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EARNING THE RIGHT: EXPLORING THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF EUROPEAN AMERICANS IN INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS

By

Angela L. Putman

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Angela L. Putman

EARNING THE RIGHT: EXPLORING THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF EUROPEAN AMERICANS IN INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Angela L. Putman

Western Michigan University, 2002

In a societal context, European Americans are the dominant majority group. However, when European Americans are involved in interracial relationships, they may often find themselves in the minority (numerically speaking) when they interact with their partner's friends and/or family members. This research explores lived experiences of European Americans involved in interracial relationships with African Americans. Specifically, the general question addressed was, "What communication strategies and behaviors do European Americans exhibit when they communicate with their African American partner's friends and/or family members?" The acculturation process and Communication Accommodation Theory were explored in order to provide initial insight into this relatively unexplored phenomenon. A phenomenological methodology was utilized to discover the lived experiences and subsequent emergent themes of the European Americans. Five themes emerged as essential. The revelatory phrase, "What gives you the right to talk like that?" and subsequent phrase "Earning the right" revealed the interconnectedness of the five themes and epitomized the essence of communicating as a European American in an interracial relationship. Limitations and future implications of this research are presented.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF THE PHENOMENON

Though culture is only one of the many influences on communication and communication is but one of the manifestations of culture, the joining of the two has a strong effect on relations between ethnic groups (Hecht, Ribeau, & Alberts, 1989). When the meeting of two cultures occurs, specifically in an interracial relationship, communication typically becomes an even more salient issue. If interracial communication is to be effective, both African American and European American communicators must make an effort to make it possible, despite the inherent stereotypes associated within the communication situation (Leonard & Locke, 1993). It is through these stereotypes that we form anticipations and expectations of the communicative experiences we encounter (Giles & Powesland, 1975; Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). How do we react to these stereotypes and expectations when we are communicating with someone of another culture? Adequate attention must be given to the communication strategies enacted when European Americans and African Americans in interracial relationships communicate with other members of their partner's culture. Providing a better understanding of this phenomenon may benefit those involved in interracial relationships, and also those who know and/or communicate with others who are involved in interracial relationships. Moreover, this type of research lays the groundwork for future research in this topical area and is beneficial to the field of communication in general.

Cultural distinctiveness, and its differences, may be most obvious in communication rules and styles (Hecht et al., 1989). Additionally, "for many ethnic groups, language or nonstandard dialect is an important dimension of social identity and symbolizes their distinctiveness from other ethnic groups" (Giles & Johnson, 1986, p. 99). How can we extend this to communication in interracial relationships, and more specifically, to European American's communication with the friends and family member's of their interracial partner?

Research has been conducted on ethnic minorities' communication strategies when communicating with the dominant culture (e.g. Orbe, 1996; Orbe, Drummond, & Camara, 2001). However, little (if any) research exists examining the communication strategies of members of the "dominant" culture with others of ethnic minority status when the "dominant" culture member is (numerically speaking) in the minority. This presents an interesting, yet virtually unexplored, phenomenon. As European Americans in today's society, many of us have come to expect that we are in the majority, and some of us have even become quite comfortable in that role. As McIntosh (1988) puts it:

> There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turf, and I was among those who could control the turf. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. (p. 11)

McIntosh (1988) was speaking of her experiences living with White privilege, which she describes as "an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious" (p. 1).

If one is to accept that European Americans are within the dominant culture, and that White privilege does, in fact, exist, then one can speculate that when a European American is involved in an interracial relationship, s/he is likely to be unfamiliar with the experiences of being in the minority. We are then left to wonder, what happens when this same European American is surrounded by the friends and family members of his/her partner, and s/he is no longer in the "majority?" How will his/her communication be affected?

Purpose

This thesis sought to examine the acculturation process of European Americans in interracial relationships as they communicate with the friends and family members of their African American partners. Specifically, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) was applied as a means to better understand the possible convergence and divergence strategies enacted by European Americans in various interpersonal communication situations. This research is important to the field of communication as it begins to explore the communication trends of European Americans as they experience what it is like when they are in the "minority." Considering the lack of current exploration of this topic, this research study will serve as a catalyst for future research on interracial relationships, specifically addressing the communication issues associated with such a relationship.

Most U.S. studies of ethnic intermarriage analyze the experiences and perspectives of those in the minority group, focusing specifically on various types of subgroups (Kalmijn, 1998). This research adds a new dimension to the already existing research on communication in interracial relationships by analyzing the perspectives of "majority" group members. Specifically, this research looked at the reactions of European Americans when they found themselves the "minority" during communication encounters.

Rationale

Pennington (1979) calls for more scholars to conduct research in the field of Black-White communication. This research intends to fill a gap in the literature on communication in interracial relationships. Through the use of phenomenology, the European American co-researchers' (see explanation of this term in Chapter Three) experiences when communicating with their partners' friends and/or family members was examined. As they locate themselves within their partners' culture, and find themselves in somewhat unfamiliar territory, what types of communication strategies do they enact? What role (if any) do the stereotypes and expectations European Americans have about African Americans play? Leonard and Locke (1993) report that stereotyping is one of the most pervasive hindrances to effective interracial communication. They also contend that Blacks and Whites have held stereotypes, often negative, about each other for years and they have remained relatively unchanged. If this is the case, one would wonder if these stereotypes have any effect

on the communication between European Americans and the friends and/or family members of their partner.

In addition to stereotypes and expectations, communicating with others in culturally diverse situations is also important to consider. In his research on co-cultural communication, Orbe (1996) discusses how groups at the top of the societal hierarchy play a major role in determining the dominant communication system for the entire society. Additionally, he adds "this process forces persons who are not dominant group members to function within a communication system that is not necessarily representative of their experiences" (p. 158). My contention is that a similar phenomenon may apply to European Americans in interracial relationships when they are communicating with the friends and family members of their partner. There is almost a role reversal; the European American is now communicating in a situation that 'may not be representative of his/her experiences.' Perhaps they are on unfamiliar grounds, or may be experiencing what it is like to be in the minority for the first time. What sorts of communication strategies do they find useful in such situations? What strategies do they find to be effective/ineffective? What are the reactions of the friends and family members to their communicative techniques? What role, if any, does the dominance of European Americans in our society play in their interactions with the friends and/or family members? These are all questions that this research seeks to explore. Before this phenomenon can be further examined, an extensive review of the literature on interracial relationships, acculturation, and communication accommodation theory is necessary.

The second chapter of this research proposal highlights the existing research on interracial relationships, acculturation, and communication accommodation theory. Specifically, this chapter addresses the experiences of European Americans and African Americans involved in interracial relationships (i.e., Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995), issues with group membership and identity (i.e., McIntosh, 1988; Orbe, 1999), support for and opposition to interracial relationships (i.e., Davidson & Schneider, 1992; Spaights & Dixon, 1984), and implications for the future in the interracial relationships section. The acculturation section offers a through explanation of the history, background, and meaning of acculturation (i.e., Birman, 1994; Landrine & Klonoff; 1996), along with its link to interracial relationships (i.e., Kim, 1980; Pope-Davis, Liu, & Ledesma-Jones, 2000). Finally, the section on communication accommodation theory presents the history and basic concepts of the theory (i.e., Bourhis, Giles, & Lambert, 1975; Giles et al., 1991), along with its utility in studies involving intercultural communication experiences.

Chapter Three introduces phenomenological inquiry, the methodology chosen for this research, and includes a detailed description of the history, meaning, and use of this type of methodology (i.e., Orbe, 2000; van Manen, 1990). Then, the chapter contains description of the co-researchers involved in the study, the specific methods utilized in order to collect the lived experiences of the co-researchers, and finally, a plan for thematizing the capta following the phenomenological framework.

Before moving on to the next two chapters, this final section describes my experience with interracial relationships and my communication with my African American partner's friends and family members. The purpose of this section is to acknowledge that as a researcher, I have my own experiences with this phenomenon, and those experiences are the driving force behind my interest in this area of research. However, in order to allow the voices of my co-researchers to guide this study, I must first acknowledge my own experiences, presuppositions, and assumptions and then bracket them so as to not allow them to interfere with my research (Lengel, 1992).

My Personal Experience

The purpose of this section is to acknowledge that I have personal experience with the phenomenon and that it does play an active role in my desire to do research in this area. However, after acknowledging my experiences, I will then bracket them and essentially set them aside before continuing with my research. This will allow my co-researchers' experiences to emerge and the phenomenon is then explored through their descriptions of their lived experiences.

For the last six years, I have dated interracially. I am primarily attracted to African American men, and all of my relationships in the last six years have been with African American men. I have found this to be a very positive experience, as well as an on-going learning experience.

I do not have a close relationship with my extended family members, so for the most part, they are not aware that I date interracially. My parents, on the other hand, are well aware. My father accepts my choice and has always maintained that if

I am happy, and the man I am with treats me well, he is happy. My mother has had a more difficult time accepting my choice to date interracially. We have had our struggles and our arguments over this issue many times, however, she is slowly learning to accept my preference.

My experiences with my partner's family members have been very positive. I have not felt any open resistance from any of their family members, although some got off to a somewhat rocky start and then smoothed out with time. My experiences with my partner's friends have been somewhat different. Many of their friends accepted me and were very welcoming to our relationship; however, a distinct few showed their disliking of me from the very first meeting and throughout our relationship.

I did not grow up in a diverse environment, however once I began college, I grew to be very comfortable around culturally diverse people. I have an affinity for people who are culturally different than me, and often find myself drawn to them. I have a growing interest in the African American culture and, even more so, the African American family. I always felt right at home when I was around the family members of my partner. Occasionally, in the beginning, I felt uncomfortable being the "minority" as far as numbers are concerned, however I rarely have those feelings now.

As for my own communication, I find that my communication patterns definitely change depending on my surroundings. When I am with my African American friends, I find myself speaking slang and using a different dialect then

when I am around the majority of my European American friends. However, it is very easy for me to slip in and out of both types of communication, and often times I find myself using them interchangeably. I feel that my speech patterns are a reflection of the people I have surrounded myself with throughout my college years, and they have become part of who I am. I have, however, been accused of "talking Black" on more than one occasion, usually by someone who does not know me well and feels that I am acting like someone I am not, perhaps. I have not been accused of this by any of my African American partner's friends or family members, however.

As I stated above, my experiences with interracial relationships have been positive, for the most part, and I have been very comfortable speaking to the friends and family members of my African American partners. After acknowledging my experiences, with the intent of bracketing them and returning to them later, I can begin to explore the experiences of others and search for themes that are representative of their lived experiences.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

For one to effectively research the lived experiences of European Americans' communication strategies in interracial relationships, a thorough review of the existing literature must be conducted. This chapter is an essential stage in the process of exploring the acculturation of European Americans involved in interracial relationships as they explore various communication strategies with their African American partners' friends and family members. Specifically, I will accomplish three goals in this chapter. First, I synthesize general information concerning interracial relationships. Second, I review literature on acculturation and its role in relationships. Finally, I describe communication accommodation theory and focus specifically on how it may be used in interracial relationships research.

Interracial Relationships[1]

Background and History

Interracial relationships, in general, are a widely discussed and highly researched topic. For many years, interracial relationships were considered taboo and were even illegal (Davidson, 1992). Until the Supreme Court ruled in 1967 that laws against

[1] For the purposes of this research, an interracial relationship is defined as a committed romantic relationship between a European American and an African American. Throughout this research, when the term 'interracial relationship' is used, this is the context in which it will be used.

interracial marriages were unconstitutional because of a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment, a total of 16 states still maintained laws against such marriages (Davidson, 1992). Since then, the number of interracial relationships and marriages has steadily increased. In fact, the number of married couples who are of different racial or ethnic groups has doubled since 1980 and typically involve those that are well-educated, upscale, and young (Suro, 1999). In 1999, there were nearly 3 million mixed marriages--about 5 percent of all married couples, a significant increase from the 3 percent in 1980 (Suro, 1999). Hill and Thomas (2000) also report that the U.S. Bureau of the Census has indicated that the number of Black-White interracial marriages has nearly quadrupled between 1970 and 1993. Orbe and Harris (2001) compare the number of interracial couples in 1980 (651,000) to the number in 1995 (1,392,000), revealing a major increase. Additionally, figures presented in Newsweek magazine (September 18, 2000) from the 2000 census indicate a continued rise in interracial marriages. Of the current interracial relationships, the census figures report that 9% are Black-White marriages.

Hill and Thomas (2000) contend that the external opposition (opposition from someone outside of the relationship) to such unions, along with their rapid growth, makes them both important and timely as a research topic. Other researchers (Chan & Smith, 1995; Negy & Snyder, 2000) report that the racial and ethnic demographics in this country have dramatically changed over the last three decades, reflected in the fact that more individuals are marrying outside their own racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, others have also noted that the acceptance such relationships seem to be

gaining. However, it should also be noted that as a whole, society meets interracial relationships with disapproval (Payne, 1998). For these reasons, the topic of interracial relationships is an important one and needs to be frequently researched in order to better understand the issues, challenges, and positive outcomes those involved in such relationships encounter.

Reported Experiences and Identity Issues

One important aspect of interracial relationship research is the experiences of those involved in the relationship. It is difficult to make generalizations about such relationships as most of the research focuses on Black-White[2] relationships, minimizing the amount of attention placed upon other mixed ethnic relationships. This research project will focus primarily on Black-White relationships, as they are more prevalent and frequently encountered, therefore maximizing the pool of potential participants. While Black-White relationships are heavily studied, research that focuses on the communication patterns within interracial relationships is somewhat limited. Specifically, there is a major gap in the literature that looks at the communication tendencies for European Americans in interracial relationships when communicating with their partner's friends and family members. This is one of the contributions that this current research proposal intends to make to the communication field.

It should be noted that when examining the experiences of those in interracial relationships, the viewpoint(s) of the European American and the African American

partners may be vastly different. This may especially be the case when the subject of family is discussed. In their book on multiracial couples, Rosenblatt et al. (1995) note that it is difficult to compare family responses in African American families to White families because those included in the word "family" are not always the same for each group. This is an important factor to consider throughout this research when responses about family are referred to. Despite the fact that this research will focus primarily on the experiences of European Americans, those of African Americans in interracial relationships should not be slighted or ignored.

African American Experiences

As was previously mentioned, despite the European American centered focus of this research, the experiences of African Americans in interracial relationships are also very much a factor when looking at acculturation in interracial relationships. Considering the transactional nature of relationships, the European American's experiences are shaped by, and are representative of, the African American's experiences, and vice versa. One person's experience in an interracial relationship may differ from the next person's; much depends on individual, social, environmental, and other cultural elements (Davidson & Schneider, 1992; Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992). However, some phenomena are frequently discussed in the literature and appear to be somewhat consistent.

One such phenomena is the reaction of family members to the interracial relationship. Many comparisons are made between White family members and Black

[2] The term Black will refer to African Americans and the term White will refer to European Americans

family members with respect to their feelings about the relationship. In their research, Rosenblatt et al. (1995) note that there was never a solid wall of opposition to the interracial relationship by the Black family, which contrasts some of the families of the White partner. On the other hand, they also found that while there was no direct statement of opposition, there was so much anti-White sentiment that the White partner had difficulties feeling comfortable or welcome. They also noted that the feelings of opposition from Black family members had a tendency to wane with time. They point out that sometimes even a militantly Black family member who was originally opposed to the relationship, while not changing in militancy, eventually came to accept the White partner. This is important because it may have an effect on the experiences of the White partner when they are immersed in the acculturation process. Payne (1998) asserts that social support, or support from friends and family, is an important factor in most interracial couples' relationships. Consequently, these outside circles of friends, family members, and acquaintances play a major role in our perception of self, others, and our relationships (Payne, 1998). This provides reason why a salient issue for interracial couples is how they handle the reactions of friends and/or family members to their relationship.

Not only are the feelings of family members a factor in acculturation during interracial relationships, but the knowledge and experiences each partner brings to the relationship are also factors. Given that African Americans are a minority in our society, they will likely have more experience with being the minority in situations

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throughout this research.

than their European American partner. Another possibility is that, "as a result of being in a statistical minority and in a system in which Whites oppress Blacks, Black partners might have entered the relationship much more expert about the White world than White partners were about the Black world" (Rosenblatt et al., 1995, p. 228). For these reasons, I have decided to focus on the experiences of the White partner in the acculturation process.

As aforementioned in an earlier section, when European Americans communicate with the friends and family members of their partner, they are likely to be faced with a situation where they are in the minority, possibly a situation with which they are not at all familiar. This is a unique vantage point to examine and is the focus of this research study.

European American Experiences

Racism and ignorance are the two barriers most often cited that European Americans must face when becoming involved in an interracial relationship (e.g. Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). The environment where one grew up, their families' beliefs and opinions, and their exposure to people of other races are all factors that contribute to the aforementioned barriers. Rosenblatt et al. (1995) report that some White people grew up in an environment in which racial tolerance was advocated and both parental teaching and religious teaching communicated that racial ideology. Even so, they contend that growing up White creates difficulty in perceiving and understanding racism in America and puts quite a burden on the White partner to understand even the very basics of what most African Americans know.

White privilege (McIntosh, 1988) is another well known factor in the experiences of European Americans in interracial relationships. Rosenblatt et al. (1995) suggest:

> Their privilege may make White identity of no particular significance to many Whites; their identity is not an issue because White privilege is so automatic. But for African Americans, the denial of privilege and the potential of White racism to appear in encounters with Whites may make it important to have a respite from being too often in all-White or mostly White social situations. (p. 189)

Racism and White privilege are two barriers that the White partner, and also the Black partner, must work to overcome in many interracial relationships. For the White partner, they must not only learn how to navigate a racist society, but they must also learn how to become more self aware (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Additionally, Mathabane and Mathabane (1992) point out that the White partner in the interracial relationship will most likely have many, often subconscious, stereotypes to overcome.

Ethnic stereotyping is an issue that many scholars refer to when discussing interracial communication (e.g. Leonard & Locke, 1993; Kalmijn, 1998; Orbe et al., 2001). Most European Americans do not know how to communicate with African American people who do not fit their stereotypes (Orbe et al., 2001). Kalmijn (1998) argues that interracial relationships and more specifically, intermarrying, helps people to lose these negative attitudes or stereotypes that they have about other groups.

Interaction between different groups occasionally fosters conflict by making differences more apparent, however. When the relationship is intimate, individuals are likely to value the uniqueness of the members of another group, which in turn leads to a weakening of their prejudices and stereotypes (Kalmijn, 1998).

Issues with Identity and Group Membership

Often times, interracial relationships may lead one or both of the partners to face issues with their own identity. Usually, this is most common for the White partner. Rosenblatt et al. (1995) found that only some Whites found their relationship to affect their identity. They contend that many Whites do not think of race or racial membership as a part of their identity, particularly when living in an entirely White or mostly White area (a core foundational principle of White privilege). McIntosh (1988) describes her experiences with White privilege:

> As a White person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, White privilege, which puts me at an advantage. (p. 1)

Once Whites are involved with a Black person, however, they are then defined as a part of an interracial couple and this forces them to include race as a part of their identity. H. Jones (1996) extends this line of thinking when discussing the upbringing of her multi-ethnic children: "This transformation has stayed with me since [I first witnessed how my daughters were treated by others]. If White remains *how I'm seen* [emphasis added], what's changed, what I mean by 'not quite White' is *how I see* [emphasis added]" (p. 205). For Whites, essentially, their experiences with

an African American partner prompt a transformation in the way others perceive them, and in the way they experience racial issues themselves (Orbe, 1999). It can be said, then, that an inner struggle concerning identity, group membership, and belongingness can ensue. Mathabane and Mathabane (1992) point out that Whites who are partnered with Blacks may lose their White status, while at the same time having their awareness of their Whiteness even more heightened than it was before. Additionally, they also posit that Whites are not given full status as a member of their partner's race. The basic argument posed by Rosenblatt et al. (1995) on this issue is that the Black partners in their research who spoke about issues with identity all strongly identified themselves as Black. On the other hand, the White partners seemed to speak much less about their identity. This may be true because we live in a society where White people can spend every day entirely surrounded by other Whites, so they may conclude that 'Whiteness' is not central to their identity. Issues with identity can also lead to questions about group membership.

Questions about where one belongs may arise when one is involved in an interracial relationship. Rosenblatt et al. (1995) link identity to questions of belongingness especially when one is committed to someone who belongs to another group and frequently associates with other members of that group. Alderfer (1994) claims that even if he were to try to escape his racial or gender group memberships, someone else (in his own or other racial and gender groups) would still treat him as if he were a member of his own group. It is important to recognize this factor when considering the acculturation process of European Americans in interracial

relationships. In fact, to which group they associate or find belonging to may present itself as a dilemma throughout their relationship. Of all the factors and barriers presented above, the reaction(s) of family and friends to a couple's interracial relationship is most salient (Kalmijn, 1998; Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992; Rosenblatt et al., 1995) and requires attention in the communication literature. Specifically, the reactions to one's communication strategies and behaviors when interacting with a culture other than one's own may prove especially insightful.

Interracial Relationships in Society

Throughout time, scholars seem to have conflicting views on how society feels in general about interracial relationships. Brown (1989) argues that contrary to the predominant attitude in the United States, society accepts interracial marriages both socially and legally. Spaights and Dixon (1984) believe that in order to withstand the pressures of a society which is bigoted, Black-White relationships must be formed with a healthy psychological base. Yet others, including Alderfer (1994), find that slavery resulted in a relationship between Blacks and Whites where Blacks must deal with being oppressed by Whites, thus putting a strain on relations between the two in contemporary society. He feels that race relations in our society would be improved if only White people would accept that they do indeed have a racial identity, and that White racism is a reality that does, in fact, exist today. Many scholars (Dainton, 1999; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Spaights & Dixon, 1984), like Alderfer, are quick to point out that race does matter in interracial relationships. Dainton (1999) points to varying statistics of African American and European American marriages as a means

to determine that ethnicity is a factor in the union of marriage. Members of interracial relationships will undoubtedly be faced with both support for, and opposition to, their relationship from our society. Where they seek support (if at all) and how they handle opposition varies from couple to couple.

