

INTERRACIAL DATING ON CAMPUS

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Table of Contents

Research Proposal..... 3

Annotated Bibliography..... 5

Outline 9

Introduction..... 11

Literature Review 12

Methods 17

Quantitative Survey 17

Qualitative Interviews 18

Results and Analysis 21

Quantitative Results 21

Qualitative Results 23

 Environment and Awareness 24

 Perception 25

 Identity 26

 Support..... 28

 Communication 30

Discussion..... 32

Conclusion..... 37

Works Cited 38

Research Proposal

This research project will explore interracial dating on California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo's campus. The research will evaluate the overall level of support that these students receive and other potential factors that affect the quality of these relationships. Students' perspectives on interracial dating on campus will also be revealed.

To accomplish these goals, semi-structured, qualitative interviews will be done using twelve interracial couples on campus. These couples will be interviewed together and then each partner will be interviewed individually. Questions will include asking the individuals to explain how they experience interracial dating on Cal Poly's campus. An online, anonymous survey will also be used to obtain quantitative data on how Cal Poly students regard interracial relationships. Analyzing the data on interracial dating at Cal Poly will reveal how these individuals with different racial and ethnic identities experience interracial dating and which internal and external factors impact the quality of their relationships. Individuals' friends, family, and being on a predominately White campus will impact the quality of these interracial relationships.

This project will help determine to what degree these factors affect interracial couples. These factors include the environment that they are in, how aware they are of it, how they identify with themselves, and the amount of support and communication that the couples possess. It will also help determine if Cal Poly's environment is supportive of this diversity and if it causes a positive or negative impact on these relationships. This project will highlight the importance of social acceptance and the specific environment. It will also contribute qualitative research on interracial relationships; previously, this subject has predominantly had a quantitative approach.

This project is connected to sociologically prevalent issues such as race and social norms.

Interracial marriage has only been legal in the United States since 1967 and has varying levels of acceptance depending on the environment. Today, racial and ethnic inequality is an ongoing issue and this study seeks to share a diverse set of experiences within this specific educational organization. My senior project will also help me advance toward my future career because I am interested in research and plan to be involved in a career that uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This senior project will help me gain experience in both types of research methods and understand firsthand what it means to collect and analyze data on applicable topics.

Annotated Bibliography

Bell, G. C., & Hastings, S. O. (2015). Exploring parental approval and disapproval for black and white interracial couples. *Journal Of Social Issues, 71*(4), 755-771. doi:10.1111/josi.12147

This qualitative study researched how parental approval or disapproval impacts Black and White interracial couples. 38 individuals, representing 19 couples, were interviewed to answer: how couples' experiences of parental approval and disapproval impact their interracial relationship? The participants were recruited using snowball sampling and they varied in age, location, and duration of relationship to diversify the sample. A semi-structured interview was performed on each participant separately from their partner to reduce the pressure of answering questions in front of each other. Researchers used Owen's thematic analysis to put data into theme-and-theory-driven categories. Categories were determined from reoccurring themes found in multiple couples. All couples had instances of public disapproval; however, the one-sided approval couples expressed more concern about parental disapproval. This also led to tension in the interracial relationship as a whole. Dual approval relationships felt more equal, positive, and interdependent in their relationship. The couples that had dual parental approval were less affected by negative outside sources than the couple that only received one-sided parental approval. This result explores the possibility of interracial couples that have a reliable support system will be less likely to be negatively influenced by an unsupportive outside environment.

Datzman, J., & Gardner, C. B. (2000). 'In my mind, we are all humans': Notes on the public management of black-white interracial romantic relationships. *Marriage & Family Review, 30*(1-2), 5-24. doi:10.1300/J002v30n01_02

In this qualitative study, 19 interracial couples were given in-depth interviews discussing public harassment and how they were able to manage it in their relationship. Interview participants were mostly heterosexual black man and white woman romantic relationships. Interviewees were asked about their relationship and how dealing with public harassment affects the relationship. Participants described the types of public harassment and management strategies and reactions they have to this. Many couples reported the exploitative practice of being stared repeatedly while in public. Their coping strategies included ignoring the actions, going out of their way to avoid it, responding back, attempting to help educate the public. Limitations that this study had include a limited sample of couples in the Midwest. More research should be done on the frequency interracial couples experiencing harassment and effects that result because of it.

