1 – 1 ½ hours. At the beginning of the interview, informed consent will be discussed and obtained and participants will be reminded of their right to withdraw. A conversational style interview will follow where participants will be invited to share their experiences of race and culture as it relates to their membership in a Racialized-White mixed-race relationship. During the interview, I will take brief notes and interviews will be recorded to ensure accuracy during data analysis. At the end of the interview, couples will be given the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and to debrief. Couples will be given the choice to be contacted 1-2 months after the interview to review the transcripts of their interview so as to provide feedback, make edits and provide clarification. Couples will also be given the option to receive a final copy of the research results.

Do I have to participate?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. During this research, you may refuse to provide informed consent or withdraw your consent without any negative consequences or penalty. During the interview, you may choose to not answer certain questions but remain as a research participant in this study. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information and data collected will be destroyed. In addition, since this research is focused on the joint/relational experiences of mixed-race couples, if you choose to withdraw, your partner will also be withdrawn as they would not be able to singularly speak about your relationship experience as a couple. Please note, due to the complex nature of data analysis, once data analysis has begun, you may no longer withdraw your participation. I will inform you of this timeline two weeks before data analysis begins.

Are there any risks of participating?

The level of self-disclosure regarding the lived experiences of race and culture may elicit some feelings of emotional and psychological discomfort. Additionally, conversations regarding your relationship may also trigger or expose relational challenges. In the event that this occurs, you have the right to pause the interview, take a break and/or withdraw from this research without penalty and/or negative consequences. At the end of the interview, you will be given the opportunity to debrief your experience and will be provided with a list of counselling resources in the community should you require follow-up emotional and psychological supports.

In addition, though security measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality, interviews conducted via online platforms pose a risk of being breached. I have established maximum safety measures to minimize this risk and to protect your information (i.e., data encryption, de-identification processes and multi-layered password protection).

Are there any benefits of participating?

Sharing your lived experiences as mixed-race couples will contribute to education, research and mental health supports for mixed-race couples and their families. There is limited research on mixed-race relationships within a Canadian context and your participation in this research will contribute in the following ways: (1) give voice and understanding to Racialized-White mixed-

race couples (2) deepen the understanding of mixed-race relationships (3) debunk stigma related to mixed-race relationships (4) contribute to the field of counselling and psychotherapy by providing culturally informed and relevant knowledge to clinicians and educators who support mixed-race couples, families and children (5) contribute to the welfare and well-being of mixed-race couples and their families by presenting mixed-race relationships from a strength-based, anti-oppressive and anti-racist framework.

Compensation
There is no financial compensation for participation in this research.

How will my privacy be protected?
Information collected during this research will be kept in the strictest confidence. The following measures will be implemented: (1) you will be asked to provide a pseudonym of your choice (2) any identifiable information provided will be kept separately from your data (3) no identifiable information nor your real names will be used during thesis committee meetings, presentations, conferences and/or future publications (4) no paper data will be kept and all electronic data will be stored on OneDrive, a secure server endorsed by the University of Toronto (5) video recorded data will be erased two months after transcription (6) transcripts will be stored for approximately seven years after the study has been completed and then destroyed, and (7) you will be given the option to review the transcript from the interviews, where you may request that certain narratives be omitted from the data and they will be erased from all data and documents.

Do I have access to the research results?
Participants will have access to (a) transcripts from the interviews and (b) final research results. You will be given the option to indicate this preference during the consent process.

If you have any further questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Review Office at the University of Toronto by phone: (416) 946-5763 or by email: ethics.review@utoronto.ca

If you have any further questions about this research study, please feel free to reach me at (416) 268-3025 or shivon.raghunandan@mail.utoronto.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Roy Moodley at roy.moodley@utoronto.ca

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Shivon Raghunandan

Appendix C

Demographic Screener for Study Inclusion

1. **Couple (initials):** (a)_____ and (b)_____
2. **Are you both over 18 years of age?** Yes____ No____
3. **Do you identify as a heterosexual couple?** Yes____ No____ Other____
4. **Do you both identify as cisgender?** Yes____ No____ Other ____
5. **How long have you been together?** _____ years
6. **Racial identity:** (a)_____ and (b) _____
7. **Are you both proficient in English?** Yes____ No____
8. **Are you both available for a 1 – 1 ½ hour interview via MS Teams?**
   Yes____ No____

Meets study criteria: _____

Recruited for Interview: _____

Date/Time of Interview: _____

Appendix D

Informed Consent to Participate in the Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Shivon Raghunandan, doctoral candidate, at the University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). Your participation is voluntary and results from this research will contribute to the understanding of race and culture in heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race relationships.