Support for Interracial Relationships

As is with most research, the negative aspects are more often reported than the positive ones. Conversely, a growing number of researchers (e.g. Davidson & Schneider, 1992; Orbe, 1999; Orbe & Harris, 2001; Payne, 1998) are reporting an increase in support from members of society, and the friends and family members of those involved in interracial relationships toward interracial relationships.

Many interracial couples find support in family, friends, co-workers, and other interracial couples (Davidson & Schneider, 1992, Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992, Rosenblatt et al. 1995). Interracial couples have a wide array of techniques that assist them throughout their relationship, one of which is their reliance on support groups (McNamara, Tempenis, Walton, & Mills, 1999). This varies from couple to couple, however. Payne (1998) reports that interracial couples will likely limit who is to be allowed in their networks, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will turn to their customized social support network much the same way as same-race couples. In the beginning of a relationship, interracial partners are likely to have individual support, but as they grow closer, the support network expands to include both families and both sets of friends (Payne, 1998).

When speaking of their experiences as an interracial couple and referring to her African American partner's family, Mathabane and Mathabane (1992) report that they accepted her without any reservations, and did not give a thought to her race, color, or social class. Additionally, Davidson and Schneider (1992) found that Blacks reported a greater willingness to associate with people married interracially in all situations including work and family and were even more willing to be personally involved in interracial relationships themselves. This may contribute to the experiences reported by European Americans as they locate themselves within the culture of their partner.

Opposition to Interracial Relationships

Unfortunately, opposition to the relationship is what most people involved in interracial relationships speak of. This may be attributed to the issue of racism in our society (Davidson & Schneider, 1992; Orbe & Harris, 2001), to some people's discomfort with different races mixing (Orbe & Harris, 2001; Spaights & Dixon, 1984), or to any other reason not yet fully explored in the research on interracial relationships.

There are several different forms of opposition that members of interracial relationships may experience. Davidson (1992) points out that lack of social support for those involved in Black-White marriages can range from open hostility or disdain, to curiosity or suspicion about the legitimacy and/or appropriateness of the relationship. For Blacks, opposition is believed to come, at least partly, from the belief that the Black person in the relationship is betraying his/her race (Davidson &

Schneider, 1992). For Whites, opposition most often comes from family members who have strong beliefs about the appropriateness of the relationship. Brown (1989) supports this notion:

> Even in the late 1980's, nothing would infuriate many White parents more than the thought of their daughter marrying a Black man. These fears run deep and are rooted in several factors, which include the sanctity of White womanhood, the alleged sexual prowess of Black males, and the perceived threat that Blacks hold for Whites. (p. 27)

Family, the church, and the state are cited as the three most important examples of parties that can sanction intermarriage (Kalmijn, 1998). While there are conceivably other contributing factors than those listed, they are believed to be the most likely. Gender differences may also be a factor (whether it is their son or their daughter involved in the relationship). However, this factor will not be heavily salient to this research study, thought it could be a possible extension for further studies.

People must also face constant scrutiny from other members of society who question their behaviors when they are involved interracially. In Orbe's (1999) research on interracial families, he found that family members (specifically, multiracial children) will often face discrimination from European Americans who feel they are "too Black" and African Americans who feel that they "aren't Black enough." This may also be an occurrence for partners in interracial relationships as they seek to acculturate themselves with the culture of their mate.

When one is involved in an interracial relationship, he/she may find himself/herself torn between one's own feelings of support and others' feelings of opposition. This is especially true when the feelings of opposition are coming from close friends or family members. Killian (2001) reports:

> Choosing to marry an interracial partner can have serious social and psychological implications for relationships with friends and family. Specifically, members of the psychological network, including close friends and relatives, typically reinforce established social norms with regard to homogamy and often actively discourage potential spouses from marrying interracially. (p. 34)

Davidson and Schneider (1992) also found that even family members who are unsupportive of the relationship may consider the partners to be very well suited for each other, except for their difference in race or ethnicity.

Extreme opposition may also have an effect on the European American in terms of their own identity. Brown (1989) found that, at times, Whites may end up being excluded from White society. Additionally, they may also find deep resentment from Black females; occasionally, they may discover acceptance from the Black community as a whole through their partner's social network (Brown, 1989). He also notes that, in some cases, Whites may begin to identify more with the Black race, and will slowly let go of their identification with their own White race. This possibility will be discussed later in the chapter in the sections on acculturation and accommodation.

Implications for the Future

Based upon the research reported above, it appears that interracial couples have many challenges, and indeed, some benefits on the road ahead of them. Some researchers (Orbe & Harris, 2001; Rosenblatt et al., 1995) believe the road to be smoothing itself out as time passes and interracial relationships become more prevalent and accepted in our society. Others, however, still see the challenges as great. For example, Scales-Trent (1995) notes in her book that because we talk and write so much about race, she can say with a level of assurance that "at any given time many Blacks hate, fear, and despise White Americans, and that many Whites hate, fear, and despise Black Americans" (p. 7).

Yet, Fu (2001) claims that a high incidence of marriage between members of two different groups is an indication of a weak boundary between those two groups. This claim is both supported and negated in the existing research on interracial marriage and relationships as is the claim made by Scales-Trent. Clearly, diverse perspectives on the issue exist. Negy and Snyder (2000) also question the stability of mixed marriages in comparison to monoethnic marriages based on the disapproval of society and their family, and different values and customs brought into the marriage by each partner. Despite all of the opposition and questions of stability and/or appropriateness from society, friends, family, etc., interracial relationships do, in fact, continue to increase. For this reason, research on this topic should continue. Scholars should seek every possible avenue to continue to provide knowledge,

understanding, and awareness of the communication issues in interracial relationships.

Acculturation

Acculturation is a process that can be easily linked to the experiences of those who are involved in interracial relationships. Birman (1994) suggests that the phenomenon of acculturation is very much a part of a multicultural society such as the United States and it can be applied to various groups and situations. Landrine and Klonoff (1996) conclude that acculturation has presented itself as a promising, nonracist way for people to explain and better understand ethnic differences. Furthermore, Pope-Davis et al., (2000) contend that acculturation theories assist researchers in understanding the process of racial and cultural identification among various cultural groupings. For these reasons, and others, the process of acculturation is an important one when examining the experiences of those involved in interracial relationships. This is especially true when communication issues related to cultural differences are a primary concern.

Background and History of Acculturation

Acculturation has been used in various types of research and has several different meanings. For the purposes of this research, only those meanings which are most applicable will be highlighted and subsequently used throughout the research. Other definitions do exist, however, this research will use those definitions that fit best within this area of study. Acculturation has its roots in anthropology and sociology.

Kim (1980) refers to the history of acculturation here, making the connection to communication explicitly clear:

> The conceptual linkage between communication and acculturation has long been accepted by anthropologists and sociologists. Implicit in those scholars' discussions concerning the relationship between acculturation, or culture in general, and communication is a theoretical orientation that communication, as a mechanism for social cohesion, and a medium for social interaction, should be a crucial factor in facilitating the acculturation of culturally alien settlers. (p. 155)

Many scholars refer to those who are acculturating themselves as immigrants or aliens. Throughout time, however, that terminology has become less frequent. Yet, the process of acculturation is something that does not falter in the research. Berry, Trimble, and Olmedo (1986) point out that the definition of acculturation has made no specific claims about the direction of the cultural change. Yet when used in research, the term is accepted to mean the assimilation of an acculturating group into a dominating group's culture, "whereby immigrants change their behavior and attitudes toward those of the host society" (Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991, p. 585). Birman (1994) also adds that when studying acculturation to a majority culture, research addresses the ways in which individuals respond to pressures to forego their own ethnic, racial, and religious characteristics and assimilate themselves to the culture of the majority group in society. Based upon previous research on acculturation, it can be said that acculturation frequently addresses minorities

adhering to the culture of the majority. In this research, European American's acculturation into the culture of their minority partner will be examined. These accounts of acculturation discussed earlier will still be applicable, as the European American may be positioned as the cultural minority when they are immersed in the culture of their African American partner.

The earliest definition of acculturation can be found in the research of Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936). They contend that acculturation has been defined in anthropology as "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original pattern of either or both groups" (p. 149). Pope-Davis et al. (2000) describe the acculturation process as a multidimensional adaptive process that occurs when one individual has an interaction with another individual of a different culture. Consequently, they suggest that this process of adapting is how the individual learns to incorporate the values and behaviors of the new culture into their own cultural values and behaviors. Snowden and Hines (1999) characterize the process of acculturation as the circumstances whereby ethnic and racial minorities participate in the cultural traditions, values, assumptions, beliefs, and practices of a majority culture in society. Again, this definition addresses acculturation from the viewpoint of the cultural minority, but still remains applicable to this research.

The Process of Acculturation and its Role in Interracial Relationships

The acculturation process is most often described as a process of adaptation. In other words, when one individual adapts his/her social norms and behaviors and cultural

beliefs to that of the majority culture which s/he is immersed in. Pope-Davis et al. (2000) report that acculturation focuses on both psychological and sociological aspects of this process of adaptation, whereby one transfers the rules and behaviors of one cultural group to a different cultural group. This can be applied to interracial relationships as one partner is introduced to the culture of their mate, presumably a different culture than their own. The process begins when the individual recognizes the importance between their racial identification and their culture (Pope-Davis et al., 2000). Therefore, at any time, it is possible that individuals may have a strong sense of racial identity but not a very strong sense of their own culture (Pope-Davis et al., 2000). Understanding the differences between the two cultures present in an interracial relationship is an important part of the acculturation process. Some may feel that the acculturating individual favors one culture over another or is accentuating a tension between the cultures; however, this is not accurate. Landrine and Klonoff (1996) remind us that any differences between ethnic groups and Whites are not reflections of a deviance or deficit on the part of the minority group in question, they are simply reflections of one's familiarity with, and immersion in, one culture versus another.

There are four common terms associated with the acculturation process. Those are, integrationist, separatist, assimilationist, and marginalized. Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999) describe the integrationist as one who values both their own cultural maintenance and inter-group relations. The separatist is one who values cultural maintenance but not inter-group relations. The assimilationist, in

comparison, values inter-group relations but not their own cultural maintenance. Finally, the marginalized individual is one who values neither.

The acculturation process contains several implications for members of interracial relationships. One danger often spoken of is the tendency to turn away from one's own cultural background as immersion into a new and different background increases. The individual may become more accustomed to the environment of the new culture, and their desire to remain in contact with their own ethnic group diminishes along with their necessity to keep close ethnic contacts (Kim, 1980). This is enacted in order to resolve both social and psychological disorganization in their life. This is something that those who are involved in the acculturation process should be aware of as their immersion into the culture of their partner continues to develop.

The study of acculturation is important when examining interracial relationships and the process individuals encounter as they seek to learn the culture of their partner. According to Landrine and Klonoff (1996), "in light of the importance of acculturation, ways of measuring a person's level of acculturation are essential to understanding cultural diversity in human behavior (p. 4). Negy and Snyder (2000) add that the role of acculturation in marital relationships is complex and depends upon factors such as the expectations of the partners, the acculturation levels within their family, as well as their immediate social-support system.

After examining the acculturation process and its association with interracial relationships, one particular theory emerges as a means to better understand the

behaviors and communication patterns of European Americans in such relationships. This theory is known as communication accommodation theory (CAT). This theory relates acculturation to interracial relationships in that it speaks to the strategies people enact when conversing with someone unlike themselves. Hence, as European Americans acculturate themselves with the culture of their partner, they may develop specific communication strategies when speaking with their partner's friends and/or family members. CAT is a useful theory to better understand those communication strategies.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

"Most of us can recount instances when we changed our speech style to accommodate a specific listener. Such accommodations suggest we make changes in language behavior based on the context in which we find ourselves" (Payne, Downing, & Fleming, 2000, p. 371). This natural tendency to accommodate our speech to the listener, spoken of above, is a highly researched area and can be associated easily with the experiences of those in interracial relationships. Howard Giles is the scholar who first reported on this theory and continues to do extensive research as the theory has continued to evolve (Giles & Powesland, 1975; Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987; Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). Giles and Coupland (1991) began with the assumption that all of us have had experiences accommodating both verbally and non-verbally to others, in the sense of adjusting the way we communicate relative to the people we are communicating with. Additionally, we have also likely

experienced others accommodating or failing to accommodate to us (Giles & Coupland, 1991).

Background and History of CAT

CAT began as Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) and was first described in the literature in 1973 (Giles & Powesland, 1975). In later years, it became Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) which is how it is commonly referred to today. Gallois, Franklyn-Stokes, Giles, and Coupland (1988) propose that CAT is primarily concerned with the moves speakers make in communication interactions "relative to the social and psychological contexts that are operating, and relative to each other's communicative characteristics" (p. 158). Research reveals that one's speech style is used as a cue by others in order to make inferences about their ethnicity, social class, and personality Bourhis, Giles, and Lambert, 1975). In addition, they suggest that speech style influences one's reception by others as much as any other variable involved in face-to-face contact. Finally, Giles et al. (1975) assert that people are motivated to accommodate their speech styles in order to gain one or more of the following goals: evoking a listeners' social approval, attaining communicational efficiency between interactants, and maintaining positive social identities. They also point out that it is the individual's *perception* of the other person's speech style that ultimately determines how the individual will respond. Their basic belief is that one's interpersonal convergence through their speech style is one of the many strategies that people will adopt in order to make themselves more similar to, and thereby accepted by, another.

Giles et al. (1975) presented three concepts (convergence, divergence, and maintenance) within CAT and referred to them as strategies that speakers can use to signal their attitudes toward one another. Convergence is changing one's linguistic or paralinguistic behavior in order to be more similar to the partner in conversation, in order to seek approval, enhance comprehension, or show solidarity (Gallois et al., 1988). Generally, interactants modify their messages in response to their conversational partners: speech will either converge (move toward the other's style) or diverge (move away from the other's style) (Hecht et al., 1989).

Divergence is the opposite of convergence; speakers emphasize the differences between themselves and their partner's speech style (Gallois et al., 1988). If interactants do not share common knowledge, motivation, and styles, then the effectiveness of their conversation will be reduced and will possibly include a form of speech divergence (Hecht et al., 1989). Finally, maintenance refers to the act of continuing in one's previously established style, often times without any reference to the partner's speech and occasionally as a purposeful reaction to it (Gallois et al., 1988). Giles and Powesland (1975) also refer to "covert" accommodation, whereby the speaker has little or no consciousness of their convergence toward the speech characteristics of their partner. In short, convergence represents a speaker's attempt to adapt their speech toward a style that is suggested by a belief, expectation, or stereotype of that person's style (Giles et al., 1975).

Why We Accommodate

Payne et al. (2000) begin with the assumption that in order to accommodate our speech, we need to know both the grammatical and social rules of language use. Once we have learned the rules, we then begin to develop strategies for accommodation. Gallois et al. (1988) advise that individuals, when contemplating a closer personal relationship with their partner, use uncertainty reduction techniques, such as, questioning, self-disclosure, and deception detection, in order to fit themselves and the partner into roles and social categories. This is also done as a means to reduce their general uncertainty about the partner as a person, and increase their confidence in explaining their partner's behavior. In other words, accommodation through speech can be thought of as an attempt by the speaker to disguise or change their persona in order to make it more acceptable for the person they are speaking to, whether consciously or unconsciously (Giles & Powesland, 1975).

CAT, in its most basic sense, proposes that convergence reflects a speakers' or a group's often unconscious need for acceptance or identification with another. Thus, people adopt convergence as a strategy to become more similar to another person, through the reduction of linguistic differences (Giles et al., 1991). They also add that the greater the speakers' need to gain another person's social approval, the more likely they will converge and the greater the convergence attempts will be. Low power groups are often found to shift to the mainstream style to accommodate for cultural differences (Hecht et al., 1989). Giles & Powesland (1975) remind us, however, that

convergence may not always be the most positive or appropriate strategy, even when the speaker is seeking approval from their partner. Some researchers (e.g., Stanford & Webster, 1996) include the variables of power and status and claim that those with higher power or status will be more capable of exerting their will. Therefore, they contend that others will be forced to accommodate to those individuals. Many variables must be considered when looking at one's level of convergence, those stated above are the most reported variables in the research.

Rewards, Costs, and Effects of Accommodation

If one accepts the belief that people find social approval from others rewarding, then it would make sense to suppose that people will accommodate to others in most social situations (Bourhis et al., 1975). Giles & Powesland (1975) list potential rewards as gains in the listeners' approval, cooperativeness, and compliance; they add, however, that the rewards are dependent upon the speech patterns that are involved. They list the costs as expended effort, a possible loss of personal or social identity, and anticipated sanctions that may accrue. Giles and Smith (1979) propose that often times, rewards of the convergent act are emphasized--specifically an increase in attraction and/or approval. However, they also point out that there are likely costs involved, such as, the increased effort made to converge, loss of perceived integrity, possible rejection of the convergence attempts, and personal identity.

Simard, Taylor, and Giles (1976) touch upon the effects of accommodation in their research. They assert that when one perceives a speaker's motive to be an effort to break down cultural barriers, the motive is evaluated positively; yet when one

believes this same behavior to be forced convergence due to situational pressures, the effort is evaluated negatively. Giles and Powesland (1975) state that another effect of convergence or accommodation is that it will allow the sender to be perceived as more similar to their partner than had he/she not accommodated to their partner's speech style.

Researchers also have reported on the degree of desirability of convergence, in general. Giles and Smith (1979) assert that although convergence is viewed as favorable, and non-convergence generally unfavorable, the extent to which this will be true is influenced by the listener's feelings about the speaker's intent.

Research also suggests interactions between people of different skin colors, particularly in situations with a specific purpose, will ultimately lead to anxiety and discomfort for those involved (Giles & Powesland, 1975). Additionally, they found that race is an important attribute of the receiver, affecting how a sender will formulate their speech in terms of convergence or divergence strategies.

Group Membership/Identity

One's membership within a specific group (specifically, racial group) or group identity are important factors in CAT. Giles and Coupland (1991) assert that the majority of ethnic groups have a distinct language or dialect, and these are often considered to be necessary attributes to gain full and 'legitimate' membership into the group. People within groups are likely to seek out attributes which make them distinguishable from other groups in order to maintain group identity (Payne et al., 2000). Speech style, then, becomes an important aspect of that group identity, and

distinguishes individuals from one another. Gallois et al. (1988) also suggest that an attitude change toward an individual will likely be generalized to the entire group as a whole, especially when inter-group communication differences are obvious. Giles and Powesland (1975) conclude that language and speech styles are wrapped up in feelings of group identity. These are important aspects to consider when one is communicating with another from a different ethnic group. This is especially the case when stereotypes or preconceived notions exist about that particular group.

Stereotypes and Beliefs about Groups

When we meet someone for the first time, we begin to make immediate judgments and inferences about that person based on what we see and hear (Giles & Powesland, 1975). Additionally, regardless of consciousness level, we have our own personality theories about others which enable us to construct impressions of people from whatever information about them is available to us at the time. Furthermore, Gallois et al. (1988) assert that the expectations or stereotypes that we have about another group are necessary in determining the perceived similarities and differences between the groups, as well as how these similarities and differences are representative of the individual's behavior. Giles et al. (1975) argue that speech convergence is often determined by our stereotypes of how others will speak, especially when ethnic minorities are concerned. For example, people will use whatever resources are available to them when accommodating to another, and their actual focus may not be indicative of the communicative styles themselves (Giles et al., 1991).

Based on the above research, it is apparent that speakers tend to base their accommodation efforts on their own personal stereotypes or beliefs about others. In other words, they rely on stereotypes which frequently relate to the groups to which others belong. We are often quite accurate in our perceptions of other's speech styles, yet on other occasions, we are quite inaccurate (Giles et al., 1975). Furthermore, even when we are actually "on target," misattributions can still occur, and be potentially dangerous (Giles et al., 1991). Finally, Giles et al. (1975) conclude that convergence often reflects a speaker's attempt to reciprocate another's actual speech style, and this may be consistent or inconsistent with the stereotype. They add that speakers will not only converge to where they believe another to be linguistically, but sometimes will converge to where they believe others expect *them* to be linguistically. This is where the most potential for danger exists. It is in these situations that a speaker may overconverge and be perceived in a negative light.

Summary

The communication strategies European Americans in interracial relationships use when communicating with their partners' friends and/or family members remains a salient issue in the study of interracial communication. This thesis sought to examine this phenomenon in a new way and offers an understanding of the lived experiences of European Americans involved in interracial relationships.

Research Questions

Acknowledging a need for scholarly research that examines the lived experiences of European Americans in interracial relationships, the following research questions are presented.

RQ1: What communication strategies do European Americans in interracial relationships report using when communicating with their partner's friends and/or family members?

RQ2: How do they describe the effectiveness of these communication strategies?

CHAPTER THREE

PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

The method I have chosen in order to gain a better understanding of the communication strategies of European Americans involved in interracial relationships is phenomenology. I have chosen this qualitative form of study for two reasons. First, there is a limited amount of existing research in this topical area, so an inductive methodology appears most appropriate. Second, by utilizing a qualitative research method, I can examine the lived experiences of my co-researchers in an open, unconstricting way with the intent to provide new insights not obtainable with quantitative methods of study. A qualitative approach allows for detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors, and also direct quotations from people about their experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts (Patton, 1980). Cahn and Hanford (1984) argue that one of the most important aspects of phenomenology is its attempt to give voice to the uniqueness of each individual's worldview. This was a primary goal of my research study.

Phenomenological research focuses on the study of lived experience and argues that by gathering other people's experiences we become more experienced ourselves (van Manen, 1990). This thesis sought to examine the lived experiences of European Americans involved in an interracial relationship. Specifically, the focus was on the communication strategies European Americans employ when

communicating with their partner's friends and/or family members. Through the process of thematic reduction/analysis, I hoped to discover how convergence, divergence, or maintenance strategies affect communication between the European Americans and their partner's friends and/or family members as they engage in the process of acculturation.