Field, C. J., Kimuna, S. R., & Straus, M. A. (2013). Attitudes toward interracial relationships among college students: Race, class, gender, and perceptions of parental views. *Journal Of Black Studies, 44*(7), 741-776. doi:10.1177/0021934713507580

This quantitative study focused on a sample of 1173 students at five universities to determine what the attitudes toward interracial relationships are among college students. Their hypotheses were categorized approval dependent on age of the students, the racial identity of the couples, the gender of the students, the race of the students. They also hypothesized that the approval of interracial relationships would be lower at historically Black universities (HBUs) than in predominantly White universities (PWUs). A survey was used to ask the participant's current dating or marital status and then a Cross-Group Relationship Scale (CGRS) was used to determine feelings toward interracial dating and marital relationships between Black/White and

Asian/White groups and perceived parental perspectives on the matter. Black students indicated their parents would be least favorable of an interracial dating and marriage. The results showed that PWUs held more positive attitudes toward interracial couple than the HBUs did. Those in interracial relationships were more approving of interracial dating and marriage than those who were in same-race relationships. Limitations were the makeup of the sample as it was 80% female and volunteers were mainly pulled from social science class which might not be representative of the entire universities.

Killian, K. D. (2002). Dominant and marginalized discourses in interracial couples' narratives: Implications for family therapists. *Family Process*, 41(4), 603.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the potential struggles or challenges that interracial couples experience and how they negotiate racial and ethnic differences. Ten Black-White couples that were married for at least a one year and with minimum one child were chosen from an urban area in central New York through a non-random sample. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used with the couples both separately and together. The researchers used an inductive, discourse analysis to determine the prominent codes and themes. This data was then run through the software program, HyperRESEARCH. Close friends and family reinforced social norms around same-race relationships and attempted to discourage the partners in the sample from marrying interracially. However, certain couples were willing to violate those expectations and instead create new norms; others dealt with racial and ethnic differences by prioritizing homogamy. The majority of respondents agreed that white partners were less affected by negative reactions that were received in public situations. White partner's' lack of affirmation regarding the racism their black partner experiences may reinforce that not all people understand how everyday racism is apparent.

Knox, D., Zusman, M. E., Buffington, C., & Hemphill, G. (2000). Interracial dating attitudes among college students. *College Student Journal*, 34(1), 69.

This quantitative study focused on what the attitudes and behaviors of college students are toward interracial relationships and the influence of families. An anonymous survey was given to 620 university students in order to determine their attitudes toward interracial dating. The sample was chosen from volunteers in lower level sociology classes at East Carolina University. The majority of respondents identified as White. About 24% responded to having dated interracially while another 49% reported that they were open to being in an interracial relationship. Results showed that students who were Black, cohabitants, or were previously involved with interracial dating were more likely to respond positively to being in an interracial relationship. Families were also a large factor in where interracial relationships were accepted or not; which family members directly held that roles depended on the families racial identities. The results aid in helping university officials and students understand that interracial is a part of college experiences. Due to the sample, the results may not be able to be generalized to the overall population.

Levin, S., Taylor, P. L., & Caudle, E. (2007). Interethnic and interracial dating in college: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 24(3), 323-341. doi:10.1177/0265407507077225

Over 2000 students at a multiethnic university were used to gather longitudinal data on interethnic and interracial dating. The purpose of the study was to determine if college students

were more likely to date within their own racial group, if men were more likely to date outside of their racial group, if racial group identification before college affects outside dating, and if attitudes towards interracial dating remains the same throughout college. Data was collected from the students by administering surveys and telephone interviews over five different periods and follow up interviews were given at the end of each year. It was found that close precollege in-group friendships were more likely to date within their own group. This was consistent throughout the study. Those that did engage in intergroup dating held less in-group bias at the end of their senior year. The authors recognized that the sample of their data was not large enough and did not include enough racial/ethnic diversity in it. The study only focused on demographic and psychological factors, not cultural factors within the racial groups. This sample limitation that will also be affected by Cal Poly's student demographic.

