Abstract
Interracial relationships and marriages have caused much controversy in the United States. In 1976, the Supreme Court ruling of *Loving v. Virginia* banned the anti-miscegenation laws and made interracial marriages legal. While still a very low percentage of relationships and marriages in the United States are interracial, the marriage rate has continued to rise since the 1967 ruling. This paper looks at how interracial marriages are perceived by individuals in the United States. It takes into consideration interracial relationships of dating and cohabitation and how each are viewed in the media. It also looks at interracial marriages and the continuing trends and stability compared to a same-ethnicity marriage, as well as, the similarities and differences between interracial children and same-ethnicity children.

......

**Interracial Marriages**

The interracial marriage is well-defined as “a marriage between two individuals who report a different race when the census is taken” (Fryer, 2007, p. 75). Lewis and Ford-Robertson (2010) have taken into consideration the cultural diversity that has happened in the 21st century America. The change, beginning in 1960 with the Civil Rights movement to the 2008 election of Barak Obama, the United States’ first racially mixed President, has led to an increase in interracial dating and marriages. Partners in an interracial marriage continue to say that their marriage is no different than the marriage of a same-ethnicity couple (Forry, Leslie & Letiecq, 2007).

**Trends of Interracial Marriage**

Lewis and Ford-Robertson (2010), look at the original assimilation theory, which takes the unrepresented members of society, decreases the social distance, and makes them part of a
dominant group in society. This theory eventually erases racism and discrimination and society is accepting of all members, regardless of their race or ethnicity. This theory is under study though, as it does not take into consideration the increasing number of individuals who have come to the United States since the 1960s. In contrast, the new assimilation theory consists of a racial caste system, which places individuals of darker skin into a different caste system than individuals with lighter skin. The darker skin individuals are more likely to have racial barriers to cross and will have a difficult time becoming socially accepted.

The new assimilation theory defines those with lighter skin and who have more benefits than those with colored skin as “color grading.” Color grading in turn places those with darker skin in a lower caste system and those with lighter skin in a higher caste system. Members in the lower caste system are more likely to be open to interracial dating because they have the potential to marry up out of the lowest caste system. The couple’s immediate families are the first to discard the couple, but they are also the first to accept the couple, with the arrival of the couple’s first child (Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2010).

In the 1980’s, 3% of marriages were interracial marriages and today a small 8% of marriages are interracial marriages (Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2010, p. 415). Findings still suggest that women are more likely to marry men of another race or ethnicity. Patterns also show that there is an increase in Black and White marriages, but they are increasing more slowly than the marriages of a White and different ethnicity spouse. Hispanic and White marriages are five times higher than Black and White marriages. In this situation, the Blacks are underrepresented in marriages compared to the overrepresentation of “Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders” (Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2010,
Color grading has had a major influence, determining that darker skinned individuals still have more barriers than lighter skinned individuals.

**Stability of an Interracial Marriage**

Little research has been done on the stability of an interracial marriage. Most research shows that the increase in interracial marriages shows a lesser social distance between the races and ethnicities in the United States (Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). Zhang and Van Hook (2009) predicted that interracial marriages are not as stable as same race marriages and that there is a greater risk for divorce or separation. Zhang and Van Hook also predicted that people marry a spouse who has similar socioeconomic status, education, and cultural background because these characteristics leave less room for misunderstanding and conflict between one another and there is more support from family and friends (Zhang & Van Hook, 2009).

Using data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 23,139 married couples were pooled from 1990 to 2001 so that marital stability could be measured. This sample pool included 94% of same race, same-ethnicity couples, and 6% of interracial couples. Of the couples followed during this time interval, results found that 2,059 of the original 23,139 couples were divorced or separated. The interracial couples, who married in the most recent years of this study, were found to have married at an older age, have a higher income, and have a greater spousal difference in both age and education (Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). About 35% of these couples were a foreign born native married to a United States citizen. The risk of a dissolving marriage is 21% higher among these couples than same-ethnicity couples; however, this number decreases in interracial couples who marry at later ages, have a higher income and who have a higher education (Zhang & Van Hook, 2009, p. 101).
Other research suggests that wives, regardless of their ethnicity, feel that their marriage relationship is unfair too (Forry, Leslie & Letiecq, 2007). Forry, Leslie and Letiecq (2007) studied 76 African American and White couples to determine the couples’ marital quality, sex role ideology, and perceived unfairness. The couples who participated had either attended college or were college graduates, an average marriage of nine years, an average income of $63,350, and an average of two children living in their household. The study’s results showed that the perception of the marital relationship and the poor quality of the marital relationship was the same in both interracial marriages and same-ethnicity marriages (Forry, Leslie & Letiecq, 2007). The difference noted in this study was that marrying interracially can have a significant effect on the racial identity of the non-White spouse and the White spouse. White individuals in an interracial relationship do experience racial discrimination towards themselves or their partners. Nonetheless, a marriage will take place when the total value of two individuals being married surpasses the total of their value from being single (Fryer, 2007).