In this chapter, I will explicate the essential concepts and key assumptions of phenomenology, highlight the steps involved in the phenomenological process, and outline the specific method utilized for this research.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of essences and essential structures of various aspects of phenomena (Husserl, 1962). The first to explore this method of study were German scholars Husserl, Heidegger, and Jaspers, followed by Sarte and Merleau-Ponty from France (Lanigan, 1979; Merleau-Ponty, 1968). As mentioned above, the goal of phenomenology is to collect lived experiences and transform them into expressions of their essence through text, thereby creating a reflective look at something meaningful allowing readers to re-live their own experiences (van Manen, 1990). Mohanty (1997) contends that phenomenology provides a method in which one clearly recognizes what one has been acquainted with all along. It is a rigorous and systematic attempt to reveal the internal meaning structures of lived experience (van Manen, 1990). This inquiry into one's lived experiences is derived from first-person reports of these experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Lanigan (1988) refers to this concept as 'conscious experience,' or the relationship between a person and the lived world

(Lebenswelt) that he or she inhabits (Zeitgeist). Finally, Krider and Ross (1997) conclude:

> Phenomenology yields a rich understanding of the human phenomenon being examined by bringing lived experiences into the conscious realm of human existence; however, the value of this type of questioning lies in the richness in the understanding of the phenomenon and not in the generalizability of the findings to others experiencing a similar phenomenon. (p. 2)

Key Assumptions

van Manen (1990) maintains that phenomenology follows from several key assumptions which assist researchers in incorporating diverse voices in meaningful ways (see also Orbe, 2000). First is the notion that phenomenology acknowledges the impossibility of the "objective researcher" (Patton, 1980), while leaving the possibility that one's own experiences may possibly be the experiences of others (van Manen, 1990). Moran (2000) argues that the main contribution of phenomenology is its protection of the subjective view of experience in order to fully understand the nature of knowledge. "The phenomenological epoche makes no such claims of objectivity because the assumptions grounding phenomenology assert that the researcher is fully immersed in the life world" (Lengel, 1992, p. 4). In this regard, "subjectivity" implies that one is as perceptive, insightful, and discerning as possible in order to disclose the object under investigation in its maximum depth and richness (van Manen, 1990).

Second, phenomenology seeks to study phenomena in an open, unconstricting way (Orbe, 2000). The co-researcher's perception, interpretation, and awareness of the phenomena are the driving force of the phenomenological inquiry (Cahn & Hanford, 1984). The three step process of phenomenology facilitates this inductive exploration of the phenomena (as explained in further sections). Additionally, ambiguity is valued and is thought to be a productive and necessary component of the phenomenological process (Lanigan, 1979).

Third, phenomenology attempts to gain a deeper understanding of our everyday experiences (van Manen, 1990). It embraces all lived experience, not merely that which is observable (Cahn & Hanford, 1984). From a phenomenological point of view, we always want to know more about the world in which we live and constantly question the way we experience that world (van Manen, 1990).

Fourth, phenomenological research differs from traditional research in that it does not specify beforehand what it hopes to discover or accomplish (Orbe, 2000). In other words, explanations and preconceived categories are not determined before the phenomena has been examined and understood (Moran, 2000). Lanigan (1988) adds:

> This is to say, an attempt is made to analyze the experience in the context of consciousness and preconsciousness, rather than in terms of assumed boundaries of judgment based on historically generated value norms. (p. 10)

Essentially, the strategy of a qualitative research study such as this is inductive, in that the researcher attempts to understand the situation without imposing preconceived expectations on the research setting (Patton, 1980).

Fifth, phenomenology is a study of "persons" or beings that have consciousness, rather than "individuals" (van Manen, 1990). Auden (1967) describes an "individual" as a biological term referring to a tree, a horse, a man, or something of the like. However, he adds that a "person" has uniqueness as a human being. Additionally, phenomenological research does not use the term "subjects" rather terms such as "narrator" (Lengel, 1992) or "co-researchers," which is becoming more widely used and accepted by researchers in the field (Orbe, 1999; Orbe, 2000). The term "co-researchers" is situated in the belief that those participating in the study are contributing to the research in such a way that their input is vital and invaluable, this leads to mutual questioning and interrogation, and it in turn, affects the way in which "co-researchers" think of themselves (Orbe, 2000).

Lastly, phenomenology deals with "capta" or conscious experience, rather than "data" or hypothetical situations (Lanigan, 1988). Phenomenologists stress capturing a process of consciousness, or an awareness of thoughts and feelings (Cahn & Hanford, 1984). Capta refers to that which is taken from one's experience thereby allowing one to give meaning on one's own (Orbe, 2000). Conversely, data refers to that which is given, involving a process of gathering information from subjects via interviews or surveys where meaning is derived from a pre-determined agenda (Lanigan, 1988; Orbe, 2000).

Steps in the Phenomenological Process

Phenomenological inquiry involves a three-step process which is synergistic in nature (Lanigan, 1988). In essence, the process is driven by a combined energy and force

from both the researcher and the co-researchers, generating a mutual effort to explore and understand a phenomenon. The three stages of phenomenological inquiry are not linear in nature, rather the phenomenological process takes on a spiraling, interdependent form where each stage informs the other, either pre- or postreflectively (Orbe et al., 2001). Several researchers (Lanigan, 1988; Moustakas, 1994; Orbe, 2000; van Manen, 1990) explain the three steps of phenomenology (description, reduction, interpretation) in depth.

Phenomenological Description

The phenomenological description process begins as the researcher engages in self-reflection in order to assess their own experiences with the phenomena being investigated; this is done to admit bias and set it aside, avoiding stereotypes and presuppositions (Lengel, 1992; Orbe, 2000). Throughout this process of self-reflexivity, the researcher begins to gather the descriptions of lived experiences. According to Patton (1980), the qualitative data is open-ended in order to investigate people's lives, experiences, and interactions, seeking meaning in their own terms and within their natural settings. Additionally, the investigations become valid when the knowledge is arrived at through descriptions which allow understanding of the essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). van Manen (1990) posits that "good" phenomenological descriptions are collected by lived experience and are validated by lived experience.

These are essential guidelines offered as part of the description process. The main goal is to collect as many vivid and detailed descriptions of the phenomena as possible from the co-researchers.

Phenomenological Reduction

The second step of the process is referred to as phenomenological reduction. This process begins as the researcher transcribes the co-researcher's lived experiences and sets out to review the transcripts 'horizontally' (Orbe, 2000). The process involves a pre-reflective description of the phenomena in its most basic sense, thereby reducing it to what is horizonal and thematic (Moustakas, 1994). Orbe (2000) explicates this process by describing the techniques commonly used by phenomenologists (while these steps are not the only way to proceed through the phenomenological reduction phase, they are preferred for this thesis project):

> The first step is to read through each transcript without making any notations.The next step involves reading through the transcript a second time, highlighting words, phrases, and recollections that emerge as essential in the lived experiences of the co-researchers. The final step is to bracket these paradigmatic (initial) thematizations from the first transcript before beginning the same process for the other transcripts. (p. 615)

After completing the initial reduction process, the phenomenologist then conducts a second review of all transcripts and initial thematizations in order to become more familiar with the initial findings (Orbe, 2000). A third review (using the idea of free

imaginative variation, explained later in this section) of the transcripts and general themes often times reveals that several themes are interconnected, redundant, or incidental (Orbe, 2000).

The overt goal of this step in the process is to determine which parts of the lived experiences are truly a part of consciousness and which are merely assumed (Lanigan, 1988). The process of reducing toward what is texturally meaningful and essential depends on clear reflectiveness and an ability to attend, recognize, and describe with clarity (Moustakas, 1994).

This step of the process is also referred to as thematic analysis. This is when one extracts the themes that are embedded in the imagery of the transcripts (van Manen, 1990). The ultimate goal is to decipher that which is essential and that which is not (Lanigan, 1979). van Manen claims that a theme "gives control and order to our research and writing" (p. 79) and also "gives shape to the shapeless" (p. 88). He also suggests that themes are understood as the structures of experience and are not objects that one happens upon at specific moments throughout a text (van Manen, 1990). As the researcher strives to differentiate between that which is essential and that which is assumed, he/she may utilize a process called imaginative free variation.

The procedure referred to as imaginative free variation requires one to reflect on the aspects of the experience that have cognitive, connotative, and affective meaning, and then imagining each as being present or absent in the experience (Lanigan, 1988). The major task is to describe the essential structures of the phenomenon; this process enables the researcher to derive structural themes which

emerge from the reduction phase (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, the phenomenologist uses the technique to verify that each theme is associated with the phenomenon essentially, rather than incidentally (van Manen, 1990). The goal is to discover specific qualities that make the phenomenon what it is, and without which one could not imagine the phenomenon to be what it is (van Manen, 1990). Throughout this process, one must also acknowledge that there is not one single path to truth, but that many possibilities will emerge, each intimately connected to the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological Interpretation

The final stage of the process is phenomenological interpretation. This process begins as the researcher reviews the essential themes and decides how they relate to one another—a process called syntagmatic thematization (Orbe, 2000). Generally, this step seeks to specify the essential meaning in the reduction and description of the conscious experience under investigation (Lanigan, 1988). van Manen (1990) also reports that the purpose of reflection is to grasp the essential meaning of something, thereby eliminating those themes which are not essential in order to understand and explain the phenomenon. It is often described as a process of looking and noticing and looking again until the researcher is able to grasp the full nature of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Throughout this process of reflective interpretation, the researcher may discover one phrase which captures the essence of the phenomena in a meaningful way. Orbe (2000) explains:

> Within this re-examining of the interpretive process, one seemingly significant phrase will emerge and serve as a means of interconnecting all of the essential themes that emerged from the co-researchers' descriptions of their lived experiences. Although often first passed by or discarded as unimportant, these revelatory phrases manage to get at the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. (p. 616)

Orbe (2000) also contends that when one uses phenomenology effectively, it can be a productive way to reveal the commonalities that exist in the diverse experiences of racial/ethnic groups while at the same time giving attention to the various ways in which these same groups have differing lived realities. This is an important notion to consider when examining interracial relationships as they inherently involve a unique mix of racial/ethnic backgrounds and experiences.

Considering the lack of existing research on the topic of interracial relationship acculturation, phenomenological inquiry is a logical choice for the methodological framework. When speaking about the benefits of phenomenology, Orbe (1996) concludes, "in short, phenomenology represents a philosophic and human science research method that constitutes an avenue to 'give voice to the voiceless" (p. 160). Many researchers (e.g., Lengel, 1992; Nelson, 1989; Orbe, 1996; Orbe, 2000; Orbe et al., 2001; van Manen, 1990) report on the value of phenomenological inquiry and discuss its utility as a qualitative research tool.

Methods

I chose to use three different methods for this thesis in order to explore the breadth and depth of the phenomenon under study. Through the utilization of these varying methods, I hoped to garner rich descriptions from a greater number of co-researchers that would not have been possible had I chosen to use only one method. The three methods of this thesis are in-depth interview, focus group discussion, and the critical incident technique. Before I discuss each of the methods in detail, I will begin by describing the co-researchers with relation to the process used to find and consequently invite each of them to participate in this research.

Co-researchers

As suggested in other phenomenological research (e.g. Nelson, 1989; Orbe, 1996), the term co-researchers is used to designate the interactive role that these persons play in shaping the outcomes of our research (Orbe, 1996). The co-researchers of this thesis are European Americans who are involved (or have been involved) in a romantic interracial relationship. For the purposes of this study, a romantic interracial relationship is defined as a committed union between two individuals, one European American and the other African American, who have been together in a romantic relationship for at least six months. The insights and experiences of the African American partner are indeed valued. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I focused on the experiences of the European American in the relationship, specifically on their communication strategies with their partner's friends and/or family members.

My co-researchers are European American, male or female, 22-65 years of age, some with college educations, some with a high school education, and are both married and unmarried. The initial core group of co-researchers consisted of personal contacts of my own (See HSIRB proposal, Appendices A-E)[1]. Nelson (1989) encourages the invitation of co-researchers with whom the researcher has a previous relationship. This creates a trusting relationship that serves to foster an open environment in which the two can dialogue. The researcher is able to share personal stories with the co-researcher in an effort to help them to feel more comfortable sharing their own stories (Nelson, 1989).

From these initial co-researchers, I gathered additional co-researchers by requesting references from the initial core group. In other words, I secured co-researchers who are involved in interracial relationships through other people who know someone involved in such a relationship.

Twenty co-researchers participated in this study through one of the three capta-gathering techniques. They live in different geographical areas (including one co-researcher who lives outside the United States), and vary in their socio-economic status and level of education. I will discuss each of the three methods used to gather phenomenological descriptions for this study in the following section.

In-depth Interviews

"The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind" (Patton, 1980, p. 196). Phenomenological research is empirical, it is derived at

[1] HSIRB approval for this research study has been gained and the full proposal outline can be found in the appendices.

through experiential data by means of in-depth interviews (Lengel, 1992). The in-depth interview is a useful tool for gathering information from co-researchers in an open and unconstricting way, allowing them to have a voice. Also thought of as a descriptive approach, phenomenological research describes situations or experiences just as they are presented to the researcher (Lengel, 1992).

I conducted five in-depth interviews, following the general interview guide approach, as described by Patton (1980). This approach outlines a set of issues to explore with each respondent before the interview takes place. The issues are not addressed in any specific order and the questions are not worded in advance for the purpose of eliciting a specific answer from the co-researchers. Patton (1980) also adds that the interview guide is to serve as a basic guideline in order to ensure that all topics are covered, yet the interviewer must be able to adapt the wording and sequence of the questions to each respondent based upon the context of the actual interview.

In order to gather as much information and descriptions as possible from the co-researchers, a basic protocol for the in-depth interviews was established. The protocol includes general topical areas which I covered with the co-researchers as they shared their experiences being in an interracial relationship. In addition, I created several hypothetical questions to use if a co-researcher was having difficulty describing their experiences (See Appendix F).

The in-depth interviews ranged from thirty-five to ninety minutes and were conducted at the co-researchers' homes or offices. The five co-researchers who

participated in the in-depth interviews were female, varying in age from 23 to 65. One co-researcher was engaged to be married to her partner, and the other four were all married to their partners, from 3 years to 15 years. The interviews were audiotaped after gaining permission to do so from the co-researcher. Subsequently, each interview tape was transcribed and used in the thematic analysis stage of the research.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a useful tool in phenomenological research given that they provide an opportunity for co-researchers to share their views while also reflecting on the views of others (Patton, 1980). This method is beneficial in that the researcher is able to gather descriptions from multiple co-researchers simultaneously. Through focus groups, researchers are able to consider the various topics presented with the co-researchers, enhancing the role of the co-researchers in the description gathering phase of the study (van Manen, 1990). Finally, focus groups provide an opportunity to generate deeper insights and understandings, thereby examining, articulating, re-interpreting, omitting, adding, or reformulating themes (van Manen, 1990). By conducting the focus groups after the in-depth interviews, a post-syntagmatic review is possible, allowing for questions to be asked based upon themes that may have emerged from the in-depth interviews (Bauer & Orbe, 2001).

Three focus groups, which involved a minimum of two and a maximum of four co-researchers in each group, were facilitated. Two of the focus groups consisted of two co-researchers and one consisted of four co-researchers. I arranged

the focus groups randomly, with an effort to include varying age groups, those who are unmarried and married, and a wide representation of relationship duration. I conducted the focus groups in the conference room at Sprau Tower and at co-researchers' homes and audiotaped them after gaining permission from the co-researchers. The audiotapes were transcribed and the transcriptions were used later in the thematic analysis process. The topical protocol and hypothetical questions outlined above were again used in the focus groups to generate a discussion with the co-researchers. Once the discussions began, however, the co-researchers often lead the discussion, focusing on any pertinent issues they desired to discuss. Orbe (2000) discusses the importance of allowing the co-researchers to lead the focus group discussion in a path they so choose, thereby giving them a voice to introduce and highlight their own lived experiences.

Critical Incident Technique

Another useful method for gathering descriptions of lived experiences is the critical incident technique. This method asks persons to communicate their experiences with the phenomenon in writing (van Manen, 1990). This technique was first introduced by Flanagan (1954) who describes it as a set of procedures to collect observations of human behavior in order to facilitate their usefulness in solving practical problems. The essence of this technique is that it requires only simple types of judgments from the observer, and all evaluations by the observer are based on an agreed upon statement of purpose of the activity (Flanagan, 1954).

I distributed eighteen critical incident forms to a wide variety of co-researchers. I used the same techniques outlined earlier in the chapter to gather the co-researchers for this portion of the study. The forms were distributed via email, postal mail, or hand delivery by the researcher, variant upon the co-researcher. Those co-researchers who were too far away to be interviewed were asked to complete a critical incident form. Each co-researcher was asked to:

> Describe an occasion when you communicated with your partner's friends and/or family members. The experience can be positive, negative, or neither. Please try to provide as much detail as possible about the situation.

A stamped, addressed, envelope was provided for the co-researchers to return the forms upon completion. I then compiled the seven forms that were returned and used them, along with the transcripts from the in-depth interviews and focus groups, to advance the phenomenological reduction phase of the study.

Thematic Analysis

In the phenomenological reduction phase of the study, the goal is to discover only those parts of the description which are essential to the phenomenon (Lanigan, 1988). From here, several themes will emerge that are central to the phenomenon, such that it could not be described without them (van Manen, 1990).

I followed the steps outlined in Orbe's (2000) research in order to allow these themes to emerge. First, I read through each transcript making no notations. The primary goal of this step was to re-familiarize myself with the material, considering each transcript individually, without any comparisons. The next step was to read

through the transcript a second time, now highlighting words, phrases, and specific descriptions which emerge as essential to the co-researcher's experiences. Finally, the initial paradigmatic themes were bracketed in the transcript and the process began again with the next transcript. This process is done horizontally, so that the paradigmatic themes can emerge from each transcript independent from the others. It is in this third review that the bracketed themes were compared, searching for any redundant, similar, or incidental themes. Any theme that was deemed to be incidental to the experiences of European Americans in interracial relationships was eliminated.

In the final stages of my phenomenological inquiry, I selected those themes which proved to be essential to the phenomenon. Throughout this process of discovery, a revelatory phrase emerged which captured the essence of the phenomenon in the co-researcher's voice. This phrase did not emerge immediately, rather after many times of reviewing the transcripts. In my research, I then explicated the essential paradigmatic themes, drawing them together and offering insight into the lived experiences of European Americans in interracial relationships.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the acculturation process of European Americans in interracial relationships as they communicate with their partners' friends and/or family members. Through the process of phenomenological inquiry, I explicated the emergent themes of European Americans' lived experiences within this phenomenon. This research stands to address a major gap in the literature on communication issues in interracial relationships and intends to open the door for future research on this

topic. While there are limitations to this research study (these are addressed in Chapter Five), the benefits are numerous.

This type of research is needed in order for communication scholars to attempt to bridge the gap between cultures in intercultural communication. It is only when we explore and attempt to understand why we communicate as we do that we can continue to grow and extend our knowledge as scholars. Communication in interracial relationships is a salient issue within intercultural communication and deserves attention by communication scholars. This research study intends to give great attention to a vastly underrepresented phenomenon in communication literature and implores others in the field of communication to do the same.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEMATIZING LIVED EXPERIENCES

Chapter Three discussed the steps in phenomenological methodology and described the first step, phenomenological description, as a means to gather the capta of European Americans involved in interracial relationships with African Americans. The capta was collected through the use of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and collecting critical incidents from a total of 20 co-researchers. This process of description produced 92 pages of transcripts focused on the conscious lived experiences of European Americans as they communicate with the friends and family members of their African American partners.

After collecting the capta, the second step in the phenomenological process, and the goal of Chapter Four, is to reduce the descriptions of these lived experiences. Lanigan (1988) describes this step in the process as a determination of which parts of the lived experiences are truly a part of consciousness and which are merely assumed. It became very clear through the initial review of the transcripts that it would not be possible to classify one set of experiences as universally true for all European Americans included in interracial relationships. My co-researchers vary greatly in terms of geographical area, age, socioeconomic status, educational background, breadth of experience with interracial relationships, length of relationships, and family history. Because each co-researcher provided diverse capta and through this phase of reduction, I was faced with the challenge of discovering what was essential

and what was not. In other words, my goal in this stage of the process was to derive the essential experiences of a European American and their communicative experiences in interracial relationships. By no means can I claim that these experiences will apply to all European Americans in interracial relationships. Yet, the themes described in this chapter were found to be essential for my co-researchers as they gave consciousness to their past experiences. My ultimate goal was to reveal the essential lived experiences of European Americans in interracial relationships as they communicate with the friends and family members of their partner.

The specific process for reviewing the transcripts along with the process of imaginative free variation were both described in Chapter Three. These processes were used throughout this phase of reduction. After reviewing the transcripts, a large number of potential themes emerged. van Manen (1990) describes a theme as:

> The experience of focus, of meaning, of point. Themes are not objects one encounters at certain points or moments in a text. A theme is the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand. (p. 87)

With this in mind, I read through the transcripts three times, bracketing possible themes in each transcript and then finally combining all of the themes from each transcript. This process produced twenty-one paradigmatic themes. After reading through the transcripts and reviewing each of the twenty-one themes, I was then able to eliminate those themes which were redundant or purely incidental. The twenty-one themes were then reduced to sixteen. This process allowed me to further reduce the paradigmatic themes into the common lived experiences of my co-researchers. These

experiences are referred to as the syntagmatic themes, or the uniting of my co-researchers' experiences.

Syntagmatic Thematizations

In this stage of reduction, the goal is to uncover the essential lived experiences of the co-researchers. van Manen (1990) describes the selective reading approach as a process of reading through the text several times and asking myself the question, 'what statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?' Sixteen themes emerged after the completion of this process. At this point in the process, these thematizations represent groups of experiences; hence some of the themes will appear interconnected and/or similar. These similarities will be eliminated at a later stage in the reduction process after the imaginative free variation technique is used to arrive at the essential themes.

Each heading represents the title of the theme. A description of how the particular theme came about, along with representative quotes from my co-researchers that support the particular theme is included under each heading. The descriptions act as an aide for the reader so that they may fully understand the logic of the researcher and the phenomenological process. Phenomenology is not only a process involving the researcher and co-researchers, but also the reader. van Manen (1990) agrees with this statement as he points out that researchers must pull the reader into the question so that he/she cannot help but to wonder about the phenomenon in a similar light as the researcher. The headings, descriptions, and comments of my co-

researchers should act as a guide for the reader in order to understand the process of the researcher.