McClintock, E. A. (2010). When does race matter? Race, sex, and dating at an elite university. *Journal Of Marriage & Family*, 72(1), 45-72. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00683.x

This study combined quantitative and qualitative to bring a fuller perspective to research interracial dating on a university campus. They reviewed interracial marriage, pairings, dating, and hookup culture surrounding this topic. The College Social Life survey given to 732 Stanford undergraduate students. The survey asked participants whether they had dated or hooked up with anyone in the past six months and asked for further information. Students were able to explain their own definition of what a hook up when to them. Students were also asked to describe the details about the relationship, including the partner's gender and race. Through these surveys, researchers were able to find volunteers for in-person interviews. Several minority same-race relationships were reported with many finding their partner through minority organizations on campus. Researchers determined from the results that participants preferred to be in same-race relationships had potentially not been exposed to other interracial relationships or groups on campus that could expand their outlook. Interracial hookups also posed less problems than when the couple decided to enter into a serious relationship with each other. This study revealed the issues with universities lacking the programs need to encourage more diversity.

Seshadri, G., & Knudson-Martin, C. (2013). How couples manage interracial and intercultural differences: Implications for clinical practice. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 39(1), 43-58. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2011.00262.x

This study include qualitative as part of the Contemporary Couples Study, to explore how diverse couples react to an environment that is socially changing. Semi-structured interviews were used with 17 married, heterosexual couples from California, and they were interviewed together and separately. Grounded theory analysis was used to hand transcribe the interviews and coded line-by-line. Distinct relationship structures around culture were found: integrated structure, willingness to engage in each other's cultures, and co-existing. Singularly assimilated structure was found when one partner is more assimilated than the other leaving that partner to feel their culture of the correct way. Assimilation is seen as conversion instead of compromise. These couples have conflict around these differences which is related to insecurities within the relationship. Strategies to deal with these differences included: creating a co-constructive narrative reality of their relationship, frame their differences, emotional maintenance, and use family and societal contexts. Due to this study being conducted in a diverse area of California, results might not be able to transfer to other social contexts.

Troy, A. B., Lewis-Smith, J., & Laurenceau, J. (2006). Interracial and intraracial romantic relationships: The search for differences in satisfaction, conflict, and attachment style. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 23(1), 65-80.

doi:10.1177/0265407506060178

This study analyzed how interracial and intra-racial relationships differ in relationship functioning. The sample included with 118 exclusively dating heterosexual couples, both interracial and intra-racial, chosen from psychology classes at a diverse Southeastern U.S. university. The first study included participants completing the Relationship Satisfaction Scale, an 8-item Communication Patterns Questionnaire, and the Measure of Attachment Qualities scale. In the second study, participants then completed the Perceived Relationship Quality Components scale, the Communication Patterns Questionnaire, the Relationship Efficacy Scale, and a modified version of the Brief COPE scale. By comparing these two studies, researchers were able to explore the differences of relationship functioning among interracial and intra-racial. Results showed that there were no significant differences between interracial and intra-racial relationships, contradicting the researchers' hypothesis. The authors also acknowledged that their studies were limited in its ability to be generalized to population because they used a more culturally diverse location, meaning community acceptance could vary.

Vaquera, E., & Kao, G. (2005). Private and public displays of affection among interracial and intra-racial adolescent couples. *Social Science Quarterly (Wiley-Blackwell)*, 86(2), 484-508. doi:10.1111/j.0038-4941.2005.00314.x

This study's objective was to examine the variation in displays of affection between interracial and intra-racial couples. Are interracial relationships perceivably different from intra-racial relationships? The method included using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) which is a national representative sample of adolescents in the US. Eighty high schools were used to select random samples through the database. In-school questionnaires and in-home interviews were administered to students from seventh to twelfth grade. Results found that interracial couples had lower levels of public and private displays of affection. While both interracial and intra-racial couples had simple levels of intimacy in private, interracial couples were more hesitant to publically display their affection. Implications are that while conditions have improved for interracial dating, there are still social barriers that take place and are an obstacle among these couples even though mixed-race romantic relationships are more widely accepted by adolescents.