**Children with Interracial Parents**

More than three million children live with interracial parents. Peace-Morris and King (2012), focus on children’s well-being with interracial parents. In 1970 only 1.5% of children lived with interracial parents and by the 2000, 6.4% of children lived with interracial parents (p. 899). Parents are a key part of shaping their children’s racial identity, helping them adjust to society and keeping after their well-being. Peace-Morris and King (2012) also studied interracial family practices to note if there were any differences compared to a same-ethnicity family. They took note of the family characteristics by looking at the parents’ relationship and its stressors, as well as, the parenting quality.
In the current study, Peace-Morris and King (2012) look at how the parents categorize their ethnicity/racial identity and how the parents categorize their parenting qualities; the way parents handle their children’s behavior problems, how the children’s emotions are affected at home and if the children are willing to try something new. The parents are also asked about relationship stressors within their marriage, social support from friends and family and each spouses’ viewpoint on how a marriage should be, such as the husband as the breadwinner and the wife as the stay-at-home- mom (Peace-Morris & King, 2012). The results showed that interracial families in the study “differed significantly from same-ethnic families on several background and family characteristics” (Peace-Morris & King, 2012, p. 909).

**Interracial Versus Same-Ethnicity Differences**

Past research has suggested that children with interracial parents will have less self-esteem, trust, and feelings of approval than those with same-race parents. These children are also at risk for higher levels of anxiety and violence. In more recent research, adolescents have been found to be antisocial and have found their way into risky behaviors such as drugs and alcohol (Peace-Morris & King, 2012). Marital conflict between parents causes less favorable discipline and less emotional support between the parents and the children.

The current research by Peace-Morris and King (2012) suggests that children with interracial families do show more negative emotions than those children in same-ethnicity families. Researchers looked at how often the children are depressed or unhappy, and anxious or afraid. They also looked at how often the children were a bully or were cruel to others and how easily the child lost his or her temper. However, the results of the children’s negative affect could not be explained by the family characteristics, cultural differences, parenting quality, or stresses of the parental relationship.
Cheng and Powell (2007) suggest that interracial couples may experience more difficulties in decision making due to having more than one culture. However, unlike same-ethnicity couples, interracial couples may acquire a broader, multicultural view when it comes to their children’s education. This multicultural view suggests that interracial couples have higher educational goals for their children than same-ethnicity couples have for their children.

**Interracial Versus Same-Ethnicity Similarities**

Within the current study, there was no evidence that suggests parenting quality in interracial families is different than the parenting quality in same-ethnicity families. Little evidence was also found supporting the assumption that there is more marital conflict among interracial families, which in return, allows for more unfavorable discipline towards children. Parental warmth found in both interracial couples and in same-ethnicity couples was correlated with higher levels of child well-being with a positive parent-child relationship. The child’s well-being was more positive for girls, younger children, and in higher income families who had fewer children, and longer lasting marriages (Peace-Morris & King, 2012). Likewise, marital conflict of both interracial families and same-ethnicity families showed lesser levels of the child’s well-being and a more negative parent-child relationship (Peace-Morris & King, 2012).

Overall, the data of this current study suggests that children’s well-being, behavior problems, or positive attitude is consistent for both interracial families and same-ethnicity families. It also suggests that the only difference found between interracial families and same-ethnicity families is that children who are living with interracial parents may approach some barriers in life. However, the children’s well-being is not at a disadvantage (Peace-Morris & King, 2012).
References