For greater clarity, co-researchers' remarks will be identified with a code after the remark (a letter followed by a number). The letter refers to the specific transcript used, where letters A-E refer to the in-depth interviews, F-H refer to the focus group interviews, I-[O] refer to descriptions gathered through the critical incident forms. The number refers to the specific page of the transcript. For example, an excerpt followed by (G15) indicates the quote is taken from Transcript G (a focus group), on page 15.

The following sixteen themes are a compilation of the experiences of my 20 co-researchers. After interviews, focus groups, and reviewing the critical incident forms, these themes emerged. They represent the conscious lived experiences of European Americans in interracial relationships as they communicate with the friends and family members of their partners. The sixteen themes are as follows: (a) comfort level around friends/family/other Blacks affects language; (b) setting affects language; (c) partner's accommodations affect language; (d) the differences are distinctly obvious; (e) I consciously do not adapt; (f) adapting is a conscious choice; (g) adapting is subconscious; (h) I am who I am; (i) past experiences shape language; (j) being the "minority;" (k) insider/outsider status; (l) feelings of cultural infringement; (m) using language to "fit in;" (n) slang as a foreign language; (o) using slang in a "joking" manner or to make others laugh; and (p) personalities affect

language. Each theme, along with excerpts from my co-researchers to support the theme, will be presented in the next section of this chapter.

Comfort Level Around Family/Friends/Other Blacks Affects Language

One influence on my co-researchers' language when interacting with the friends and family members of their partners was their level of comfort around them. A tone was often set from the first meeting with these people and the co-researchers' language seemed to be shaped by their feelings of how much they were liked or respected.

--I believe his friends really love me and I feel totally accepted by them and they like to be around me. But I don't have to talk like them to be accepted by them or to be a part of their group even . . . D7

--I think he had said that his mother was not happy about it [our relationship] or it wasn't—I don't know preferred I guess. So that's the only time I ever went to see his family. G2

--I would mostly just be like in the room. Because I wasn't really sure if I fit in or not. So if someone approached me I would try to be cool about it and talk to them a little bit but for the most part I wasn't like outgoing and you know . . . being buddy buddy with his friends. G3

--Well I have a friend who's mixed and grew up with White parents but he has a surrogate Black family. So he can talk White, but he could switch on a dime. And he and I would talk Black with each other. But we could talk White with each other too. My friend _____ is a Black man, Black family, grew up in (White city). So he sounds more White, but he can switch on the jive talkin' slang too. Like I'm comfortable and I can talk that way with those two because I'm comfortable. G10

--Other than his family, I think there's some aunts and uncles that don't approve. They have children and all their children are married to Black people, and it's not that they say anything or do anything, they're very nice to me when I'm there but you just can feel it. I mean after seven years I don't really feel part of the family. It's like you go there and I'm a guest is basically how I feel. H2

--A couple of his friends were in our department and I just got to know them all from hanging out and doing stuff. And I didn't get any qualms or anything . . . I didn't really have any problems with any of his friends. Nobody really said much. H4

--I asked [my partner] why [his family members] were straining so much [to see me]—and he answered, "they wanted to see what race you were." I couldn't believe it! He had not told his sisters that I was White. In this two year relationship, they had no idea what race I was. I suddenly found myself so nervous to talk with them. Did they like White people? I thought they already knew. J1

Setting Affects Language

Many of my co-researchers described a sense of comfort when they were in different settings (i.e., various events, locations, social atmospheres) or around different people (i.e., family members/friends of their partner they had never met). This seemed to have an effect on their language and how comfortable they were using slang or simply speaking, in general.

--The problem is that we have a lot of mutual friends and our friends are very diverse. So, in that type of setting, I feel very comfortable in the fact that we do speak differently, I guess. But in other settings where maybe we don't know the people as well, maybe we're in a group at church or something and it is more heavy and it's obvious that my speech is very different, um I do notice it . . . I'm sure I've felt uncomfortable at times. B3

--Now I don't go to parties and clubs, but just going off that, I imagine I might feel slightly uncomfortable at an all Black party, like the ice breaker or something because that's a very different setting and a very different group than church. B4

--No. I didn't find that comfortable [referring to going places with her partner where there were Black people that she didn't know]. Well it would be depending on where we were. If we were at a lecture, or at a venue where I was comfortable, that would be okay. If we were at a party that was mostly Blacks, then I would find that not very comfortable. If we walked in and there were people that I knew, I would be more comfortable then if they were people that I didn't know . . . C4

--His father, I won't use [slang] around his father because he pretends to be a very well educated man, um, he's trying to be and so I speak very proper in front of him, but with his mom it's just a more relaxed atmosphere . . . F4

--I don't really know if I have too many Black friends anymore. Just the one girl who's mixed. And maybe some people at work. Like if we're out drinkin' like we went to the bar once and there was one Black guy and one White guy . . . I think I

would be more comfortable talking to Black men and using slang language then I would Black women. G11

--I don't really. . . like I said I don't think that I would speak that way [using slang language] if there were a lot of Black females around. Because I think that I would be in trouble. I think that I would hear something or get into something and I don't know why I think they're so judgmental . . . G11

--So it's like [my partner's family members] have very much, their conversations are the Black person is the dominant person and the White person is the one treading on them. So it's kind of difficult . . . it's not that it's just the physical wording that they use it's more what they're physically talking about where I see the differences in our conversation and I just tend to shut up so that I don't have to argue with people who are just going to overpower me. H5

Partner's Accommodations Affect Language

A recurring theme throughout the interviews and focus groups was the partner's language and how it affected the language of the co-researchers. Even when asked specific questions about their own language, my co-researchers turned to the language of their partner. They often spoke of hearing their partner accommodate his/her language in various settings and related that to their own accommodations (or lack thereof). The way their partner speaks with them or around his/her friends appears to have an effect on their own language.

--[My partner] was raised by his grandparents and he was always taught to speak very proper and not to use any slang or Ebonics, so he always spoke very proper English. All of the other Blacks around campus, especially when we would have lunch in the dorms would call him Uncle Tom and things of that nature because he doesn't speak with any slang. I mean around home he does, like joking around. Or with his more laid back friends he will, but otherwise no, he doesn't. A4

--My language is pretty much the same, but I have picked up words that I never would have used before and actually, [my partner's] language, he says—his mother told him awhile ago like, "your English is improving" so maybe his English is changing a little and mine does too, I use words like "shady" you know or something, but I don't speak slang. Like kind of how I'm talking to you now is how I talk. But

um I might in a more relaxed setting say something like "that's shady" or something, but that's about as far as I go to change. B2

--With me . . . it's the same [referring to her language around new Black people], but I have noticed, and he's told me before, if we're in a group where's he's uncomfortable, say the first time he met my parents or if we're in a professional type setting, I notice he'll make a real effort to make his voice very clear and his speech very clear and talk louder than he's comfortable doing. Cuz he's kind of a slow speaker naturally. Like I think in those settings he switches, but around me, no, and around our friends he's pretty much the same. B2

--I wouldn't say [my partner] has like the "ghetto slang" either. I do think he definitely uses slang. And I've picked up words from him, or Ebonics I guess. But um, I have heard other people speak much stronger slang that's much heavier, if that makes sense. B3

--[My partner] doesn't speak slang, and even when he's home he very seldom speaks slang. And his brothers don't speak much slang either so . . . so I don't know if he . . . he may experience the same kind of culture challenge that I would in being in a group of people, and I mean we've never talked about it but I bet he does experience that when he goes to work with people in the community. He speaks as an educated outsider. C7

--Well, one thing that I do notice about my husband and I still notice it today is that the way he talks to his friends and on the basketball court is very different from the way that he'll talk to my parents. Like it's, it sounds so stereotypically Black and ghetto when he's like "hey man what's up, you know . . . let's go ballin" you know that kind of stuff. D4

--I would say that you know there's somewhat of a mix [in his language], but mostly [my partner] doesn't talk to me in ghetto slang or whatever you want to call it. D4

--But when it was just the two of us, we would have normal, I shouldn't say normal . . . we would have . . . I wouldn't feel like I would have to go outside my comfortable speech patterns. G4

--[My partner] uses [slang] with me and I use it with him. G4

--[My partner uses slang] around his friends. If it was just him and I . . . I don't think that he talked the same. He might use some of the same language, um, but it wasn't a show. Like it was with his friends. G8

--[I would use slang] if it came up in casual stuff. But it wouldn't be a whole conversation of totally different speech. It would be like just words here and there or references to things or maybe relaxing like my "ing's" or whatever. I think that my speech became a lot more casual rather than proper. G8

--With regard to D and his family, D was actually raised more White than he was raised Black. I don't know if D knows how to talk slang . . . what I would consider inner city slang. He can do some of the slang and things when we're goofin' off, but if you listen to him on the phone and you're not seeing him, you would think he's a White person. He speaks that way, very proper and educated . . . more than using the Ebonics type language. H1

The Differences Are Distinctly Obvious

When asked questions about their language or feelings when around all African Americans, my co-researchers spoke of the noticeable differences rather than the similarities. They described their feelings of being the only White person present and how that felt. Their language was then linked to their level of comfort with the differences or whether they noticed the differences at all.

--[The difference in our cultures] was a little awkward I'd say in the beginning because I was always thinking "I don't want to offend him, I don't want him to think that I am racist" and it was kind of like I had to prove to him that I wasn't racist in case he was thinking that all Whites must be racist. So I think I was more conscious of what I was saying with him than how I would have been if I were with other Whites, or what have you. It wasn't a big issue, though, I mean I don't know that I was really that conscious of it, but there was a little of that there. A2

--[Referring to a recent experience when she was the "minority"] So that was a little bit interesting. I was the one and only White person in the church. And as the preacher was talking he would scan the crowd and he always stopped at me, and I was thinking "ok, why you lookin' at me?" I know I stick out like a sore thumb, but why you starin' at me? *laughs* It didn't really make me uncomfortable, I think it's more because I've been in situations like that before, it just happens that this one was the most recent. Very early on, like going to the step shows on campus at [school] very few White people were there and things like that. I think I felt a little bit more uncomfortable in those situations because they were doing more of the traditional African American stuff and more of the slang and all of that kind of thing. A5

--[When meeting her partner's friends] I kind of remember feeling uncomfortable and um, as far as my language . . . I spoke the same but I remember thinking "yes, it's obvious that I'm White" you know what I mean? B4

--[Referring to she and her partner socializing with each other's friends] But it is obvious that he speaks different from us, you know in different settings, or vice versa so do I. B4

--I was just proud to be there [referring to the area where her husband is from, while on a visit] and proud that I'm his wife and so, he had gone off to hang out with a couple of his friends and I was with our son and I decided to go on a walk through his ghetto, which is what it really is and you know, and when I went and I was walking up and down the little alleys and stuff and I had several people who were like "Hey Whitey, what's up?" and um I was like "hi" and *laughs* I don't know, I thought it was funny and fun and I mean, granted I definitely felt like a minority and I was the only White person there. But I kind of felt proud to be there, but I also wouldn't say that I'm necessarily my super outgoing self because I think I monitored how much I said because I didn't know how much was appropriate particularly in that culture and what was inappropriate, so I probably kept my mouth shut more than maybe I normally would in another situation that I'm familiar with. D5

--The only difference in our communication is I think I was more tactful in my word choices sometimes. They were all blunt with the truth at times. I1

--Most of the people in the room spoke with Ebonics, while I generally do not. I equate this difference to the difference in our cultures. K1

--I noticed they [my partner's friends] were conscious of me, for example they would say, "This White guy said . . ." and then the person talking would look at me and say, "No offense or anything." K1

--There were differences in language between myself and [my partner's] family. There was also language differences within [my partner's] family. L2

<u>I Consciously Do Not Adapt</u>

The topic that seemed to vary the most with my co-researchers was individual language adaptation. This theme emerged as co-researchers spoke of the various reasons why they do not and would not adapt their language to that of their partner or

his/her friends and family. My co-researchers had a wide array of reasons for not adapting their speech and often times had strong feelings about the topic.

--I think there is probably some distinction between the two [referring to her own language and the language of her partner's family]. I mean, when I was interacting with them I was still speaking my normal everyday speech, I didn't change it at all to fit into the situation. A5

--It's different when Blacks communicate with each other. But it's not, it's not a style of language I've ever tried to adapt myself to. It's not something I can do comfortably. I've never gotten into that. C3

--So sure, that is a conscious decision that I wasn't able to overcome and didn't feel it would be a good thing for me to overcome. My White face was always going to be there no matter what so I was always going to be dealing with whatever people's past experiences had been and what their expectations were. I had to also deal with my expectations of myself. And I didn't feel that I would make them terribly uncomfortable because after all, that is how they expected me to speak. C5

--Speech patterns which belong to the Black community are just not naturally mine and I don't see good reason or comfortable reasons to change. So in those [referring to situations where she is around her partner's friends] types of situations you notice that your communication will stay the same . . . regardless of the patterns that they're using at the time. But again I'm not in a lot of situations where it's such a distinct difference between the way I would normally speak, and it's partly that someone communicating with me will attempt to communicate with me in a way that I'm most comfortable, in the more "White world." C6

--I think that, especially women when they talk that way [using slang language], they sound like they have a lot of attitude. You can automatically be, I can be very defensive. It doesn't sound intelligent. I don't find a reason for it. F6

Adapting Is a Conscious Choice

This theme includes the comments from those co-researchers who did recognize a difference in their speech and spoke of that difference as a conscious choice. They included the situations and experiences where they noticed their language as not the typical "White" language and cited reasons for why they have adapted.

--So there are some things [referring to certain slang words] that I wouldn't say, but at the same time if there's something that I've sort of gotten to say because of being around people, I might say it, if that makes sense. B3

--At work, there was a girl that I can change [my language] around . . . I change my language a lot. I speak one way to the customer, one way to the other cashiers and one way to my friends and I happen to have all three in the store at one time. She said, you just went from being ghetto, to being my supervisor to being all polite for the customer, she's like, how did you just do that within five minutes? It's like, it's really easy. F5

--I said it's really easy [switching my language]. It's really easy. Spanish is easy for me too, but . . . it's really easy to switch in and out of those personalities. F6

--[When asked if she would change her speech patterns if all of her friends spoke proper English with little use of slang] Probably, if I'm around them, I would speak how they speak. I would start like I wouldn't . . . I always call it talking ghetto or something like slang . . . I wouldn't talk like that in front of them. I would talk proper probably. F14

Adapting Is Subconscious

Some co-researchers did not feel that their adaptation toward the "typically Black" language was a conscious decision they had made. They spoke of the change in their language as subconscious, or something that they had not yet given consciousness. After looking back on it, they realized that when they would switch their language to that of the people they were around at the time, they did not notice they were speaking differently than they normally would.

--But it didn't really occur to me that I was switching [my language]. It would just be whoever you're with you kind of adapt your communication style to whoever you're with. I think a lot of people do that. I do it . . . I guess [my partner] did too. So I guess most people do it without thinking about it. G8

--Sometimes I don't notice that I'm speaking differently like trying to get [my minority students in the classroom] to relate to me unless I get a reaction. So unless they laugh or say oooh she said that [referring to use of a slang word], unless that happens, I don't notice it. And like _____ said, as long as I am working in this area, I will probably continue to have some change in my normal speech patterns. G14

I Am Who I Am

When asked to recall situations where they were the "minority," or when they were around the friends and family members of their partner, my co-researchers seemed adamant that they wanted to be accepted for who they were. No matter what style of language each co-researcher uses, there was a sense of 'this is who I am, take it or leave it.' They articulated a fear of other people accusing them of being someone that they are not. In short, they just wanted the friends and family members of their partner to accept them regardless of their speech patterns.

--I would have been uncomfortable [around Black people] trying to speak differently than who I really am. So I just didn't change [my language]. And again I didn't want them to think that I was trying to belittle them or "I'm just trying to be like you" or . . . I don't know. A5

--[Referring to being the only White person and communicating with Blacks] It's not something that makes me want to run out of the church or something, or out of the setting . . . do I feel comfortable using slang words . . . I try to be honest with who I am. So if I know a word and that's the word I would normally use, I would say it around anyone, like "shady" I'll say it. And people might laugh when they hear me say it. But there's some words that I wouldn't use like the "n" word. I don't use that word. B3

--[As far as] how I speak . . . it would be even more retarded if I would have tried to talk in slang or how [my partner's friends] were talking because that's not who I am. So it was just kind of like "well, here I am" B4

--I think [my partner's friends] would think that I was trying to be someone that I'm not [if I were to speak slang around them]. And I've never really tried [to speak slang around them], I'm pretty comfortable with who I am so I don't think that . . . I just know they would laugh [if I spoke slang]. And, I would be being something that's somebody that I'm not. You know I'd be putting on this façade of, cuz I would never [speak slang] with my White friends, so it would just seem so unnatural to me to do that with my Black friends. D6

--[Referring to her frequent use of slang language] I spoke like that when [my partner] met me, and if he don't like it he can push on. F11

--I can sit in a room with a bunch of Black folks too and never [speak slang] and just talk to them the way I'm talking to you now. You know, and they . . . that's the funny thing when you were talking about the looks. I avoid all those looks because I am what I am. They don't look at me like "oh look at that White girl, she tryin' to be Black" they look at me like "oh look at that White girl" cuz that's what I am. You know . . . I don't try to you know . . . I guess it's just the way it is. F13

--But at the same time, I know I'm a White girl, I like bein' White. Just cuz I talk different, what does that mean? That's how I feel comfortable, so I shouldn't be looked at funny
or . . . F15

--I would say that um, I would keep my own speech patterns before I would slip into someone else's because I wouldn't want [Black people] to think that I was fake. So like unless I felt comfortable with them like the situation with my boyfriend and his friends. I wouldn't try to speak like them unless I knew them well enough but I don't think that I would totally go that far because I would rather be seen as being myself than trying to be something that I'm not. Like I wouldn't want them to say she's not Black, so why is she talking like that? I would rather just keep my own self and if they didn't like that then tough. But like I said I did try to every now and then just to fit in or be thought of as kind of cute and then move on. G9

--I think for me that race has become such a non issue with me that I'm just myself. I'm just who and how I am. I think I would say the same things around them to anyone. It's not like when I'm talking to a Black woman that I'm going to switch my speech patterns. G14

--I'm not timid about my language, in fact I get more crap from White people for being the way that I am [referring to her use of slang] than from Black people. It's more acceptable with Blacks for me than with other Whites. H8

--I don't care about people's opinions that I don't know and as far as going to predominantly Black bars with people that I've dated, I don't have a problem with it because I mean . . . sometimes people look at me a certain way . . . but I don't care. H8

Past Experiences Shape Language

When my co-researchers discussed their level of comfort around Black people, their language, or even their feelings about the relationship, there was a natural tie made to their past experiences. The environment they grew up in, the amount of Black friends

they have had, the acceptance of interracial relationships in their families, all of these were influences on their language and speech patterns.

--I grew up in [small town] and we had one family that had Black kids. The mother was White, the father was not around at all, and there were three kids that were Black. And they were the only Black people that I really had any association with prior to coming to college. A1

--I think [my language] was the same [when I met my partner] just because . . . [my language] might have been different if I wasn't raised around like . . . in my neighborhood is all Black people, like all my girlfriends are Black or Hispanic or like not White. But I think it would be different if I was raised like in an all White neighborhood and then I started dating a Black guy, but no, I still talk to [my partner] like I talk to my friends. Like I'll yell at him or stuff like that. F2

--There was probably like, in high school there was maybe um, I don't know. You could count how many Black folks on one hand. F2

--I grew up in an integrated neighborhood. There was Black and White people there. And I have pretty much talked the same since then [Referring to her frequent use of slang]. F3

--[People at our school would say to us] like "why you tryin to talk Black?" and I was like, that's how I was raised, that's who I was raised by. Because you try to talk like your friends like all my friends talk this way so I'm trying to talk like them. So I started talking like them. But I'm like her [referring to another co-researcher], I can switch. F6

--Our mom used to yell at us and say "why are you talking Black?" "Don't talk Black at me!" "I be doin' this . . . I be doin' that . . . talk right!" Like she used to yell at us. Even though she . . . I mean like "you're the one who raised us in this neighborhood, you shouldn't have moved here!" F8

--I don't know like when I was in Lansing for a while, I had Black roommates, I went to a lot of Black places like the bars, parties, whatever. I was probably like the only White person there. But I talk the same way as I talk every day and they didn't really look at me funny. F12

--Like when you're around . . . like you [referring to another co-researcher] said when you go somewhere you're gonna start talking like that cuz that's what you hear. It's just like kids sometimes they'll say how their mom talks or not. . . you know maybe when they get older they change. F14

--Um, I was good friends with a girl named _____, in college. I met her in the dorms and um we just got along really well. She was a lot of fun.
A: She's Black?
Yah. I did orientation and was around a lot of Black students. I learned a lot of Black culture when I did the whole orientation thing because the focus was diversity. And if there was stuff I didn't know, I asked questions. G5

--When I was in [inner city] I was best friends with a Black girl and I didn't remember that til now. That was like 15 years ago or something. That whole time in my life might have been the first time I was ever really around Black people and like there were a couple guys before [my partner]. And then after . . . I guess the majority of the people I hung out with were White. And then I've had other relationships . . . during my whole college career my best friend was Puerto Rican and Black. She was very cool, I still to this day feel very comfortable with her. Because of the totally relaxed way of life that they have. G9

--So as far as dating this first guy, I didn't hang out with [a lot of White people], like the older I got the less White friends I had because of what you said, culture, what I liked, the kind of person I am. The food I eat, what I like to do, music . . . that's where I fit in. H6

--That also brings back my family. They shout and scream at one another like that and constantly interrupt one another you've got four people going at the same time and they are just loud. I mean you can hear them outside in my house. So I mean, that's just what I'm used to, you know what I mean? H9

--A lot of things that I say though are kind of . . . I do have a White ghetto mentality I guess you could say because even the places that I have lived when I lived in [another state], I lived in a nasty suburb that wasn't mainly White and when I went to school at [university] I lived in low income housing. I mean here I live downtown. I've never had like the real nice White environment period. So I mean, that and the things that I do personally, I just laugh at myself sometimes because I think you do need to change some stuff, but that's just the way that I was raised and that's the way that I do things. H11

Being the "Minority"

When asked to recall experiences where my co-researchers were the "minority" (in terms of pure numbers), their feelings about these situations were quite varied. Some were very comfortable in such situations, some were quite uncomfortable, and some

did not even give thought to the fact that they were the only White person there until asked to recall the situation.