Outline

- I. Introduction
 - A. Interracial dating
 - B. Societal implications
 - 1. Hypothesis that interracial couples face obstacles in society → will also face obstacles on campus
 - C. Experiences on campus
 - D. Importance of these experiences
- II. Literature Review
 - A. Topics
 - 1. Attitudes toward interracial dating
 - 2. Support and approval
 - 3. Challenges
 - 4. Racial Identity
 - 5. Interracial vs. intraracial
 - B. Gaps in literature
- III. Method
 - A. Qualitative research
 - 1. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with 12 interracial couples
 - 2. How participants were found (snowball sampling, convenient sampling)
 - 3. Couples are interviewed together and then separately
 - 4. Examples of questions
 - 5. Grounded theory analysis
 - 6. Coding process
 - B. Quantitative research
 - 1. Anonymous online surveys
 - 2. Students' opinions on interracial dating on campus
 - 3. Examples of questions
 - 4. Statistics used to analyze
- IV. Results and Analysis
 - A. Qualitative factors from the interviews
 - 1. Environment and Awareness
 - 2. Perceptions
 - 3. Identity
 - 4. Support
 - 5. Communication
 - B. Quantitative results
 - 1. Student's definition of interracial relationship
 - 2. % of students that have been in interracial relationship
 - 3. How accepting Cal Poly students are of interracial couples
 - 4. Analysis

V. Discussion

- A. How these factors impact quality of relationship
- B. How supportive of an environment this campus is
- C. Compare interracial couples' experiences to students' perceptions
- D. Implications for Cal Poly campus
- E. Relate back to gaps in literature review

VI. Conclusion

Introduction

There are many dynamics that can influence the quality of an interracial relationship. These factors include a person's socioeconomic background, religion, family values, social acceptance, and their environment. While interracial couples in the United States legally gained the right to marry in 1967, they continue to face barriers in society that same-race couples are not exposed to in their relationships. Previous studies have focused on the attitudes toward interracial relationships in order to explain society's standpoint on interracial dating. This study includes both the students' views on interracial dating, and also analyzes how these interracial couples' perspectives are influenced by these factors. The research in this study investigates interracial dating on California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo's campus, in order to evaluate the overall level of support received and what other elements affect the quality of these relationships. Due to interracial couples facing obstacles in society, this study also explores if these couples experience similar issues on Cal Poly's campus.

This study utilizes the grounded theory approach to analyze responses from twelve interracial couples that participated in qualitative interviews; using this method will help to gain a better understanding of their experiences on Cal Poly's campus—a predominately White university. In addition, the couples' experiences will be compared with fellow students' perceptions of interracial couples on campus. Included is an analysis of how couples with different racial and ethnic identities navigate their interracial relationships and what influences the quality of their relationships. There are several factors that can affect the quality of interracial couples. Among these influences are the environment that they are in, their awareness, how they identify themselves and their relationship, and the amount of support and communication that the couples receive. It is important to determine if Cal Poly's environment is supportive of these

relationships and if it causes a positive or negative impact on them. Social acceptance and the specific environment these couples are in is a main concern in this study.

An important aspect for defining interracial relationships is exploring how these couples categorize themselves. My research relies on participants self-identifying their relationship as interracial. Other Cal Poly students were asked how they define interracial couples, which will be used as comparison to the self-definitions that the couples gave. Different definitions of what it means to be in an interracial relationship can change how couples are perceived on campus and certain couples could receive different levels of support based on this information. As a predominantly White campus, there is the potential for interracial couples to not feel as supported in their relationship while attending Cal Poly. The lack of diversity is a potential hindrance for interracial couples that do not feel they have proper representation on campus. If couples already have a unstable support system, they may choose to not involve themselves in an interracial relationship and it could also deter them from feeling accepted at Cal Poly. It is important to identify if these setbacks are occurring on campus in order for improvements to be made. Using a diverse set of perspectives, this study will help determine what obstacles a predominantly White university contains for interracial couples. Understanding their experience of navigating a college campus that lacks diversity will help open a dialogue on what difficulties many students face in this type of environment and what can be done to aid them while they attend Cal Poly.