Title of Research: Navigating Race and Culture: The Lived Experiences of Heterosexual Racialized-White Mixed-Race Couples in Toronto

Purpose of Research: To understand the lived experiences of heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race couples in Toronto with regards to issues of race and culture.

Procedure of Research: Participants who express interest in this research will undergo a brief telephone screening to determine inclusion eligibility. Those who meet eligibility criteria will be invited for an interview via MS Teams, a secure video conference platform. The choice to conduct interviews via MS Teams was informed by the recommendations of Toronto Public Health related to the health and safety guidelines for COVID-19. Interviews will be conducted by the primary researcher and will last for approximately 1 – 1 ½ hours. Interviews will follow a conversational style and participants will be invited to share their experiences of race and culture as it relates to their membership in a Racialized-White mixed-race relationship.

Access to Research Results: Participants will have access to the research findings. Please indicate your preferences below:

(a) Would you like to receive a copy of the interview transcript?
Yes: ____ No: ____

Participants are invited to provide feedback (i.e., make edits, provide clarification, etc.) to the interview transcripts no later than 2 weeks after a copy of the transcript has been received.

(b) Would you like to receive a copy of the final research results?
Yes: ____ No: ____

If Yes to (a) and/or (b), please provide your email address:
Email address: _____

Possible Risks and Discomforts: The level of self-disclosure regarding the lived experiences of race and culture may elicit feelings of emotional and psychological discomfort. Additionally, conversations regarding your relationship may also trigger relational challenges. In the event that this occurs, you have the right to pause the interview, take a break and/or withdraw from this research without penalty and/or negative consequences. Participants will be provided a list of counselling resources in the community should they require follow-up emotional and psychological supports. In addition, though security measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality, interviews conducted via online platforms pose a risk of being breached. I have

established maximum safety measures to minimize this risk and to protect your information (i.e., data encryption, de-identification processes, multi-layered password protection, secure storage via OneDrive).

Possible Benefits: Sharing your lived experiences as mixed-race couples will contribute to education, research and mental health supports for mixed-race couples and their families. There is limited research on mixed-race relationships within a Canadian context and your participation in this research will contribute in the following ways: (1) give voice and understanding to Racialized-White mixed race couples (2) deepen the understanding of mixed-race relationships (3) debunk stigma related to mixed-race relationships (4) contribute to the field of counselling and psychotherapy by providing culturally informed and relevant knowledge to clinicians and educators who support mixed-race couples, families and children (5) contribute to the welfare and well-being of mixed-race couples and their families by presenting mixed-race relationships from a strength-based, anti-oppressive and anti-racist framework.

Confidentiality: Data collected during this research will be kept in the strictest confidence. The following measures will be implemented: (1) you will be asked to provide a pseudonym of your choice (2) any identifiable information provided will be kept separately from your data (3) no identifiable information nor your real names will be used during thesis committee meetings, presentations, conferences and/or future publications (4) no paper data will be kept and all electronic data will be stored on OneDrive, a secure server endorsed by the University of Toronto (5) video recorded data will be erased two months after transcription (6) transcripts will be stored for approximately seven years after the study has been completed and then destroyed, and (7) upon your review of the transcript, you may request that certain narratives be omitted from the data set and they will be erased from all data and documents.

Compensation: There is no compensation for your participation in this study.

Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw at any time during this study without any negative consequences or penalty. During the interview (data collection) you may choose to not answer certain questions but remain as a research participant in the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information and data collected will be destroyed. In addition, since this research is focused on the joint/relational experiences of mixed-race couples, if you choose to withdraw, your partner will also be withdrawn as they would not be able to singularly speak about your relationship experience as a couple. Please note, due to the complex nature of data analysis, once data analysis has commenced, you may no longer withdraw your participation. I will inform you of this timeline two weeks before data analysis begins.