--I think [my feeling about being the "minority"] has to do with where we grew up and cities that we've lived in and I've lived in places where there weren't really any Black people around so I'm more conscious of it here in situations like that. Where [my partner] has been in situations growing up in every day situations where he's been the only Black person. A7

--I think that people are . . . I don't know that other people in the situations would notice [that I'm the only White person there], but I would notice it and it's not necessarily something that's uncomfortable, I mean it's a very different situation of me being the minority, like you said before . . . A7

--I've been a minority in several different cases, and you do feel like the minority and sometimes it is uncomfortable. B4

--I think [my uncomfortable feelings] comes from not being used to being around another culture cuz you were used to being the majority and not really understanding what it really meant to be a minority. So with _____, he's been a minority all his life, so it's probably more comfortable, I'm assuming, for him to do that, because everywhere he goes almost he's a minority. But for me it's a little different because I've been the majority and not really known what that's like until college I would say. B5

--If I weren't comfortable being around Black people and asking questions and discussing issues of race and things like that I wouldn't have pursued the relationship. G6

--I just think that the White people speaking in slang is the minority. There are a lot of Black people, probably more so, that do speak more proper English than there are White people that speak slang. So the minority is always going to be looked at differently. H9

--[When asked about the looks White people get from others when they use slang] I think that's because you're the minority. Seriously. I think that's where the difference is because the minority is always not as well accepted, period. I'm just saying as far as that circumstance, we [referring to White people who speak slang] are in the minority. H11

--[Referring to herself, her partner, and his friends] We were having fun talking etc. Then I realized I was the only White person. No one pointed it out, I just realized it. I thought at the time that I didn't ever remember being the minority before. K1

Insider/outsider Status

When speaking about their relationship with their partner and their language use, my co-researchers described negotiating insider/outsider status. They spoke of gaining insider status through their relationship with their partner. It was as if they felt that by being in an interracial relationship or having Black friends, they were given a leeway they would not have without the relationship. However, when they are not with their partner (he/she is not present), the insider status is lost, and they are no longer offered the freedoms they felt while with their partner. Additionally, some co-researchers reported that they feel insider status was never gained, and they are not even sure how to gain it.

--[My partner and I] do have mutual friends and they're all accepting. So if it is somebody who feels negatively [about my language or the relationship], they're outside. So they don't feel as comfortable confronting me. B3

--I have known people that are White and that's [referring to Black people] who their friends are, that's totally who they are, they are in the Black culture. And everyone who knows that person in the Black culture, or group, does not look negatively at that person. But anybody outside that little clique or whatever is going to look at that person and be like "why?" you know "I don't understand." But if you were to address somebody in that group like, "why is that dude actin' like that?" or something, then the Black person in the group would probably defend him like "he's cool, whatever, you don't need to worry about it." So it's usually people who don't know the person and they're judging the behavior. B5

--[Referring to Whites using slang language] I would think as we were talking it's an exclusion, inclusion issue. Of this is unique to us and if I sense somebody not from this culture tries to take it over . . . and I wonder if they don't feel that same way about White hip-hop performers who have taken their idioms and made them their own. C9

--Well my relationship with ____ gives me the quote unquote right to be there, you know, I mean, it gives me the right to have fun with them and hang out with them. D7

--Yes, but I think that the easiest way to get insider status is to be married or to date someone, but I think that you can get insider status through friendship too . . . but you have to have someone who's willing to kind of vouch for you, I think . . . Someone that's like "Oh, you're here, good we're glad you're here, come on in," ya know, but if that statement is not really made, I think that you'd probably still be viewed as an outsider. D8

--[Referring to an experience going to a Black club] I walked in with a group of Black people. And I was the only one with them. Probably if I had of walked in there by myself . . . it probably would have been a little different. F12

--[Referring to her Black co-workers who speak slang with her] A difference might be that a lot of [our Black co-workers] know that I date a Black man or have dated a Black man.
[Another co-researcher replies] Right—and I don't wear it as a badge that says by the way I've dated Black people so you can speak your own language with me. G9

--I think that maybe if you come from the same neighborhood that Black men and women would maybe be more accepting of the way that you spoke. G11

--[Referring to her Black friends and how they feel about other Whites who use slang] They're critical. I would say that cuz you have the in-group and out-group kind of thing. You've got the in group and you're all doing the same or similar things and then you have this other group and it's completely different from the others. H9

Feelings of Cultural Infringement

Similar to the above theme, my co-researchers expressed a feeling of infringement into a culture that is not theirs—an outsider within, so to speak. They felt that by using a language that is not traditionally "White," other people would view them as using cultural norms that are not provided to them. Additionally, my co-researchers told stories about various situations where they inquired about Black culture, used typically Black language, or tried to participate in typically Black events, and were met with feelings of resistance.

--[Referring to slang language] It's not traditionally, I don't know, it's a different dialogue, so . . . um, to hear a White person say a slang word that's not normally used

by White people I guess for them, or for under-represented groups, minorities, they're not used to it. B3

--[Referring to Whites using slang language] Now why it's looked at negatively . . . that's a very good question. I think it has to do with the racial tensions that have gone up from our history. And um, I think it comes from the Black culture and the fact that they're . . . I mean I've heard Black people say this in racial diversity questions and stuff, like um "why does that White person change their identity and act Black?" cuz they're looking at it like that person is changing their identity. And that is also looked at negatively for a Black person to go and become White acting. B5

--I think maybe for Blacks, because we know [slang language] is not historically the language that someone knew, it had to be acquired very deliberately. Or what if someone truly values that speech, I think I would have all kinds of questions about why are you doing this, is it because you feel you need to ingratiate yourself with these people, um and I think it's the White baggage of, I've always been in this society, this is the way I have always spoken and I don't know really the reason for changing that speech, since I can certainly be understood. And I do, depending on the people I'm with, I don't always use the same vocabulary, and I will certainly do my best to communicate with whomever I am with. C6

--I think that um, when White people try and accommodate their speech, they are viewed as trying to be someone that they're not or trying to . . . this might be one of the reasons too, they're trying to be a part of a culture that they're not, and particularly when it's a minority culture, I think that it might be viewed as 'what gives you the right to talk like this, because you weren't in slavery for how many years, you weren't, you know you have no reason, you've had advantages and privileges all your life' and so you kind of have to earn a right to be a part of that you know, I guess. D6

--I think that um when you're raised a certain way, that . . . it's like southern drawl so to speak, it's like southern. They speak differently down there like instead of saying pardon me, they say sorry? You know what I mean, so it's different, you know like why conform yourself to something else? That's not you, that's not the way you were raised. F6

--[Referring to her reason for not using slang language] Because I know that I'm not immersed in that culture. I don't live the same life, I'm not from the same place. I didn't grow up like that. I just met someone and every now and then we'd dip back into what their lifestyle is like and so I'm not going to pretend that hey I'm like this all the time. G10

--Blacks are very possessive of whatever they have and it's like what you [referring to researcher] were saying . . . you get more looks and comments from Black women.

It's like . . . Black women don't like White women being with their men. But take a single Black woman that has no man in her life . . . she really, typically, hates to have a White woman be with a Black man because it's like you're takin' one of the possibilities of who I can be with. So whatever [Blacks] seem to possess of their culture, it's like [my partner's] aunt has a lot of Black art in her house which is very cool. I mean, it's real cool. And I'll look at it and make comments about it and her response is a lot of times, this is the one that I think has a problem with our relationship . . . will be like "well you really can't understand it because it's Black." You know and it's like, no it's art, give me a break it's art, it's very cool and I'm asking about it. I want to know about it, if I don't . . . that's why I'm asking you questions. But they don't really want to give it up, it seems like. It's their culture and as much as they say that they're American, they in a lot of ways to me seem like they want a Black culture in America that they don't want to let White people into. And I think that's a lot with their language too, where they have Ebonics and it's like if a White person came up and started talking Ebonics to a Black person, you're gonna get looks and that criticism for using it. H7

--[Referring to Whites using slang language around Blacks] And it's like, the closer you are to that person, they more they can accept it. Because now you're just talking in conversation, and I think that has a lot to do with it in general because people don't know you except that you're an intruder to their surroundings. If they know you, you'd probably feel involved more than if they didn't. H10

Using Language to "Fit In"

One reason my co-researchers provided for using a language not typically thought of as "White" was to fit in with the people they were around. Some felt that they may use it for that reason, while others described situations where they have seen other White people use slang to attempt to fit in.

--I don't know if they [Whites who use slang language] just want to try and impress their friends or, try and just fit in and not be the oddball. A5

--You should be proud to be what you are and who you are. No matter who you meet on the street or whatever. Just be, you know be proud of whatever. You don't have to do something if you're just trying to impress somebody or to fit in. I mean, isn't that what we try to teach our children? Be yourself, you know, love who you are and what you are, don't do something else to fit in. F15

--You don't have to go to that extreme to fit into another race. You don't have to do that. You could have these little you know words here and there, you get it. Or how you say something . . . you know? F19

--Sometimes I would use a phrase or expression that I knew they [referring to partner's friends] used to attempt to fit in with them. I guess I thought that maybe if I talked more like them that they might accept me . . . I'm not sure if it really worked. G11

--I always felt that I fit in and I have a lot of Black friends. And I also have quite a few Asian friends. And I don't know, like my language does change a little bit sometimes, but it's pretty much the same through and through. H6

--[Referring to Whites using slang language around Blacks] I think it depends on how close you are to the people. Like if you're doing it and they perceive that you're doing it to try and fit in, now it sounds contrived. It's like me trying to sound like a person your [referring to researcher] age would talk. It's like I don't fit in trying to talk and use the language that you use, age wise. And when I was young and my mom and dad tried to talk the way I talked, I didn't like it. H10

Slang as a Foreign Language

One analogy my co-researchers made was that using slang was like speaking a foreign language. They described it as a language they could understand but did not feel comfortable speaking or feel a need to speak themselves.

--I know subconsciously that it's somehow not cool, for me to try to accommodate my speech and talk slang. And so although I feel comfortable using slang words, I don't feel comfortable speaking it, even though I am familiar with all of the language and what it means. I can understand it, but I wouldn't speak it probably. B5

--I almost don't even know how to form some of those sounds. *laughs* which might sound weird, but my lips don't make those noises or those sounds . . . so I feel very comfortable around it, listening to other people, but I can't necessarily reciprocate those same terms and words and language because I feel like it doesn't sound right coming from me, ya know, I mean . . . but it doesn't intimidate me at all, I actually enjoy being around it, because I'm so fascinated by different ways that people were raised in different cultures. I just think it's fun to be around people that are different from me. But I don't necessarily find myself adapting a lot to that, either. D5

--[Referring to Whites who switch to using slang language] It's like you're speaking two different languages, it's like going from Spanish to English. F6

--Sure, I can understand what you're saying but that doesn't mean that I have to answer you back in the same fashion. F6

--That's just the way I was raised you know [to speak proper English], and I don't see . . . I understand . . . it's like understanding language and yah, I can speak it, but that doesn't mean that I um that I have to do it. F13

--Um . . . not like I didn't know what I was saying or didn't know how . . . but it felt a bit awkward I guess. G10

Using Slang in a "Joking" Manner or to Make Others Laugh

When asked if they would ever feel comfortable speaking slang around the friends or family members of their partner, my co-researchers frequently said they would use it if it was clear to others that they were joking. They felt it was a way to lighten the conversation or to make light of their accommodations. They also spoke of using slang in a joking manner with their partner.

--[When asked about using slang at home] Some, but it's more along the lines if we're joking around or something. If we're having a serious conversation, it doesn't come out. Only every now and again when we're joking. A4

--I can remember saying "shady" and they were like "_____, what?" it wouldn't necessarily be a negative reaction, it would just be an excited reaction, like if someone else had said it would have been thought of as normal conversation, but because I said it, it aroused some kind of reaction. B3

--[When asked about how her partner's friends would react if she were to use slang language around them] They would totally laugh. Partly because they know me and that's not really my personality, like I think I am a fun person and I love to laugh, but I'm not a comedian, you know, like I'll laugh at you, but I won't make you laugh. Like I tend to be sarcastic, so people laugh because I am a little sarcastic or something you know and they think, I'll laugh at myself too and so people will laugh along with me, but I'm not gonna be up there, you know stand up, just spewing jokes, I mean that's totally not my personality and if I tried to take on that persona everyone would know it didn't fit me and they would just laugh. D5

--[Referring to her use of slang] Unless I'm joking around, unless it's a funny thing you know where I'm just like saying "what's up dog" or something I mean. D6

--[Referring to her use of slang] Yah, a little bit. In a social atmosphere because when I did, people would think it was funny and they would laugh. So I thought that they were more relaxed toward me if I would try to like slip in a couple words, ya know . . . they'd be like "oh she's cute or she knows words." G4

--[Referring to her use of slang language] I would feel comfortable if I was just trying to be funny about it. G8

--My pattern does not change. Except for I find that I tend to be more cautious about what I say at times. If I'm with [my partner] and he knows that we're in a goofy mood, and I'm givin' him chicken for dinner I might say "do you want some watermelon with that?" *laughs* But I would have to know the mood he's in before I would say something like that because he would be offended. I would never ever say something like that in front of his family. H5

--[My partner] will goof off with language where he'll start talking um . . . slang. If he's just talking to me normal, he won't. But like he'll do how the Black girls do the snapping Z thing, he'll do that. . . but we have to be in a goofy mood for him to do that. But I have never seen him do it in front of his family. H5

Personalities Affect Language

An influential factor on the language of my co-researchers related to their reported personality traits. If they are not particularly outgoing people, they are not as likely to feel comfortable speaking around people they do not know or people they are trying to impress. Those co-researchers who are very outgoing seemed more apt to try out language that is not typically considered "White," and were likely to be themselves no matter who they were around. This aspect of reported personality type was quite often a clear link to language usage.

--Well I have to say that I don't really feel comfortable using a lot of slang, I mean that's not really my personality. I've been raised very properly, traditionally, so I don't know that, I mean I can joke around a little bit and say "hey what's up dog" or something. D5

--Like I said, I can hang with the best you know, but I just as I got older, I just um . . . I don't find a reason for [speaking slang]. F10

--Maybe because that's just not my personality, I'm more of a shy person and that I always feel like . . . I usually don't say much because I don't want to be judged or people to think about me . . . I don't know I just freak out. But those are my co-workers and since I don't know them very well . . . I would not speak with them that way unless we were on a more friendly basis. G9

--I guess I just always want people to like me. I am a people pleasing person I don't like conflict. I would rather have people go away thinking I'm a nice person or have a good interaction with me and have myself go away ticked off and mashing my teeth or something than them. G9

--[Referring to another co-researcher's comments] I can see what she's saying and I would tend to agree with it as far as people switching [their language] and being comfortable with it, I guess it just kind of depends on your personality. G11

--I wonder if personality plays a factor. Like both of you guys are outgoing and you say what's on your mind. Whereas I, like when most people find out that I've dated Black people they're like "what?" maybe I don't seem like the typical . . . if there is a typical White girl that would date a Black guy but sometimes people are like, "you have?" because I'm not . . . outgoing . . . I'm not a fast talker. G11

--I always felt that I fit in and I have a lot of Black friends. And I also have quite a few Asian friends. And I don't know, like my language does change a little bit sometimes, but it's pretty much the same through and through. H6

--I'm not timid about my language, in fact I get more crap from White people for being the way that I am than from Black people. It's more acceptable with Blacks for me than with other Whites. H8

Further Reduction to Reveal Five Essential Themes

According to van Manen (1990), "the most difficult and controversial element of phenomenological human science may be to differentiate between essential themes and themes that are more incidentally related to the phenomenon under study" (p. 106). At this stage of the process, I sought to differentiate which themes were essential to the lived experiences of European Americans as they communicate with the friends and family members of their African American partners, and which were

not. van Manen (1990) further concludes that in order to name a theme as essential, we must discover aspects of the phenomenon that make it what it is, and without which it could not be what it is. In other words, I must ask myself the question, 'Could I imagine being a European American and communicating with the friends and family members of my partner without including this theme?' If the answer to that question is no, the theme is then deemed as essential to the experiences of my co-researchers. This is essentially the essence of the process referred to as imaginative free variation, described in Chapter Three.

The sixteen syntagmatic themes, as described thus far, were: (a) comfort level around friends/family/other Blacks affects language; (b) setting affects language; (c) partner's accommodations affect language; (d) the differences are distinctly obvious; (e) I consciously do not adapt; (f) adapting is a conscious choice; (g) adapting is subconscious; (h) I am who I am; (i) past experiences shape language; (j) being the "minority;" (k) insider/outsider status; (l) feelings of cultural infringement; (m) using language to "fit in;" (n) slang as a foreign language; (o) using slang in a "joking" manner or to make others laugh; and (p) personalities affect language.

Several measures were taken to reduce these syntagmatic themes to the five themes that are thought to be essential to the lived experiences of the co-researchers. Reviewing and re-reading transcripts, bracketing potential themes, and comparing and contrasting the themes all aided me in forming my interpretation of the capta. This constant reflection allowed me to connect themes, eliminate those that were redundant or coincidental, and finally reveal the five essential themes that capture the

experiences of European Americans in interracial relationships as they communicate with the friends and family members of their partners.

Five Essential Themes

The process of imaginative free variation, where the syntagmatic themes are interconnected, combined and given a more general heading, and/or are eliminated for being incidental is crucial to the thematization process. Orbe (2000) refers to this as the fusion or blending of the expectations or experiences of the researcher and the capta from the co-researchers. This reflective process resulted in the emergence of five essential themes: (a) past experiences shape language; (b) language is influenced by environment; (c) personalities influence language; (d) conflicted sense of belonging; and (e) conflicting feelings about adapting language. The next section of this chapter explicates these five themes and their connection to the phenomenon under investigation.

Past Experiences Shape Language: *"That's just what I'm used to"*

One theme that united all of my co-researchers was the influence that their past experiences have had on their language. Regardless of the style of language each co-researcher comfortably uses, the experiences they brought with them into the interracial relationship have an affect on their language. One element of these experiences is the environment the co-researcher grew up in, and what sort of effect that environment has had on their language in the relationship. Some grew up in very homogenous neighborhoods, and thus their language is "typically White" and their

familiarization with other cultures was slim before meeting their partner. One such co-researcher shares her past experiences here:

> I grew up in [small town] and we had one family that had Black kids. The mother was White, the father was not around at all, and there were three kids that were Black. And they were the only Black people that I really had any association with prior to coming to college. A1

Another group of co-researchers grew up in integrated or primarily Black neighborhoods. These co-researchers reported being comfortable using "typically Black" language, have many Black friends, and are familiar with Black culture. These past experiences are highlighted in the following comments by two co-researchers in their twenties:

> I grew up in an integrated neighborhood. There was Black and White people there. And I have pretty much talked the same since then. F3

> But that also brings back my family. They shout and scream at one another like that and constantly interrupt one another you've got four people going at the same time and they are just loud. I mean you can hear them outside in my house. So I mean, that's just what I'm used to. H9

The type of neighborhood my co-researchers grew up in had an effect on their language prior to meeting their partner and becoming involved in an interracial relationship. Two co-researchers, from the same focus group, who have primarily dated Black men since high school and report being very comfortable using slang language share their experiences:

> I think [my language] was the same [before my partner] just because . . . it might have been different if I wasn't raised around like . . . in my neighborhood is all Black people, like all my girlfriends are Black or Hispanic (not White). But I think it would be different if I was raised like in an all White neighborhood and then I started dating a Black guy, but no, I still talk to [my partner] like I talk to my friends. Like I'll yell at him or stuff like that. F2

> [People at my high school would say] "Why you tryin' to talk Black?" and I was like, that's how I was raised, that's who I was raised by. Because you try to talk like your friends like all my friends talk this way so I'm trying to talk like them. So I started talking like them. But I'm like her [referring to another co-researcher]. I can switch. F6

The environment the co-researchers grew up in seemed to be a large influence on their language and whether or not they make accommodations when speaking with the friends and family members of their partner. In addition to environment, my co-researchers also spoke of the friends they had before engaging in an interracial relationship. It appeared that those co-researchers who had Black friends before the relationship were comfortable making accommodations or using slang language, whereas those co-researchers who were raised in predominantly White neighborhoods and who did not have many Black friends before entering an interracial relationship were not comfortable changing their speech patterns or using slang language. For instance, one co-researcher stated:

> When I was in [inner city] I was best friends with a Black girl and I didn't remember that til now. That was like 15 years ago or something. That whole time in my life might have been the first time I was ever really around Black people and like there were a couple guys before [my partner]. And then after . . . I guess the majority of the people I hung out with were White. And then I've had other relationships . . . during my whole college career my best friend was Puerto Rican and Black. She was very cool, I still to this day feel very comfortable with her. Because of the totally relaxed way of life that they have. G9

Another co-researcher, in her early twenties who speaks primarily slang language in her everyday speech, spoke of her experiences having Black friends and going to primarily Black settings:

> I don't know like when I was in [city] for a while, I had Black roommates,

> I went to a lot of Black places like the bars, parties, whatever. I was probably like the only White person there. But I talk the same way as I talk every day and they didn't really look at me funny. F12

Similarly, another co-researcher shared her experiences in college and how she learned a lot about the Black culture and began speaking slang then:

> I did orientation and was around a lot of Black students. I learned a lot of Black culture when I did the whole orientation thing because the focus was diversity. And if there was stuff I didn't know, I asked questions. I don't really feel like I slipped into talking a different way with him [referring to partner]. I think I picked more of that up in college like hanging around with ____ [an African American friend] and her friends. G6

The past experiences of the co-researchers also contributed to their level of comfort when they found themselves the "minority" in communication situations with the friends and family members of their partner. Many co-researchers found the experience of being the minority to be uncomfortable and consequently it appeared to have an effect on their language. This co-researcher describes her feelings of being the "minority:"

> I don't know that other people in the situations would notice it [referring to the fact that she was the only White person present], but I would notice it and it's not necessarily something that's uncomfortable, I mean it's a very different situation of me being the minority, like you said before. A7

Another co-researcher, who is engaged to the first Black man she has ever dated, discusses the difference between her experiences as the "minority" and her partner's:

> I think it comes from not being used to being around another culture cuz you were used to being the majority and not really understanding what it really meant to be a minority. So with ____, he's been a minority all his life, so it's probably more comfortable, I'm assuming, for him to do that, because everywhere he goes almost he's a minority. But for me it's a little different because I've been the majority and not

really known what that's like until college I would say. B5

For some co-researchers, being the "minority" was not an uncomfortable situation, and this is attributed to their past experiences, as is shared here:

> If I weren't comfortable being around Black people and asking questions and discussing issues of race and things like that I wouldn't have pursued the relationship [with my partner]. G6

One of my co-researchers spoke of the "minority" in a different light than it had been previously used. She shared her experiences speaking slang language, around the friends and family members of her partner, and around Blacks in general. In these cases, she feels that she, and other Whites who use slang, are in the minority:

> I just think that the White people speaking in slang is the minority in that context. That there are a lot of Black people, probably more so that do speak more proper English than there are White people that speak slang. So the minority is always going to be looked at differently. Seriously. I think that's where the difference is because the minority is always not as well accepted, period. I'm just saying as far as that circumstance, we [White people who use slang] are in the minority. H11

The past experiences of my co-researchers highly influenced their language, however, yet another influence on their language is their environment. Both the people and places they encounter throughout the relationship have a great affect on their style of language.