Literature Review

Typically, studies done on interracial relationships have focused on attitudes toward interracial couples in order to explain society's standpoint on the issue, to evaluate the overall level of support received, or to compare these relationships to same-race relationships (Field,

2013; Knox et al., 2000; Bell & Hastings, 2015; Datzman & Gardner, 2000; Troy, Lewis-Smith & Laurenceau, 2006; Vaquera & Kao, 2005). There are also quite a few in-depth qualitative studies of interracial couples, which focus on the actual experiences of the couples, the challenges they face, and how they maintain a relationship despite these difficulties (Killian, 2002; Seshardi & Knudson-Martin, 2013). Other studies have focused on the racial differences regarding people's attitudes toward interracial dating, the likelihood a person will date interracially based on their racial identity, minority same-race relationships, and how perceptions vary among races based on age differences (Levin, Taylor & Caudle, 2007; McClintock, 2010). Some studies do encompass environmental factors focusing more on family support and acceptance and its influence on the couples. For example, Bell and Hastings (2015) explored how parental approval or disapproval impacted Black and White interracial couples by interviewing these couples about the ways in which their parents viewed interracial dating, their level of acceptance towards the relationship, and the effects of having dual approval as opposed to one-sided approval.

There are many factors that can influence the quality of interracial relationships. Friends and family often dictate the stability of these unions based off their level of acceptance. Killian (2002) interviewed Black-White couples and found that close friends and family reinforce "social norms around homogamy and discourage the partners in this sample from marrying interracially", yet some couples were willing to defy these expectations and establish new norms (p. 613). Others navigated around racial and ethnic differences by prioritizing homogenous characteristics. Societal acceptance was also found to affect the couple's level of comfort. Public harassment, micro-aggressions, and discrimination can put a huge strain on these relationships. In a qualitative study, Datzman and Gardner (2000) conducted in-depth interviews with

interracial couples to discuss public rejection and how they manage it by asking their personal experiences and their coping mechanisms. “The invasive ‘exploitative practice’ of staring frankly or ogling repeatedly was the most reliably mentioned and recalled of the public harassment experiences” (Datzman and Gardner, 2000, p. 3-4). The most common reactions to these micro-aggressions involved intentionally ignoring or repressing what was happening, avoidance, segregation, accompaniment, answering back and educating the public. Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) discovered distinct structures used to address the challenges couples face when they are colliding two different cultures. The purpose was “to discover how interracial couples from a range of backgrounds create strong, meaningful relationships despite potential problems” (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013, p. 43). Some couples integrated or melded both cultures together, while others were co-existing or agreeing to disagree. Many adopted the singularly assimilated structure where one partner assimilates more than the other. The rest were unable to resolve the conflicts created by these differences. Environmental factors were the strongest indicators of stress on couples and negatively affected the quality of their relationships.

Attitudes toward interracial dating varies by race, age, and level of exposure to these relationships. In a quantitative study conducted by Field, Kimuna, and Straus (2013), they addressed the feelings toward mixed-race dating and marital relationships between Black/White and Asian/White groups and the perceived parental perspectives on the matter. The results reveal that those in the “Other” racial category were most favorable toward interracial relationships, and Black students indicated their parents would be least favorable of an interracial relationship and marriage. In addition, predominately White universities showed more positive attitudes toward interracial unions than they historically did in Black universities. Knox et al., (2000) had a similar focus to their study with comparable results. Of the 620 university students who

completed the questionnaire, “almost one fourth (24.2%) reported having dated interracially and almost half (49.6%) expressed an openness to become involved in an interracial relationship” (Knox et al., 2000, para. 1). Black students, cohabitants, and students who have previously been in an interracial relationship were significantly more likely to express positive attitudes towards mixed-race unions. There were contradicting implications regarding Black families and acceptance. Their study claimed that in a Black family, the women play a key role in the level of acceptance for interracial dating. Since women tend to respond with higher levels of openness and less with prejudice to their children’s relationship choices, there may be more acceptance of a family member’s entry into an interracial relationship.