Alternatives to Participation: Your alternative to participation is to not participate.

Rights of Research Participant: You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or negative consequences. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this study. This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics. If you would like to speak further about your rights as a participant, please do not hesitate to contact:

(1) Office of Research Ethics, University of Toronto
McMurrich Building, 12 Queen's Park Crescent W.
Toronto, ON
Canada
M5S 1S8
Email: ethics.review@utoronto.ca
Phone: (416) 946-5763

(2) Shivon Raghunandan
Email: shivon.raghunandan@mail.utoronto.ca
Phone: (416) 268-3025

(3) Dr. Roy Moodley
Email: roy.moodley@utoronto.ca
Phone: (416) 978-0721

Signature of Research Participant:

I have read the information provided for this research and agree to participate. I give the principal researcher, Shivon Raghunandan, permission to present this work in written and/or oral form provided that my name or identity is not disclosed. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____
Name of Participant (please print)

_____ _____
Signature of Participant *Date*

_____
Name of Witness (please print)

_____ _____
Signature of Witness *Date*

Appendix E

Informed Consent for Online Interviews via MS Teams

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Toronto Public Health and the University of Toronto have recommended that where possible, research be conducted through remote platforms to ensure the safety of participants and researchers.

For this research, interviews will be conducted via MS Teams. MS Teams is considered a secure storage facility based on the Privacy Impact Assessment and Threat Risk Analysis conducted by the University of Toronto. For more information on MS Teams and data collection and storage, please review the following: https://cris.utoronto.ca/spotlight/secure_remote/

By choosing to participate in online video interviews via MS Teams, I am acknowledging the following:

- I understand that there are risks in participating in video interviews, including the possibility, despite best efforts to ensure high encryption and secure technology on the part of the researcher, that the transmission of my information could be disrupted or distorted by technical failures, the transmission of my information could be interrupted by unauthorized persons, and/or electronic storage of interviews could be accessed by unauthorized persons.

- I understand that interviews could be disrupted or distorted by unforeseen technical problems.

- I understand that the researcher will conduct interviews in a private location with a secure internet connection.

- I (participant) understand that there is a risk of being overheard by anyone near me if I am not in a private location while participating in interviews. I am responsible for (1) providing the necessary computer, telecommunications equipment and internet access for the interview, and (2) arranging a location with sufficient privacy.

- I understand that I will attend the interview on the agreed date and time. If I need to cancel or make modifications, I will notify the researcher in advance by telephone or email.

- I understand that personal identifiable information, images or excerpts from the interviews will not occur without my explicit consent.

- I understand that both myself and the researcher can determine due to certain circumstances, online video interviews are no longer appropriate and we can choose to terminate online video interviews in favour of in-person interviews. This decision needs to be discussed as soon as possible and will require further compliance with the University of Toronto and Toronto Public Health safety recommendations related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- I understand that interviews will be video recorded for the purpose of data analysis. Video recorded data will be erased two months after they have been transcribed. No paper data will be kept and all electronic data will be stored on OneDrive, a secure server endorsed by the University of Toronto. Data will be stored for 7 years after the study has been completed and then destroyed.

- I understand that I have the right to withhold or withdraw consent at any time without any negative consequences or penalty.

- I understand that because this research is focused on the joint/relational experiences of mixed-race couples, if I choose to withdraw, my partner will also be withdrawn as they would not be able to singularly speak about our joint relationship experience as a couple.

Signature of Research Participant:
I have read the information provided for this research and agree to participate. I give the principal researcher, Shivon Raghunandan, permission to present this work in written and/or oral form provided that my name or identity is not disclosed. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____
Name of Participant (please print)