Language Is Influenced By Environment: *"It would depend on who I was with"*

One of the most prevalent factors that influenced the language of my co-researchers was their environment. Whenever a possible language choice or use of language that is not typically "White" was discussed, co-researchers spoke of their environment and how it affected their speech. Where they were, their level of comfort in a particular

setting, the people who were present, what sort of activity was involved, and other factors, were all cited as having an influence on their communication.

One particular influence that was especially apparent, and seemed to have a great affect on their language choices, was the setting. Co-researchers frequently discussed the influence of the setting when asked questions about their language and whether they had noticed a difference in their language. One co-researcher, a woman in her mid-sixties who has been with the same Black man for forty years, described this influence in the following comments:

> No, I didn't find [primarily Black settings] comfortable. Well it would be depending on where we were. If we were at a lecture, or at a venue where I was comfortable, that would be okay. If we were at a party that was mostly Blacks, then I would find that not very comfortable. If we walked in and there were people that I knew, I would be more comfortable then if they were people that I didn't know . . . C4

This sense of dependency on the setting and the co-researchers' level of comfort in the setting seemed to be a factor in their various speech patterns. Another co-researcher, a woman in her mid-twenties who dated a Black man in college for two and a half years, speaks of her use of slang and also includes the influence of the people present in the setting:

> I don't really . . . like I said I don't think that I would speak that way [referring to using slang language] if there were a lot of Black females around. Because I think that I would be in trouble. I think that I would hear something or get into something and I don't know why I think they're so judgmental . . . G11

Their level of comfort around the friends and family members of their partner was also a contributing factor with regard to their language. When co-researchers felt comfortable or at ease around the friends and family members, they seemed more apt

to be themselves and speak openly, no matter what types of speech patterns they typically use. If they ever felt unwelcome or ill at ease around the friends and family members, their speech either decreased significantly, or they spoke in a manner in which they felt they were "expected" to speak. One woman, in her late twenties who has been married to a Black man for three years, explains these feelings of comfort/discomfort:

> Well with his really close friends, I feel really comfortable just being me and speaking the way that I am, and I think that there is somewhat of a distinct difference between the way that we talk, but I think we're both comfortable with it. Now, people that I don't know . . . I think that I tend to be more quiet, so as not to maybe accentuate those differences, um, and because they don't know me and they don't love me yet, you know, I don't want to say anything offensive or, I just think that I'm more quiet and uncertain how to talk. D6

Another environmental influence on my co-researchers' language was their observations of their partner's language and the accommodations that partner does/does not make when speaking. Many times, my co-researchers turned to their partners' language and speech patterns, and how he/she makes accommodations, as an explanation for their own language. Co-researchers were in agreement that it is more accepting by societal standards for African Americans to accommodate their speech toward typical "White" speech than it is for European Americans to accommodate their speech toward typical "Black" speech. However, their partners' language seemed to have an effect on their own language and their feelings about accommodation, as described by this co-researcher, in her early-twenties who is engaged to a Black man that she has been with for three years:

> My language is pretty much the same, but I have picked up words

> that I never would have used before and actually, [my partner's] language, he says—his mother told him awhile ago like, "your English is improving" so maybe his English is changing a little and mine does too, I use words like "shady" you know or something, but I don't speak slang. Like kind of how I'm talking to you now is how I talk. But um I might in a more relaxed setting say something like "that's shady" or something, but that's about as far as I go to change. B2

Another co-researcher in her late twenties summed this up in one simple statement referring to her use of slang, "He uses it with me and I use it with him." (A4)

Some co-researchers whose partners spoke slang language felt comfortable speaking it around their partner, but not around anyone else. They described a noticeable change in their partners' language that varied depending on situational context, and compared that to their own changes, or lack thereof. If the co-researcher felt comfortable speaking slang, they were likely to speak it with their partner more so than his/her friends and family members. Often times, if they were introduced to slang or Ebonics by their partner, co-researchers spoke of noticeable effects that introduction has had on their own language. Some reported "trying out" different slang words here and there. Yet, others have adopted a use of slang into their daily language. For the most part, however, these co-researchers report speaking it with their partner more so than when they are around other Black people. Two co-researchers spoke of their use of slang here:

> I wouldn't say [my partner] has like the "ghetto slang." I do think he definitely uses slang. And I've picked up words from him, or Ebonics I guess. But um, I have heard other people speak much stronger slang that's much heavier, if that makes sense. B3

> [I would speak some slang] if it came up in casual stuff. But it wouldn't be a whole conversation of totally different speech. It would be like just words here and there or references to things or maybe relaxing

> like my "ing's" or whatever. I think that my speech became a lot more casual rather than proper. G8

In addition to environmental influences on language and speech patterns, the reported personalities of my co-researchers also plays a major role in their style of communication when interacting with the friends and family members of their partners. Their reported personality affects their language and also the various motives behind their language and is featured in the next theme.

Personalities Influence Language: *"That's just not my personality"*

All of my co-researchers have a unique personality and each reported personality has a great effect on their communication style and their level of comfort when communicating with the friends and family members of their partner. Those with naturally outgoing personalities report being very comfortable communicating with the friends and family members of their partner. Such as this co-researcher, who considers herself to be quite boisterous and outgoing:

> I'm not timid about my language, in fact I get more crap from White people for being the way that I am [using slang] than from Black people. It's more acceptable with Blacks for me than with other Whites. H8

Likewise, those co-researchers who consider themselves to be shy are not as comfortable using a language that is not their own, and often find it difficult to speak at all when they are around Black people. Additionally, their reported personality traits have an effect on their language and whether they will accommodate that language or not. This co-researcher shares her feelings about speaking (or not speaking) slang as a shy person:

> Maybe because that's just not my personality, I'm more of a shy

> person and that I always feel like . . . I usually don't say much because I don't want to be judged or people to think about me . . . I don't know I just freak out. But those [Black people] are my co-workers and since I don't know them very well . . . I would not speak with them that way [using slang] unless we were on a more friendly basis. G9

Some co-researchers linked their reported personality with others' expectations of the type of person who would date a Black person. Several people commented on the fact that they felt other people wondered what they were doing with a Black person, or what that Black person was doing with them. Some felt the way they looked caused others to think such thoughts and yet others felt it might have to do with their personality. One co-researcher, a woman in her mid-twenties shares her thoughts about this:

> I wonder if it's personality plays a factor. Like both of you guys [referring to researcher and another co-researcher] are outgoing and you say what's on your mind. Whereas I, like when most people find out that I've dated Black people they're like, "what?" Maybe I don't seem like the typical . . . if there is a typical White girl that would date a Black guy but sometimes people are like, "you have?" Because I'm not . . . outgoing . . . I'm not a fast talker. G11

The reported personality of my co-researchers is also closely tied with the motive behind their accommodations, for those who reported feeling comfortable making accommodations. One such motive cited by many co-researchers was the use of slang to lighten the conversation or to make others laugh. Often times, when we are uncomfortable in a situation, we will use humor to lighten the mood or to take attention away from the fact that we are uncomfortable. One co-researcher shares a specific instance when she used humor:

> [I would use slang] in a social atmosphere because when I did, people would think it was funny and they would laugh. So I thought that they

> were more relaxed toward me if I would try to like slip in a couple words, ya know . . . they'd be like "oh she's cute or she knows words." G4

Other co-researchers reported that their partner (who did not speak much slang) would speak slang with them if they were joking, and thus the co-researcher began to use slang in a joking manner also:

> [Referring to using slang with her partner] Some, but it's more along the lines if we're joking around or something. If we're having a serious conversation, it doesn't come out. Only every now and again when we're joking. A4

Another commonality was found when my co-researchers spoke of using various slang words or expressions in a joking manner to try them out. For some of them, they would only use such expressions if they were joking. They could not imagine using them in their everyday speech:

> [I don't use slang] unless I'm joking around, unless it's a funny thing you know where I'm just like saying "what's up dog" or something . . . D6

This use of joking, or making light of our language, was a way for my co-researchers to gain a level of comfort in their environment and also to test the waters, so to speak. In order to see how people will react when they use slang, they can use it as a joke, to save embarrassment should the friends and family members not appreciate their use of slang language. One co-researcher, when asked whether she would use slang around the friends and family members of her partner replied with, "Um, I would feel comfortable if I was just trying to be funny about it." (G8)

Also linked to the reported personalities and motives of the co-researchers is the use of slang language to "fit in" with the friends and family members of their partner. If they were uncomfortable or uneasy about whether or not they fit in,

sometimes they used language as a way to attempt at fitting in, as one co-researcher recalls here:

> Sometimes I would use a phrase or expression that I knew they [referring to partner's friends] used to attempt to fit in better with them. I guess I thought that maybe if I talked more like them that they might accept me . . . I'm not sure if it really worked. G11

Other co-researchers talked about their decision to avoid using slang just to fit in. Additionally, they discussed their feelings when they see other Whites using slang for purposes of fitting in around Black people:

> I don't know if they [Whites who use slang] just want to try and impress their friends or, try and just fit in and not be the oddball . . . A5

> I'm gonna be what I am, you should be proud to be what you are and who you are. No matter who you meet on the street or whatever. Just be, you know be proud of whatever. You don't have to do something if you're just trying to impress somebody or to fit in. I mean, isn't that what we try to teach our children? Be yourself, you know, love who you are and what you are, don't do something else to fit in. F15

Some co-researchers feel that they fit in regardless of their language. They feel comfortable around the friends and family of their partner, often times because they have had other Black partners and Black friends before meeting the partner they are with now. This co-researcher, in her mid-twenties, has spoken slang for many years and has been dating Black men since high school:

> I always felt that I fit in and I have a lot of Black friends. And I also have quite a few Asian friends. And I don't know, like my language does change a little bit sometimes, but it's pretty much the same through and through. H6

In addition to personality influences on language and speech patterns, a recurring aspect of the phenomena under investigation was the conflicted sense of

belonging experienced by my co-researchers. They are often immersed in a culture that they know is not their own, yet they long to feel a part of. The next theme accounts for these conflicted feelings.

Conflicted Sense of Belonging: *"I know that I'm not immersed in that culture"*

This next essential theme emerged as the most vivid theme during this stage of analysis. It seemed that no matter what adaptations were made, or were not made, in language style co-researchers struggled with their conflicted feelings of where they belonged. Co-researchers often spoke of an in-group and out-group when talking about their experiences with the friends and family members of their partner. Which group they felt they were a part of varied for each co-researcher, based on their diverse set of experiences and the specific situational context. They also expressed feeling as if an insider status needed to be gained before any accommodations in language could be made. Some felt that their relationship with their partner gained them this status, others felt they did not or could not gain such an insider status. Ultimately, this led to a conflicted sense of belonging by the co-researchers. One co-researcher begins to touch on the possible reasons behind this in-group and out-group distinction:

> I would think as we were talking it's an exclusion, inclusion issue. Of this is unique to us and if I sense somebody not from this culture tries to take it over . . . and I wonder if they don't feel that same way about White hip-hop performers who have taken their idioms and made them their own. C9

There were a small amount of co-researchers who felt that they had gained this insider status, and were comfortable being themselves around their partner's

friends and family members. One co-researcher, who is in her early twenties and grew up in an all Black neighborhood, offered her thoughts about gaining this insider status: "I think that maybe if you come from the same neighborhood that Black men and women would maybe be more accepting of the way that you spoke." (G11) For her, insider status has been gained based on the area in which she grew up. She has been immersed in Black culture from a very young age, so she feels it is more acceptable for her language to be more "typically Black" than other White people. Another co-researcher, in his critical incident report, talked about the cultural gap between he and his partner and how he gained insider status. He writes, "I think any cultural gap was narrowed by her upbringing and private elementary school education as well as by the fact that I played as the only White player on the basketball team." For this co-researcher, he and his partner met in the middle in polarized "Black" and "White" worlds. She had a "typically White" upbringing and he played on an all Black basketball team.

An additional way to gain insider status was given by the following co-researcher, a woman in her late twenties married to a Black man:

> Well my relationship with ____ gives me the, quote unquote, right to be there, you know, I mean, it gives me the right to have fun with [his friends] and hang out with them. D7

This co-researcher felt that her insider status was gained simply by her involvement in an interracial relationship. She discussed a certain leeway that is provided to her by being in that relationship and she felt that she was accepted by her partner's friends from the very beginning. Other co-researchers did not report such

feelings of acceptance and belonging. This is where the conflict began to emerge. Many of the co-researchers felt that despite their longing to learn about their partner's culture and grow closer to that culture through him/her, they simply were not a part of that culture and therefore felt awkwardly about adapting their language. One co-researcher explains the tension in the following comments:

> I know that I'm not immersed in that culture. I don't live the same life, I'm not from the same place. I didn't grow up like that . . . I just met someone and every now and then we'd dip back into what their lifestyle is like and so I'm not going to pretend that hey I'm like this all the time [referring to any use of slang language]. G10

Co-researchers also agreed that slang language is a part of Black culture, and if they did not feel a part of that culture, they were not likely to use that type of language. A co-researcher in her sixties shares her feelings about slang language, and her feelings about White people who use slang:

> I think maybe for Blacks—because we know it's not historically the language that someone knew, it had to be acquired very deliberately. Or what if someone truly values that speech, I think I would have all kinds of questions about why are you doing this, is it because you feel you need to ingratiate yourself with this people, um and I think it's the White baggage of, I've always been in this society, this is the way I have always spoken and I don't know really the reason for changing that speech, since I can certainly be understood. C6

When co-researchers were unsure as to where they belonged and what sort of status they had in the Black culture, and also had recognized that slang language is a part of Black culture, then they frequently drew the conclusion that using slang would be an attempt to be a part of a culture that they are not. One co-researcher begins to draw such a conclusion here:

> I think that when White people try and accommodate their speech,

> they are viewed as trying to be someone that they're not or trying to . . . this might be one of the reasons too—they're trying to be a part of a culture that they're not, and particularly when it's a minority culture, I think that it might be viewed as 'what gives you the right to talk like this, because you weren't in slavery for how many years, you have no reason . . . you've had advantages and privileges all your life' and so you kind of have to earn a right to be a part of that you know, I guess. D6

This concern about how Blacks might react if they were to use a style of language considered to be "traditionally Black" came up often during interviews and focus groups. One co-researcher offers her opinion as to why Blacks might have a negative reaction toward a White person adopting a style of language not traditionally their own:

> [Referring to slang] It's not traditionally, I don't know, it's a different dialogue, so . . . to hear a White person say a slang word that's not normally used by White people I guess for them, or for under-represented groups, minorities, they're not used to it. B3

Another co-researcher spoke frequently of her concerns about how Black people would react if she accommodated her speech toward the style of speech Blacks typically use. While she had a desire to feel welcome and to feel like she belonged in her partner's culture, she did not feel comfortable using slang language when around members of that culture, other than her partner. This is evident in her comments:

> I'd say I don't speak much slang. If I do it's only around him. I'm afraid if I do it in public then other Blacks might think that I'm trying to make fun of them or something to that effect and they might not appreciate it. [I think] they'd be upset that I used their language or would say things in that way so I generally don't do that. A4

Co-researchers also spoke of feeling like a cultural outsider at times when they were around the friends and family members of their partner. Whether it was something they said, or something they did, they discussed a feeling of infringement

into a culture where they were not welcome. Their desire to belong and to be accepted was so great, and one way they attempted to fulfill this desire was to ask questions and try to make connections with the friends and family members of their partner. This was often times a difficult task for co-researchers, as many reported feeling that Black people hold tightly to things that are culturally "theirs," and any attempt to understand or celebrate in the culture was seen as an infringement. One co-researcher told a story of an experience she had with her partner's aunt and how this reinforced her feelings about Black culture:

> [My partner's] aunt has a lot of Black art in her house which is very cool. I mean, it's real cool. And I'll look at it and make comments about it and her response is a lot of times . . . this is the one that I think has a problem with our relationship . . . [her response] will be like "well you really can't understand it because it's Black." You know and it's like, no it's art, give me a break it's art, it's very cool and I'm asking about it. I want to know about it, if I don't . . . that's why I'm asking you questions. But they don't really want to give it up, it seems like. It's their culture and as much as they say that they're American, they in a lot of ways to me seem like they want a Black culture in America that they don't want to let White people into. And I think that's a lot with their language too, where they have Ebonics and it's like if a White person came up and started talking Ebonics to a Black person, you're gonna get looks and criticism for using it. H7

In addition to the conflicting feelings of belonging highlighted throughout this theme, emerged another set of conflicting feelings reported by my co-researchers. Not only did they question their belonging within the Black culture, but they also questioned their belonging within another group not as clearly defined—"White people who are romantically involved with Black people." They often referred to the "typical White girl who dates Black guys" and discussed feeling as if they had a higher set of standards to live up to by being involved with a Black person. What do

they have that a Black person does not have, and what can they possibly offer their partner? These are questions my co-researchers feel the friends and family members of their partner may ask themselves after meeting them. They reported feeling as if they were under constant scrutiny by the friends and family members of their partner and this seemed to have an effect on their communication when interacting with these friends and family members. A woman in her mid-twenties, whose first experience dating interracially was in college, shares her feelings of being scrutinized:

> Whenever he took me to meet some of his friends that I hadn't met before, I always felt like I was being judged. And most of the time I felt like I didn't pass. Maybe that was because I was insecure, but . . . I'm from up north, and I'm not like into you know sexy clothes or whatever, so I'd just go in my regular old clothes and I just felt like they were judging me like I wasn't fashionable enough like . . . I didn't look like the typical White girl that a Black guy would go for. I don't know. G3

Another co-researcher talked about meeting the various friends of her partner and what she believed they thought of her after seeing that she was White. She touches on the feelings described above of having to live up to higher standards by her involvement with a Black man and shares her reactions to this here:

> People were always courteous, and it wasn't, it's not possible for me to tell what people are really thinking and you have to be around them a lot to see if they're cordial the next time you see them. If they're cordial when they see you on the streets, and things like that. My expectation was if I was gonna be in a group of Blacks that there would be people that would be saying, "what's he doing with her, what does she have that a Black person would want?" Because I wasn't beautiful, and I wasn't a snappy dresser, and I wasn't any of the stereotypes of what a man might look for in a woman outside of his culture . . . so that was more my anticipation of what they would be thinking. "What does she have to offer him?" Especially after being with him for so long. They must be wondering "what does he see in her?" And some people you just never see again, or you see at a party five years later. C3

This inner conflict is carried around by co-researchers throughout the relationship, and when they are introduced to various friends and family members of their partner, it is difficult to erase these feelings from their consciousness. The final essential theme is the culmination of the four previous themes. After all is said and done, the questions that remain are, should I adapt, not adapt, just be myself . . . what is the best way? These are questions my co-researchers report wrestling with as they plot their course of interaction with the friends and family members of their partners.

Conflicting Feelings About Adapting Language: *"I don't see good reason to change"*

My co-researchers were divided when the topic of adaptation or accommodation was touched upon. Many co-researchers had very strong feelings about adapting their language and whether or not they are in the habit of making accommodations. In this section, I will highlight the conflicting feelings about language that emerged from my analysis.