The racial and ethnic identities of both individuals in a mixed-race couple are connected to cultural differences, family acceptance, and awareness and perceptions. Levin, Taylor and Caudle (2007) discovered that the more racial identity the participant had, the less likely they were to date outside their racial group. On college campuses, minority organizations provide safe-spaces for minorities and allow for different cultures to be celebrated. These clubs are a positive aspect to college campuses especially campuses lacking diversity. A negative outcome to these organizations is the racial segregation that is produced. In order to counteract this aspect without eliminating cultural clubs would be to integrate programs that include interracial unions. In a mixed method study, McClintock (2010) found as a result of these organizations, that many of the respondents reported being in minority same-race relationships where they met through the minority clubs. Researchers concluded that the participants who indicated they would rather be in same-race relationships perhaps were never exposed to interracial liaisons or events on campus, which led to their segregated circle of friends and people they knew.

Interracial couples have a different experience than intra-racial couples when it comes to acceptance, cultural differences, family support, and facing conflicts due to the challenges unique to interracial couples. Vaquera and Kao (2005) found that there are barriers to interracial dating that remain an obstacle among youth, even though adolescents are far more accepting of these types of unions. Interracial couples reported having lower levels of affection in both public and private displays compared to same-race couples. Fear of societal rejection or discrimination forces these adolescent couples to hold back from displaying affection. Based on a mixed methods study, Troy, Lewis-Smith, and Laurenceau (2006) found that there were no significant differences between interracial and intra-racial relationships among relationship quality, conflict assessment, and attachment style. While interracial couples face distinctive challenges, their level of satisfaction mirrors those in same-race relationships.

These studies are necessary to address the overall societal perspective of this issue and the differences in these attitudes among race. In addition, they help to further explore the challenges that interracial couples face. However, little research has been conducted on how cultural differences impact the quality of interracial relationships and how one's hometown and upbringing shapes their worldview, which can affect the overall level of satisfaction within the relationship. Research has addressed how attitudes toward interracial dating varies by race, but more research needs to address how the level of awareness each partner has regarding societal acceptance, micro-aggressions, or discrimination is based off of their racial or ethnic identity. My study will further discuss environmental factors, family and social support, and the personal challenges interracial couples face while in a predominately White campus, in order to fill in the gaps of existing literature.

Methods

This study sample was taken from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo students, a predominantly White community. The research consisted of two parts: the first is an online, anonymous survey that was given to Cal Poly students to determine the climate toward interracial couples on campus; the second part includes twelve interracial couples that were interviewed to gain insight on their experiences.

Quantitative Survey

To capture students' perspectives of interracial couples on Cal Poly's campus, an online survey was used. This online, anonymous survey was posted in the Cal Poly Facebook 2018 to 2021 class groups to capture freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The anonymity of the surveys reduced participant bias for more accurate responses. The survey consisted of thirteen questions, five of these related to demographics and the remaining eight were content questions. The demographic questions included age, class year, gender, race/ethnicity, and hometown. Participants were all from the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo campus and the sample size included 234 students. The respondents were aged 18 to 24; 73.5% identified as female and 26.5% identified as male. Their race/ethnicities consisted of White, African American/Black, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Native American or Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and other. A majority of the respondents identified as White (79.9%) with the second and third largest groups being Hispanic/Latino (14.5%) and Asian (10.35%). These results accurately reflect the overall demographics of Cal Poly's campus. For the purposes of this study, race/ethnicity will be combined into two groups for statistical analysis: White (79.9%) and minorities (20.1%).

The survey questions were designed to determine if students had firsthand experiences of interracial relationships and their perceptions of how accepted interracial couples are on campus. Content questions used a Likert Scale to have students rate the statements from 1-5 based on their level of agreement.