_____ _____
Signature of Participant *Date*

_____
Name of Witness (please print)

_____ _____
Signature of Witness *Date*

Appendix F

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Age
What is your age: ____

2. Gender
What is your gender: _____

3. Racial/Ethnic Group Membership
How would you describe your racial and/or ethnic group membership?
_____

4. Cultural Identities
Do you identify with any sub-cultures or hold other cultural identities?
_____

5. Native Language
(a) What is your primary language?
_____

(b) What is your secondary language?
_____

6. Place of Birth
Where were you born?
_____

7. If you were not born in Canada, how many years have you lived in Canada?
_____

8. Parents Place of Birth

Parent 1: _____

Parent 2: _____

9. Religion
Do you identify with any religious group(s)?
_____

10. Marital Status
What is your marital status?
_____

11. Children
How many children do you have (if applicable)? _____

12. Level of Education
What is the highest grade or year of school you completed?
____ Elementary School
____ High School
____ College
____ Bachelor's Degree
____ Professional Degree (M.A., PhD., etc.)
____ Other

13. Income
What is your current combined household income?
____Under $10,000
____$10,000-$19,999
____$20,000-$29,999
____$30,000-$39,999
____$40,000-$49,999
____$50,000-$74,999
____$75,000-$99,999
____Over $100,000
____I would rather not say

14. Pseudonym
Please provide a pseudonym (fake name) for the purpose of protecting your identity
_____

Appendix G

Navigating Mixed-Race Relationships Interview Guide

The purpose of our meeting today is for me to hear about your experiences of being in a heterosexual Racialized-White mixed-race relationship within a Canadian context. I am particularly interested in how you experience race and/or culture both within your relationship and outside of your relationship. I will first ask you questions regarding your backgrounds and then proceed to questions to explore your lived experiences as a mixed-race couple. There are no right or wrong answers nor are there any right or wrong ways for you to tell me your story. You can alternate taking turns talking; ideally it would be important to hear from both of you. You are welcome to disagree as this makes relationships so rich and exciting! I hope to create a comfortable space for us to have this conversation.

Interviewer: Shivon Raghunandan

Date: _____

Couple (Pseudonym): _____ and _____

Background Questions

1. Tell me about your cultural backgrounds
Probing questions may include the following:

- How would you describe your racial/cultural identity?
- With regards to your race/culture, what experiences have and/or who has shaped who you are today?

2. Prior to your current relationship, what were your attitudes and beliefs regarding interracial relationships and what shaped them?

3. Do issues of race and/or culture arise in your relationship? If so, how?

4. What are your experience as they relate to being in a mixed-race relationship with regards to your family, friends and extended community?

5. How do you support each other during race and culture related issues and concerns?

6. What are some of the strengths unique to being in a mixed-race relationship?

7. Tell me how you incorporate your race and cultures to build new traditions as a couple/family.

8. Tell me about some challenges of being in a mixed-race relationship.

9. Tell me how you incorporate your race and cultures to build strength and resiliency in your relationship.

10. Tell me about your relationship identity. How has it evolved?

11. How have you changed (socially, culturally, politically) since being in this mixed-race relationship?

12. Is there anything else you would like to share about being in a mixed-race relationship?

Appendix H

Referral Resources for Counselling

1. **Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) Psychology Clinic**
   Address: Suite 7-296, 252 Bloor St. West, Toronto
   Phone: (416) 978-0654
   Email: oiseclinic@utoronto.ca
   Website: https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/aphd/Home/Psychology_Clinic/

2. **Family Service Toronto**
   Address: 355 Church Street, Toronto
   Phone: (416) 595-9618
   Email: https://familyservicetoronto.org/

3. **Medical Centre for Person Centred Psychotherapy**
   Address: 2040 Sheppard Ave. E, Unit A201, Toronto
   Phone: (416) 229-2399
   Website: https://www.medicalpsychclinic.org/

4. **Jewish Family & Child Services**
   Address: 4600 Bathurst St., Toronto
   Phone: (416) 638-7800
   Website: www.jfandcs.com/counselling

5. **Tropicana Community Services**
   Address: 1385 Huntingwood Dr., Toronto
   Phone: (416) 439-9009
   Website: http://tropicanacommunity.org

6. **Catholic Family Services of Toronto**
   Address: 1155 Yonge St., Suite 200, Toronto
   Phone: (416) 921-1163
   Email: info@cfstoronto.com
   Website: https://www.cfstoronto.com/

7. **The Mindfulness Clinic**
   Address: 700 Bay St., Suite 2200, Toronto
   Phone: (416) 847-7118
   Email: info@themindfulnessclinic.ca
   Website: https://www.themindfulnessclinic.ca/