There were many co-researchers who reported that they often make a conscious decision NOT to adapt their language to the typical "Black" style of speaking. Although their decision was ultimately the same (not adapting), their reasons were quite different. One co-researcher, a woman in her late-twenties who has had several interracial relationships and is now married to a Black man, adamantly maintains her position that White people should not use slang language, and even when Blacks use it, she feels they sound unintelligent:

> I think that especially women when they talk that way [referring to using slang], they sound like they have a lot of attitude. You can automatically be . . . it can be very defensive. It doesn't sound intelligent. And I don't find a reason for it. F6

Another reason my co-researchers cited for not adapting their speech was that they feel that slang language is something Black people use with each other, and it is not something they would feel comfortable adapting themselves to, as this co-researcher explains:

> It's different when Blacks communicate with each other. But it's not, it's not a style of language I've ever tried to adapt myself to. It's not something I can do comfortably. I've never gotten into that. C3

Through further analysis into the reasoning behind my co-researchers as they discussed their feelings about adapting their language emerged an issue of competency. It addresses the issue of whether co-researchers even feel competent to use slang or to accommodate their speech toward that of their partner and his/her friends and family members. Co-researchers compared using slang to speaking a foreign language. Many felt that they can understand it, but they either cannot speak it or do not choose to speak it, as this co-researcher explains:

> Sure, I can understand what you're saying but that doesn't mean that I have to answer you back in the same fashion. And that's just the way I was raised you know, and I don't see . . . I understand . . . it's like understanding language and yah, I can speak it, but that doesn't mean that I have to do it. F13

In addition to the foreign language analogy, other co-researchers felt that it would not be accepted if they changed their normal speech patterns, and therefore would feel uncomfortable making such changes. The co-researcher here describes her conflicting feelings about understanding the language but not wanting to speak it:

> I know subconsciously that it's somehow not cool, for me to try to accommodate my speech and talk slang. And so although I feel comfortable using slang words, I don't feel comfortable speaking it,

> even though I am familiar with all of the language and what it means. I can understand it, but I wouldn't speak it probably. B5

Some felt very competent using slang and report using it frequently. Typically, these were the more outgoing co-researchers who also had previous experiences that contributed to their use of slang. Those who felt they could not speak it if they tried were highly unlikely to make any attempts when socializing with the friends and family members of their partner. One woman speaks here of lack of competency when it comes to using slang language or expressions:

> I almost don't even know how to form some of those sounds. *laughs* Which might sound weird, but my lips don't make those noises or those sounds and so I feel very comfortable around it, listening to other people, but I can't necessarily reciprocate those same terms and words and language because I feel like it doesn't sound right coming from me. But it doesn't intimidate me at all, I actually enjoy being around it, because I'm so fascinated by different ways that people were raised in different cultures. I just think it's fun to be around people that are different from me. But I don't necessarily find myself adapting a lot to that, either. D5

Co-researchers who consciously do not adapt seemed to do so out of fear of what others will think (specifically Black people), personal feelings about that style of language, lack of interest, or lack of ability. In addition to the reasons cited above, co-researchers also touched upon a different reason that was particularly interesting. When speaking with Black people who are close to their partner in some fashion, they noticed that sometimes the Black person will accommodate toward their style of speech. In such cases, co-researchers projected that the Black person was either used to making such accommodations, or perhaps was trying to make them feel comfortable. Whatever the case may be, this caused the co-researchers to feel as if

any adaptations toward the Black style of speech were not necessary. One co-researcher speaks of such a situation:

> Speech patterns which belong to the Black community are just not naturally mine and I don't see good reason or comfortable reasons to change. But again I'm not in a lot of situations where it's such a distinct difference between the way I would normally speak, and it's partly that someone communicating with me will attempt to communicate with me in a way that I'm most comfortable, in the more "White world." C6

This division of "two worlds" where people communicate differently was touched upon frequently by my co-researchers. It is almost as if European Americans, as the majority group, have an expectation that the minority group will make accommodations, whether that expectation be conscious or subconscious. This division and subsequent expectations will be explored further in Chapter Five.

For other co-researchers, they reported consciously making adaptations in their language. Some grew up in an area where it was comfortable or acceptable for them to use the "Black" style of language, and others began adapting with their first experiences developing close relationships with Black people. For them, accommodations are either a way of life, or are a comfortable change often made in their language style. One co-researcher, who does not report a frequent use of slang language, discussed her use of certain phrases that she has grown comfortable saying:

> [Referring to slang expressions] So there are some things that I wouldn't say, but at the same time if there's something that I've sort of gotten to say because of being around people, I might say it, if that makes sense. B3

Another co-researcher avidly spoke of her ability to change her speech whenever she so desired. For this co-researcher, adapting is a daily process and she is

quite comfortable making adaptations. She tells a story here of how she changes her language when she is at work and how others react to those changes:

> At work, there was a girl that I can change [my language around]. I change my language a lot. I speak one way to the customer, one way to the other cashiers and one way to my friends and I happen to have all three in the store at one time. She said, "you just went from being ghetto, to being my supervisor to being all polite for the customer . . ." she's like, "how did you just do that within five minutes?" It's like, it's really easy. F5

Several co-researchers felt that it would be more of an accommodation for them to use typical "White" speech patterns than it would for them to use typical "Black" patterns. For these co-researchers, they make accommodations to fit societal norms, if they feel it is necessary. When asked if her language would change if her partner's friends and family members spoke proper English, one co-researcher answered:

> Probably, if I'm around them, I would speak how they speak. I would start [talking proper]. Like I wouldn't . . . I always call it talking ghetto or something like slang . . . I wouldn't talk like that in front of them. I would talk proper probably. F14

For other co-researchers, as they gave consciousness to their experiences, they felt that their adaptations were subconscious, rather than conscious. Looking back on their language, they noticed several situations where they had accommodated toward the speech patterns of their partner's friends and/or family members without realizing at the time that they had made a change at all. This can be attributed to their level of comfort in the setting or with the people present, or to their level of comfort using slang in their language, or both. Additionally, their environment makes it easier for them to accommodate as they often find themselves around large groups of Black

people. One co-researcher did not even realize how her language would vary when she was with her partner and his friends and family members until thinking about it in the interview:

> But it didn't really occur to me that I was switching [my language]. It would just be whoever you're with you kind of adapt your communication style to whoever you're with. I think a lot of people do that. I do it . . . I guess [my partner] did too. So I guess most people do it without thinking about it. G8

It seemed apparent that no matter what particular style of speech co-researchers use, they agree that this is who they are, and others should accept them no matter what. One co-researcher, when asked about her use of slang around her partner who speaks "proper" as she described, replied with: "I spoke like that when he met me, and if he don't like it he can push on." (F11) Another co-researcher present at the focus group challenged this co-researcher's use of speech patterns that are not typically "White," and she replied back with:

> But at the same time, I know I'm a White girl, I like bein White. Just cuz I talk different . . . what does that mean? That's how I feel comfortable, so I shouldn't be looked at funny or . . . Even when I'm at home I don't change. F15

In addition to a desire for acceptance, there was also a feeling of 'not wanting to be someone I am not' relayed by my co-researchers. Many felt that any change would be viewed by other Blacks as condescending or insulting. They expressed a fear of rejection by the friends and family members of their partner if they should use speech patterns that are not considered their own. This co-researcher shared her feelings about this fear and how it affects her language:

> I would have been uncomfortable trying to speak differently than

> who I really am. So I just didn't change [my language]. And again I didn't want them to think that I was trying to belittle them or "I'm just trying to be like you." A5

For others, who do not feel comfortable accommodating, they agreed that any accommodations would feel awkward since it is not their normal speech style. One co-researcher stated, "I would say that I would keep my own speech patterns before I would slip into someone else's because I wouldn't want them to think that I was fake." (G9) Another co-researcher discussed her desire to be true to who she is and only use words she would normally use, rather than using a slang word she is not comfortable using just to fit in:

> Do I feel comfortable using slang words . . . I try to be honest with who I am . . . so if I know a word and that's the word I would normally use, I would say it around anyone, like "shady" I'll say it. And people might laugh when they hear me say it. But there's some words that I wouldn't use like the "n" word. I don't use that word. B3

Other co-researchers spoke of their own use of slang language as being contrived, or forced. They felt that using a language that is not their own would cause them to be someone they are not, and others would notice this other personality coming forth. Two co-researchers discuss their feelings about changing their language and why they would not do it:

> [Using slang] would be a very false kind of speech, contrived speech, or speaking a foreign language. When I guess I would also say it's not necessary for me to change my speech to be theirs. That's also a denigration of what is uniquely their [Black people's] style of speaking. C5

> [If I used slang language] I would be being something that's somebody that I'm not. You know I'd be putting on this façade of, cuz I would never do that with my White friends, so it would just seem so unnatural to me to do that with my Black friends. D6

Another common reaction of my co-researchers was their projection of what the friends and family members of their partner might think if they were to accommodate their speech. Many thought that the friends and family members of their partner would react negatively, and they feared such a reaction. In order to avoid this projected reaction, they simply do not accommodate their speech, unless they are very comfortable with the people present at the time. This co-researcher, who admits to being timid at times with her speech shares her feelings:

> Unless I felt comfortable with them [Black people] like the situation with my boyfriend and his friends . . . I wouldn't try to speak like them unless I knew them well enough but I don't think that I would totally go that far because I would rather be seen as being myself than trying to be something that I'm not. Like I wouldn't want them to say "she's not Black, so why is she talking like that?" I would rather just keep my own self and if they didn't like that then tough. But like I said I did try to every now and then just to fit in or be thought of as kind of cute and then move on. G9

Another idea contributing to the conflicting feelings about adapting language is a sense that co-researchers wanted people to accept them for who they are, no matter what style of language they use. Co-researchers seemed to have strong feelings in this area and expressed a desire for acceptance by the friends and family members of their partner, regardless of their speech. One co-researcher who was very avid about not using any slang language discusses some of her reasons for this:

> I can sit in a room with a bunch of Black folks too and never do that and just talk to them the way I'm talking to you now. You know, and they . . . that's the funny thing when you were talking about the looks. I avoid all those looks because I am what I am. They don't look at me like "oh look at that White girl, she tryin to be Black" they look at me like "oh look at that White girl" cuz that's what I am. You know . . . I don't try to you know . . . I guess it's just the way it is. F13

On the other hand, another co-researcher, reported using slang language frequently in her daily speech; she discussed her attitude toward her language and how it has become a part of who she is:

> I think for me that race has become such a non issue with me that I'm just myself. I'm just who and how I am. I think I would say the same things around them to anyone. It's not like when I'm talking to a Black woman that I'm going to switch my speech patterns. G14

These five emergent themes represent a thematization of the lived experiences of my co-researchers. The emergence of these themes represents an attempt to uncover the core, essential, experiences of European Americans in interracial relationships as they communicate with the friends and family members of their partners. They examine the hesitations, limitations, and accommodations expressed by my co-researchers as they catch a slight glimpse into the world of their minority partners.

Summary

Chapter Four outlines the process involved in steps two and three of the phenomenological process. This process began as I collected capta and compiled it into the 92 pages of transcripts. Using the process outlined by Orbe (2000) to review the transcripts, I arrived at an initial twenty-one paradigmatic themes. After re-reading and condensing the themes, sixteen syntagmatic themes emerged as the conscious lived experiences of European Americans in interracial relationships as they communicate with the friends and family members of their partners. Imaginative free variation was then utilized in order to get at what is essential and

what is non-essential in order to arrive at the themes thought to be essential. A continual process of reduction revealed themes that were interconnected, redundant, or incidental. The five essential themes eventually emerged: (a) past experiences shape language; (b) language is influenced by environment; (c) personalities influence language; (d) conflicted sense of belonging; and (e) conflicting feelings about adapting language. These themes are representative of the experiences of my co-researchers and also reflect my own personal experiences in many ways.

In Chapter Five, I will utilize these themes, and through a macro-level process of hyper-reflection, will interpret how they specifically relate to the experiences of European Americans as they communicate with the friends and family members of their African American partners. This interpretation will then serve as an explication of the phenomenon discussed throughout this entire chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETATION THROUGH HYPER-REFLECTION

The goal of Chapter Five is to explicate the interconnectedness of the five essential themes and continue the interpretation process in order to provide further insight to the phenomenon under investigation. Accordingly, how do "past experiences shape language," "language is influenced by environment," "personalities influence language," "conflicted sense of belonging," and "conflicting feelings about adapting language" relate to one another and to the phenomena of communicating as a European American in an interracial relationship with the friends and family members of my partner?

The process of hyper-reflection is central to this stage of interpretation. Merleau-Ponty (1968) describes this process as a continued reflection on my previous reflections and one where I seek to discover the essential meaning of the phenomenon under investigation. Throughout this process of hyper-reflection, one or two revelatory phrases should emerge that capture the essence of the experiences of the co-researchers. Nelson (1989) describes the revelatory phrase as an indicator of specific meanings, usually one that is not apparent in the earlier stages of the process. This final phase of the phenomenological process should unite the voices of the co-researchers with the voice of the researcher and should provide insight into the phenomena of what it means to communicate as a European American in an interracial relationship with the friends and family members of my partner.

Earning the Right:

"What Gives You the Right to Talk Like That?"

Each interview, focus group, and critical incident form provided me with a glimpse into the lives of my co-researchers and their experiences as European Americans in interracial relationships. At the end of every interview many co-researchers would ask me if I had gotten what I was looking for, or make statements like, "I hope what I said helps you!" What they were unable to realize was that as a phenomenologist, I did not set out to "prove" something nor did I begin my research hoping to find the answer to a pre-determined hypothesis.

The voices of my co-researchers were invaluable to me as I began my process of interpretation and analysis. After each review of the transcripts, and after the emergence of the five essential themes, one particular phrase continued to re-appear in my thoughts. The phrase, "What gives you the right to talk like that?" emerged as my revelatory phrase. As I interpreted this revelatory phrase, the theme of "earning the right" also emerged. These two phrases seemed to epitomize the experiences of my co-researchers and also connected each of the five themes. The phrases come from the comments of one of my co-researchers, a woman in her late twenties who is married to the first Black man she ever dated. She shares her feelings about using slang and projects an anticipated reaction if she were to use slang language around Black people:

> I think that when White people try and accommodate their speech, they are viewed as trying to be someone that they're not or trying to . . . this might be one of the reasons too, they're trying to be a part of a culture that they're not, and particularly when it's a minority

> culture, I think that it might be viewed as 'what gives you the right to talk like this, because you weren't in slavery for how many years, you weren't, you know you have no reason, you've had advantages and privileges all your life' and so you kind of have to earn a right to be a part of that. D6

This need to "earn the right" to be a part of another culture speaks to the tensions my co-researchers described as they discussed their experiences communicating with the friends and family members of their partners. After re-examining the transcripts, additional phrases made by my co-researchers seemed to tie into this revelatory phrase. Comments like, "people at school would ask me, why you tryin' to talk Black?" (F6), "I know that I'm not immersed in that culture" (G10), and "it's their culture. . . they don't really want to give it up." (H7)

What contributes to this feeling of needing to "earn the right" to speak a certain way around a particular group of people? Is it even possible for European Americans to earn the right? Or is it an ongoing process? These are all questions provoked by this revelatory phrase and will be addressed throughout this chapter. The first point that must be discussed is the society in which we live.

Majority Controlled Society

This research is situated in the context of a majority controlled society. As Akintunde (1999) posits, the White race has unquestionably been the dominant force of the western civilization throughout all of the modernist period (hundreds of years). Stanfield (1985) adds that within a large civilization, when any group dominates over other groups for such a long period of time, the ways of the dominant group not only become the accepted ways of that civilization, but they also become so deeply

embedded that they are viewed as "natural" or appropriate norms rather than as something that has evolved throughout time. Additionally, Akintunde (1999) claims:

> To a large degree, the dominant group, whatever its composition, makes its own community the center of the universe and the conceptual frame that constrains all thought. Thus the dominant group creates or constructs the 'world' or 'the Real' and does so in its own image, in terms of its ways and its social-historical experiences. (p. 3)

Martinot (2000) agrees with this existence of a dominant society in which Whites are the dominant group. He draws attention to the notion that "in the United States, the relation of whiteness to domination is not one of historical precedence, but of form and content. In the colonies and the nation that emerged from them, whiteness (and from it, race) is the form that domination took" (p. 47). We live in a dominant society where White privilege is undeniably present (McIntosh, 1988). As White people, we are offered many privileges and advantages and this is something with which we, as White people, must come to terms. On the other hand, minority groups have had to earn various rights and privileges throughout history, and we must recognize this before we can begin to understand the dynamics involved in interracial communication.

One theoretical framework within the field of communication that specifically addresses the tensions that exist between culture and communication is Co-cultural Theory. In his research on Co-cultural Theory, Orbe (1998b) discusses these tensions within a societal context:

> The fact that an assortment of co-cultures simultaneously exist in our society notwithstanding, a co-cultural theoretical model also is grounded in the belief that over time certain co-cultures (those of European Americans and men for example) have acquired dominant group status in the major societal institutions across the land. This central positioning—in political, corporate, religious, and legal institutions—of certain dominant groups has rendered other co-cultural groups as marginalized within the predominant societal structures. (p. 2)

This discussion has been presented for two reasons. First, we cannot eliminate the larger societal context within which this study is grounded. Second, although co-researchers often discussed situations in which they were the "minority," in the larger societal context, they are very much the majority and cannot escape this well known fact. These points impact the findings of this study and are discussed throughout this chapter.

Division of Two Worlds

My co-researchers were in agreement that there is a Black speaking world and a White speaking world and involvement in an interracial relationship intensifies the differences between these worlds. "White language" was often referred to as "speaking proper" or using "correct English," while "Black language" was referred to as "slang language" or "Ebonics." For my co-researchers, they felt that language is culturally centered, where Whites typically speak "proper" and Blacks typically speak "slang." They also agreed that there are most definitely exceptions to this rule. One

exception that became quite apparent was the number of Black people who use "White language," including many of the partners of my co-researchers.

This seemed to be common place in our society and my co-researchers did not report being at all bothered or irritated when they heard Black people using typically "White language." Houston (2000) shares her findings within this topic of discussion: "the greater African American community seems to accept the inevitability of linguistic assimilation to mainstream U.S. English in certain settings, but there is also deep unhappiness about the necessity in many quarters" (p. 13). Once again, we find the co-cultural group adapting toward a "norm" set by the dominant culture. Booth-Butterfield and Jordan (1989) corroborate this statement within their research on communication adaptation by adding that despite our societal movements toward racial equality, research continues to reflect differences in racial communication patterns indicating that Blacks more often adapt toward the established norms set by Whites.

On the contrary, although it is typically socially acceptable to hear Blacks using "typically White language," it is not as common place to hear White people using "typically Black language." But what happens when they do? My co-researchers had mixed feelings as to their predicted reactions of Blacks (specifically the friends and family members of their partner) should they choose to adopt a "typically Black" style of speech. Ultimately, the answer to this question is not clear and the lack of clarity ultimately leads to the tensions created by accommodating one's style of speech.

As White people, we are used to hearing Black people who use "typically White" language. Whether they have been raised to speak that way, their education led them to speaking that way, or they are accommodating in order to appease the majority, there is no cause for alarm or red flag raised when we hear Black people use "typically White" speech. On the contrary, White people are rarely raised to speak slang language, are not educated to speak slang language, and certainly do not have to speak slang language to appease the majority, as we ARE the majority. So what could possibly be the reason or motive for White people to use a language that is not culturally theirs? Some of my co-researchers grew up in neighborhoods where Whites were not the majority, and this contributed to their past experiences, their level of comfort being the "minority," and their subsequent language. How does the language of these co-researchers differ from those who grew up in areas where they were the majority? Before we can arrive at any type of understanding to these questions and others, we must address the difference (or lack thereof) between "typically Black" and "typically White" language.

I have used quotation marks when referring to "typically Black/White language" because it remains unclear what differences exist between the two and why there need to be any differences at all. Often times, the distinctions made between these two "types" of languages are based upon stereotypes associated with those using the language. Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, and Fillenbaum (1960) report that those who are concerned with the varieties of language and attitudes typically assume that when a listener hears a language associated with a particular group, that language

evokes stereotypical characteristics of the said group. Johnson and Buttny (1982) add that in the case of Black English, racist attitudes—both individually and culturally centered—seemingly influence negative stereotypes evoked by language characteristics which are associated with Black people. They also argue that differences between "Black English" and "Standard English" only serve to create barriers to cross-racial communication. However, they conclude that language is highly associated with class and that class is conceptually confounded with race. Finally, they draw attention to the fact that under a class-related notion of standard-ness in language, the contrast between speech that sounds White and speech that sounds Black is apparent.

It is my contention that if one continues to buy into the stereotypical differences between "typically Black" and "typically White" speech patterns, he/she only serves to perpetuate the societal norm that one is better than the other and only those groups designated within the titles can use such speech patterns (Whites must use "typically White" speech and Blacks must use "typically Black" speech). I am not suggesting that one should be so naïve as to think that language has no cultural prejudices, however one can take a more general approach and acknowledge that cultural differences do exist, but should not govern our communicative interracial interactions. In essence, what does it really mean to "talk Black" or "talk White?"

In an interracial relationship, White people are often faced with various experiences where they are the "minority," purely by number. For many of these White people, this may be their first experience as the "minority." Interacting with

the friends and family members of their partner is one such experience, and communication is both inevitable and necessary in these interactions. The tensions created by these situations have a great affect on the language choices European Americans will make, whether they be conscious choices or choices made in the subconscious.

Interconnectedness of Themes

In Chapter Four, 92 pages of descriptions were reduced through the phenomenological process to arrive at the five essential themes, which represent the core of the phenomena under study. Through the hyper-reflection process, one revelatory phrase, "What gives you the right to talk like that?" emerged as a central idea which served as a link for all five of the different themes. The phrase encapsulates the barrier European Americans must overcome as they communicate in an interracial relationship. The barrier can best be described as an attempt by members of the dominant group in our society to break through the cultural "norms" set by the said society. As dominant group members, European Americans in interracial relationships are faced with many challenges when communicating with the friends and family members of their partners. By re-examining the five essential themes, we are better able to understand the tensions involved in this type of interracial communication.

The first three themes—past experiences shape language, language is influenced by environment, and personalities influence language—are interrelated and are essentially the field of experience for European Americans as they begin their

interracial relationship. When people enter any relationship, they bring with them their own set of unique experiences that have shaped who they are at this point in their lives. The environment in which they grew up, the friends they have socialized with, and their past relationships are all components of these past experiences. Specifically, for European Americans entering interracial relationships, these experiences shape their language, both with their partner and with their partner's friends and family members.

Their language is then influenced by their environment within the relationship. Their partner's speech patterns, the speech patterns of his/her friends and family members, the settings they find themselves in, and their level of comfort in those settings also affects their language. Additionally, their reported personality traits are yet another influence on their language. How outgoing/shy they may be, their motives for using a particular style of speech, and their desire to use speech for humor or to fit in are also factors affecting their language when communicating with the friends and family members of their partner.

These three themes play a major role for European Americans in the tension coined, "earning the right." Do their past experiences give them the right to use the "typically Black" style of speech? Does their environment? Or what about their personality? Can they earn the right by having an acceptable combination of the three? There is no one "correct" answer to this question, which is where the tension for European Americans begins.

The first three themes lead into the final two themes—conflicted sense of belonging and conflicting feelings about adapting language. After questioning their right to use a particular style of speech based on their past experiences, environment, and personality, European Americans are left to wonder, "where do I belong?" They are well aware that they are not a part of the Black culture, however their partner is, causing them to feel like an outsider within. Their relationship with their partner gains them some (undesignated) level of access into the culture of their partner, making them not quite an outsider. Yet, they are not given full access into a culture they were clearly not born into or fully enculturated into. This may cause them to feel like an outsider within. Most research on the "outsider within" takes the vantage point of a marginalized group member as an outsider within a dominant group (Collins, 1986; Orbe, 1998a). However within this area of research, a parallel line may be drawn for the European American attempting to gain access within the culture of his/her partner when communicating with his/her friends and family members. They desire to learn about and experience the culture of their partner and yearn for acceptance by those within the culture—especially the friends and family members of their partner. Their next question is how can I gain insider status? Or can I even gain it at all?

Some feel that insider status is gained simply by being in the relationship, yet others feel they do not have insider status and are unsure as to how it can be attained, or if it ever can be attained. This leads European Americans to conflicting feelings about adapting their language. One of the ways in which they can attempt to bridge

the cultural gap is to accommodate their speech. In Chapter Two, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) was defined and explained thoroughly. Convergence was given as one possible strategy for accommodating one's speech and reflects a speakers' or a group's often unconscious need for acceptance or identification with another in order to seek approval, enhance comprehension, or show solidarity (Gallois et al., 1988). Thus, people adopt convergence as a strategy to become more similar to another person, through the reduction of linguistic differences (Giles et al., 1991). For those who desire acceptance by or identification with the friends and family members of their partner, accommodating their speech may be a likely choice. For the co-researchers who reported making accommodations in their language (both consciously and subconsciously), convergence was, in fact, the preferred method. Perhaps this helped them to feel as if they belong. However, many reported being met with resistance by the very group they were attempting to belong. Once again, European Americans struggle with earning the right.

For another group of co-researchers, the costs of accommodating seemed to be much greater than the rewards, therefore they reported avoiding any accommodations in their speech when communicating with the friends and family members of their partner. One co-researcher, in particular, adamantly reported a refusal to accommodate her speech in any way, and spoke of specific instances where she was aware that the differences were distinct. For example:

> I can sit in a room with a bunch of black folks too and never [speak slang] and just talk to them the way I'm talking to you now. You know, and they . . . that's the funny thing when you were talking about the looks. I avoid all those looks because I am what I am. They don't look at me

> like "oh look at that white girl, she tryin' to be black" they look at me like "oh look at that white girl" cuz that's what I am. You know . . . I don't try to . . . I guess it's just the way it is. I mean, I know _____ looks at me sometimes like "damn you're white" and I know . . . but I am and that's just the way I was raised, and I don't see . . . I understand . . .it's like understanding language and yah, I can speak it, but that doesn't mean that I have to do it. And I don't care . . . I just won't do it. F13

This is described in the research as divergence, or when a speaker emphasizes the differences between themselves and their partner's speech style (Gallois et al., 1988). For these co-researchers, either they do not desire to earn the right to speak like their partner's friends and family members, or they do not feel they are able to earn that right.

Within this group of co-researchers who did not report making accommodations are those who hope that simply by "being myself" they will gain acceptance from the friends and family members of their partner and therefore will feel as if they belong. This strategy is referred to as maintenance, or the act of continuing in one's previously established style, often times without any reference to the partner's speech and occasionally as a purposeful reaction to it (Gallois et al., 1988). At face value, this strategy may be desirable for some European Americans involved in interracial relationships. However, by adopting this strategy, the cultural differences are much more obvious and may lead to more discomfort being the "minority." For those who desire approval and acceptance, this then defeats the purpose of attempting to belong to the culture of their partner or beginning the process of earning the right.

Whether we choose convergence, divergence, or maintenance, the outcome invariably appears to be similar. The reality for us as European Americans is that even though we may feel like the minority in various situations throughout an interracial relationship, we will always be thought of as the majority, regardless of the situation. As European Americans, we cannot escape "the White baggage" (C6) that we carry around with us in everything that we do. As one of my co-researchers so eloquently put it, "my White face was always going to be there no matter what." (C5) In other words, as long as we are operating in a dominant societal construct, where White privilege exists, European Americans will continue to be seen as having the upper hand in most contexts. There are stereotypes and expectations that come along with our White faces, and we must acknowledge their existence before we can begin to understand the linguistic tensions involved when we communicate in interracial relationships with the friends and family members of our partners. The key to earning the right lies within the word "earning." As European Americans, we cannot continue to expect that certain rights and privileges will be handed to us as they have been throughout history (the core idea within White privilege). We must, instead, earn these rights, just as those with whom we are communicating have had to earn them themselves. Jackson (1999) makes this glaringly clear when he states:

> Certainly, there are Whites who understand the privileges, stigmas, and associated meanings of their whiteness, and deal with it as responsibly as they can. Likewise, there are those who choose to ignore how they might truly participate in the maintenance of privilege. (p. 52)

This leads us back to the tension of earning the right. If our past experiences, environment, personality, and the simple fact that we are in an interracial relationship do not earn us the right to use a "typically Black" style of speech, then how can we begin to earn that right? Better yet, can we even earn that right at all? These questions remain at the core of the experiences of European Americans in interracial relationships as they communicate with the friends and family members of their partners.

It is vital to point out that in phenomenological inquiry, a complete reduction is impossible. Merleau-Ponty (1964) contends that it is beyond our capacity to gain a complete understanding of the phenomenon under study. Additionally, it is not productive, but rather detrimental to the process, to make generalizations about the research and the phenomenon under study. Nelson (1989) also points out that our interpretations change once we reflect upon them. Therefore, interpretation is a dynamic process and is constantly changing.

Limitations

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the communication strategies of European Americans when they communicate in interracial relationships with the friends and family members of their partners and the reported effectiveness of these strategies. Specifically, I sought to discover whether or not my co-researchers accommodated their speech toward the speech patterns of their partners' friends and family members and what the possible reasons were for these accommodations or lack thereof. In attempting to answer these questions, I discovered that European Americans enter

interracial relationships with a unique set of experiences. These experiences, combined with their environment and their personality contribute to conflicting tensions of belonging and adapting their language. Ultimately, European Americans must struggle with earning the right. Earning the right to be who they are, earning the right to celebrate a culture not their own, and earning the right to speak a language not typically associated with their culture. Although the findings from this thesis project are significant and have shed light on a virtually unexamined phenomenon, there are inherent limitations, as there are with most research projects of this caliber.

While the attempts of the researcher to produce outstanding research that makes significant contributions to the field of study are great, limitations are inevitable. It is important to recognize these limitations and acknowledge them in order to improve future research endeavors.

Co-researchers

One limitation of this study involves the size and diversity of my group of co-researchers. The size of the group was sufficient for the purposes of this thesis, yet the number could have been greater for optimum observation of a complex phenomenon. More is not necessarily better, especially when utilizing a phenomenological methodology where the researcher seeks to discover the essential experiences of a unique group of people. However, a greater number of co-researchers increases the capta gathered by the researcher, thereby working to ensure a more thorough analysis of the phenomena. This line of research needs to be

pursued using a variety of methodologies in order to fully understand the complexities of the phenomenon.

In addition to the number of co-researchers, another limitation was the diversity of the said group. Nineteen of the 20 co-researchers were females, and one was a male. This creates a definite gender bias, making it difficult to distinguish between the experiences of female European Americans and male European Americans involved in interracial relationships. Additionally, this led me to question if my findings are specific to European American women, rather than European Americans in general. Future research should include more male voices, however it was much more difficult to find European American males who fit the criteria and were willing to participate than it was females.

Another limitation specific to my co-researchers is the regional diversity. Most of the co-researchers originate from the same state, and nineteen of the twenty currently live in the same state. This may affect the diversity of experiences, as region does play a role in our interactions and schools of thought.

Methods

The methods chosen to gather the phenomenological descriptions were useful, however the size of the focus groups was a limitation. The desired size was three to five people, however two of the focus groups contained only two co-researchers. Both of these focus groups lasted well over an hour in length, however the discussions could have been much more synergistic in nature and might have taken different (not necessarily better) paths had more co-researchers been present. Had

there been male co-researchers involved in the focus groups, there may have been less agreement and more in-depth discussions on various topics.

Finally, the critical incident technique is a useful tool to increase the number of participants, however the capta gathered from such a technique is not as vivid and insightful as the capta from the in-depth interviews and focus groups. Obviously, it is impossible to generate a discussion or ask additional probing questions when we ask co-researchers to write about their experiences rather than talk about them. The inherent limitation within this capta gathering technique is the lack of clarification or explanation provided once the researcher receives the completed form.

Future Implications

The goal of this thesis, to discover what communication strategies European Americans report using in interracial relationships when communicating with the friends and family members of their partners, was met. However, inherent in the phenomenological methodology is the fact that it cannot be used to generalize, but rather is used as a means to examine the experiences of my co-researchers (Orbe, 2000). This type of research often creates more questions than it answers, therefore there are several implications for the future which I will outline in this final section.

Other Contributing Factors

Two elements that influence the lived experiences of my co-researchers, but did not receive much attention, are the length of the co-researcher's current relationship and the previous experience that the co-researcher has/does not have with interracial relationships. These are both areas in which future studies could focus more heavily.

Attention might be given to the co-researchers' experiences with interracial relationships, specifically the number and quality of the interracial relationships they have been involved in throughout their lives. This is a factor that may be found to be a significant influence on the co-researchers' language use in the relationship and their willingness/ability to accommodate their speech. Do the co-researchers who have had multiple experiences with interracial relationships report accommodating their speech more often than those who are in their first interracial relationship? If they have had negative experiences with interracial relationships, or with accommodating their language in the past, does this effect their current interactions or accommodations?

Additionally, the length of the relationship they are reporting on could also be addressed as a possible influence. Do the co-researchers in longer relationships report their communication strategies to be different than those who are in newer relationships? These are factors that this thesis was unable to specifically address, however future research may give consideration to such influences.

Expanding the Pool

Another future implication, and one in which I would like to address personally with future research, is the need for expanding the group of co-researchers beyond the European Americans. The African American partners of the co-researchers could also be interviewed in future research so they are able to share their observations of their partner's language. Often times, those around us notice specific behaviors that we are unable to notice ourselves. My view of my language may not be the same as

the way my partner views my language. This insight from the partner could help to uncover additional themes that were not apparent from talking to only one half of the relationship dyad.

Additionally, interviews could be conducted with the friends and family members of the African American partner with whom the European American partner has communicated. This could assist the researcher in better answering the second question which dealt with effectiveness. A comparison could be made between the level of effectiveness reported by the European Americans and the effectiveness reported by the friends and family members with whom they have communicated. This addition could help to differentiate between how the European Americans feel about their language use and how those with whom they are communicating feel about their language. In other words, how do the African American friends and family members feel about the language used by the European American partner? Will the theme of "earning the right" come through also when talking with the African American friends and family members? These are all possible questions that could be answered with future research endeavors. I hope to shed some light in these areas with future research studies, utilizing other methodologies.

Finally, there are theoretical implications created as a result of this study. One of the claims made in the rationale section of this thesis spoke to the need for more research which examines the experiences of European Americans as they are situated as the "minority" within communicative interactions. The acculturation process and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) both tend to focus on members of

non-dominant groups in their interactions with the dominant group. This research begins to shed light on the experiences of dominant group members as they communicate within situational contexts where they do not have majority status (numerically speaking). However, in a larger societal context, they cannot escape their majority status or the privileges that come along with such status. CAT alone does not account for such situations. Perhaps we can extend some of the theories related to marginalized groups, such as Co-cultural Theory, and apply them within the framework of this study. Or, perhaps we need to create a new theory which specifically addresses the questions posed throughout this chapter and begins to focus on the issue of earning the right.

Conclusion

European Americans face many challenges when communicating in interracial relationships, especially when communicating with the friends and family members of their partners. The biggest challenge is their ongoing struggle with earning the right. The right to be themselves, to use "typically Black" language, to celebrate a culture not their own, and to seek additional privileges from a minority group in a majority controlled society. No matter what the situational factors may be, as European Americans, we will always be viewed as the majority. Therefore we cannot expect that rights and privileges designated for minority group members will be provided for us, despite the fact that we may be in a romantic relationship with a minority group member. It is necessary for European Americans and African Americans to dialogue about cultural expectations and where language fits into those

expectations. It is impossible for any of us to know what style of speech is acceptable or not acceptable to our audience if we do not ask questions. As is true with most issues, communication is the key in order for relationships to remain positive and effective. European Americans need to be comfortable with who they are, and proud of who they are, and they should not lose sight of their own identity in order to replace it with someone else's. This research has provided a foundation and a starting point in this relatively unexplored area of study. Future research can continue to explore this phenomenon and provide additional insight as European Americans continue to struggle with earning the right.

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Appendix A

Acculturation in Interracial Relationships: Exploring the Communication Strategies of European Americans

HSIRB Protocol Outline

Project Description

The purpose of this project is to examine the acculturation process enacted by European Americans in interracial relationships, specifically focusing on the communication patterns established with their partners' family and friends. For the purposes of this project, the term relationship will refer to a romantic commitment between two individuals who have been together for at least three months. The term partner will thus refer to either member of the relationships and the term interracial (in the context of a relationship) will refer to partners with differing racial backgrounds. This exploratory study will utilize a phenomenological framework in order to investigate the following research questions:

(1) What communication strategies do European Americans report using to acculturate themselves with the culture of their partner in interracial relationships?
(2) How do they describe the effectiveness of these communication strategies?

The project will utilize a maximum of 5 focus groups and 5-10 individual interviews, involving a total of approximately 25-40 European Americans (18-65 years of age). Each focus group will consist of 3-5 participants and each participant will participate in one focus group discussion or one in-depth interview. In addition, some participants may only be asked to complete a form on which they write about an experience asked of them at the top of the form (See Appendix D). This process is referred to as a critical incident technique. The forms will be distributed to contacts who are unable or unwilling to be interviewed. They will either be hand delivered by the student researcher, or mailed to the participant to an address provided by them. They will be asked to mail the form back to the student researcher at 211 Sprau Tower. The forms will be anonymous. The questions asked of the participants in the focus groups and in-depth interviews will be similar to each other. The interviews and focus group discussions will be facilitated by the student researcher at the Communication conference room, on the second floor of Sprau Tower, at Western Michigan University, or at the participants homes during the months of January/February 2002. Each session will last approximately 45-60 minutes in length and include the following:

(1) Explanation of research project
(2) Presentation/explanation of Informed Consent Form
(3) Explanation of how participants can receive a copy of the final paper
(4) Opportunity for questions

(5) Conversational dialogue around several questions
(6) Closing/opportunity for questions, feedback, and so on

Interviews and focus group discussions will be audio taped, transcribed, and then reviewed via the thematization process inherent in phenomenological inquiry[1].

Benefits of Research

The expected benefit of this line of exploratory research is its contribution to the growing amount of research on interracial relationships an the benefits/challenges that come with such a relationship for the participants involved in the study. This proposed study will have no concrete benefits other than an opportunity to discuss life experiences. Interviewees and focus group participants will be, however, given an opportunity to receive a copy of the final paper, by notifying the student and/or principal investigator either at the focus group, in-depth interview, or vial the telephone. This information will be contained in the consent form.

Subject Selection

The European Americans involved in this research project will be recruited through personal contacts, and also by using a technique called snowballing (receiving referrals from contacts who know other contacts). Interested participants will be informed to contact me either by phone or through email (See Appendix B and C).

Risks to Subjects

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participants. However, the risks are highly unlikely and are minimal in nature. Participants will be asked to disclose personal information about themselves and their relationships, and may feel uncomfortable disclosing such information. The participants will be aware that they are encouraged to skip any questions which cause them discomfort, or may end the interview at any time and for any reason.

Protection for Subjects

Participants involved in this project will be protected in several ways. First, their identities will remain confidential (only first names or pseudonyms will be used). Second, participants will be offered the option to refrain from responding to any particular question or to end the session at any time and for any reason. Third, participants will be informed that all information discussed throughout the focus groups and in-depth interviews is confidential and should not be repeated or discussed outside of the sessions or interviews. Finally, the audio tapes and written

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[1] This process involves a rigorous review process by which transcripts are reviewed independently and collectively until general themes emerge. The student researcher will review the transcripts for the thematic discovery. It is important to note that phenomenological inquiry does not involve "coding," in the traditional use of the term, but instead an inductive, humanistic approach to scholarly analysis. **Centralizing diverse racial/ethnic voices in scholarly research: The value of phenomenological inquiry** by Mark P. Orbe (2000, International Journal of Intercultural Relations) gives a detailed review of this process.

transcriptions of the focus groups and interviews will only be handled by the principal investigator and/or the student investigator and will be secured in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's office for at least three years and then destroyed.

Confidentiality of Data

As mentioned in the previous section, all identities of the participants will remain confidential. To ensure the confidentiality of participants in all written materials, all quotes will be edited to remove any information that may reveal the identity of the participant. The audio tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's possession for at least three years and then destroyed.

Instrumentation

The interviews and focus group discussions facilitated through this project will be conducted using a general conversational interviewing technique based on the Hermeneutic Phenomenological Human Science[2]. Phenomenology is the study of the lived-world and aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of our everyday experiences. In hermeneutic phenomenological human science, the interview serves very specific purposes: 1) it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of human phenomenon, and 2) the interviews are used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relationship with the interviewed about the meaning of an experience. In order to facilitate the focus group discussion, the following general questions will be utilized:

(1) Describe how, if at all, you have familiarized yourself with the culture of your partner?
(2) How would you describe your communication with your partner's friends/family?
(3) Have you noticed any changes in your communication/behaviors when you are around your partner's friends/family? If so, what types of changes?
(4) Describe the reactions you have experienced from the friends/family of your partner when you have communicated with them.
(5) How effective do you feel your communication with your partner's friends/family was? Is now?

In-depth interviews will also be conducted, using similar types of questions as those listed for the focus group discussions.

Informed Consent

[2] See van Manen, M. (1990), **Researching lived experience,** for a detailed description of this process.

A copy of the Informed Consent Form is attached. This form will be given to, and discussed with, all participants prior to the interview or focus group discussions. Those participating in the critical incident technique will either be given the form in person and have it discussed with them, or it will be mailed to them and the student researcher will discuss it with them via telephone. It will then be mailed back to the student researcher before they are able to participate in the critical incident technique. In addition, participants will be asked not to repeat the information discussed in the confines of the focus groups, for the protection of all participants. After participants have been provided an opportunity to ask any questions or to withdraw their involvement, each participant will receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form for their personal records. For a general guideline of the discussion with the participants regarding this form, see Appendix E. The topical protocol for the focus groups is outlined in Appendix F.

Appendix B

PHONE SCRIPT

Hello—my name is Angela Putman.
I am a graduate student in the Communication department at Western Michigan University. I received your name from _____ as a possible candidate for a study I am conducting to complete my Master's thesis required for graduation. The focus of the research project is the process experienced by European Americans in interracial relationships as they seek to familiarize themselves with the culture of their partner. This is an invitation for you to participate in my thesis project and should you choose to accept the invitation, you may choose which forum you would like to participate in. The forums are focus groups and interviews and you will only be asked to participate in either one focus group or one in-depth interview, each lasting approximately one hour.

I would like to ask you the following questions:
What is your ethnicity?
Are you currently involved in an interracial relationship and if so, for how long?

Do you have any questions that I can answer?

> At this point, if the person meets the conditions of the study-being a European American (male or female) in an interracial relationship (their partner is of another race) I would tell them the date and time of the focus group, or discuss with them a potential time for an in-depth interview (consent will be gained at the focus group or in-depth interview) and thank them for participating.

Appendix C

EMAIL SCRIPT

Hello—my name is Angela Putman.
I am a graduate student in the Communication department at Western Michigan University. I received your name from _____ as a possible candidate for a study I am conducting to complete my Master's thesis required for graduation. The focus of the research project is the process experienced by European Americans in interracial relationships as they seek to familiarize themselves with the culture of their partner. This is an invitation for you to participate in my thesis project and should you choose to accept the invitation, you may choose which forum you would like to participate in. The forums are focus groups and interviews and you will only be asked to participate in either one focus group or one in-depth interview lasting approximately one hour.

I would like to ask you the following questions and would appreciate your responses via email:

What is your ethnicity?
Are you currently involved in an interracial relationship, and if so, for how long?
Do you have any questions that I can answer?

Sincerely,
Angela L. Putman

Appendix D

CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE FORM

Describe an occasion when you communicated with your partner's friends and/or family members. The situation may be positive, negative, or neither. Please provide as much detail as possible about the situation.

Appendix E

CONSENT FORM SCRIPT

The purpose of this form is to provide you (the participant) with as much information as possible about the research project in which you will be participating. Please make sure to read this form in its entirety and feel free to ask for clarification on any aspect(s) that are unclear to you. Once you have read the form and are comfortable with its contents, please provide your signature at the bottom, indicating that you have read the form and agree to participate in the study under the conditions outlined in the document.

Appendix F

FOCUS GROUP TOPICAL PROTOCOL

Hello, thank you for coming and for agreeing to participate in this focus group today.

My name is Angela Putman and I am a Masters student at Western Michigan University, studying Organizational Communication. For my Masters Thesis, I am conducting a study on interracial romantic relationships and am seeking to gain information from you about your thoughts and feelings of communicating in an interracial relationship. Some of my questions are about your communication with your partner's friends and family members. For example, I will be asking you to describe your communication with your partner's friends and family members, and to describe any reactions you have noticed throughout the communication.

This focus group is meant to be a discussion between all of us and I encourage anyone to speak about whatever they are comfortable sharing. I will be asking some questions to get the discussion started. I also encourage you to respond to each other's comments and add to the discussion in any manner in which you are comfortable. If at any time you are uncomfortable for any reason, you may indicate this to me by requesting that we take a break, at which time you may leave the room or terminate your participation in this focus group.

Again, I thank each of you for attending and look forward to our discussion.

Appendix G

HSIRB Approval Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: November 13, 2001

To: Mark Orbe, Principal Investigator
Angela Putman, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair Mary Lagerwey

Re: HSIRB Project Number 01-10-21

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Acculturation in Interracial Relationships: Exploring the Communication Strategies of European Americans" has been **approved** under the **exempt** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: November 13, 2002