Example Likert Scale statements used:

1. "Cal Poly has a diverse environment."
2. "The people I know are supportive of interracial relationships on campus."
3. "I consider Cal Poly to be a supportive environment for interracial relationships."
4. "Cal Poly is more supportive of interracial relationships than my hometown is of them."

My hypothesis was that White students would have a higher level of agreement with these statements than minority students. To test this hypothesis, I took the mean of the responses for each statement. I then used a t-test to compare the mean of each statement between White and minority students. By gaining the insights of a sample of Cal Poly students, I was able to create the context for the environment that interracial couples on campus are surrounded in.

Qualitative Interviews

A research group, consisting of six members, conducted the in-depth interviews with the couples. The majority of the interviewees were gained through convenience sampling, where subjects that were immediately available were interviewed. Snowball sampling was another technique used to have participants suggest other couples to interview. I also implemented an online survey through the Cal Poly Facebook groups to collect demographics and ask for willing interview participants; four of the couples responded through this method.

I used the Cal Poly guidelines for interviewing human subjects and followed the informed consent guidelines to ensure that subjects participated voluntarily. Each participant was made aware that they could withdraw at any time and signed informed consent paperwork

through both the online surveys and before the in-person interviews. Twelve couples that self-identified as interracial relationships were interviewed. The interview schedule was semi-structured with a guideline of questions that was flexible enough for impromptu follow up questions. Participants filled out a demographics survey prior to starting the interview. Each couple was interviewed together and then specific questions were asked to the partners individually without the other partner present to ensure privacy. The interviews lasted from about thirty minutes to over an hour and were recorded.

The interviewees identified as White, African American/Black, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, part-White and Native American, part-White and Native Hawaiian, or a mixture of previously listed races and ethnicities. In ten of the twelve couples, one partner identified as White while the other partner identified as African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, or a mixture of multiple races and ethnicities. In two of the couples, both partners identified as a mixture of races and ethnicities. All participants were Cal Poly San Luis Obispo students, ranging from freshmen to seniors or recent graduates, and were aged from 18 to 26 years old. Of the twenty-four participants, half identified as male and the other half identified as female; all twelve couples were in heterosexual relationships. Religion among the participants varied from Christian, Roman Catholic, Buddhist, Jewish, Agnostic, Atheist or not religious. Eight of the couples had partners with different religions from each other, or no religion. Three couples identified as having the same religion. The education levels of the participants' parents ranged from high school graduates/GED to Master's degrees. The majority of the participants' hometowns were towns in California such as Orange County, San Francisco, Paso Robles, Long Beach, San Jose, Santa Barbara, etc. Two of the participants identified their hometowns outside of California in Maplewood, NJ and Fort Worth, TX.

The topics that these questions focused on included the comfort level of the couple, how their friends and family felt about their relationship, potential challenges, positive and negative influences, if there were any cultural differences and how the couple dealt with them.

Example questions for couples together include:

1. "How comfortable do you feel walking around campus together?"
2. "What are the challenges of being in an interracial relationship?"

Example questions for individual partners:

3. "How do you feel people perceive you, personally, in this relationship, compared to individuals in a same-race relationship?"
4. "How accepting is your family of this relationship and are some relatives more accepting than others?"
5. "Do you and your partner encounter cultural differences related to your racial and ethnic backgrounds? How do you think your cultural differences affect the quality of your relationship?"

I used the grounded theory approach to analyze the collected data. The grounded theory method consists of "systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1). Each interview was recorded and then manually transcribed to best engage directly with the text. "Grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes interactive strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analysis" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1). Once transcribed, line-by-line coding was used to analyze each transcript. Initial preliminary codes were determined and put into categorical codes. From there, the preliminary theory emerged.

While I was aware of the topic of interracial dating and the potential issues surrounding it, I did not fully understand the implications of it in society and how people within interracial

relationships felt and experienced it themselves. The grounded theory approach allowed me to have the couples be the expert on this issue. It was the best approach to realistically interpret how and why subjects are feeling the way that they do. Through hand transcribing and line-by-line coding, I was able to fully engage with the data to better connect with my participants and realize the social significance behind this data.

Results and Analysis

Quantitative Results

Racial and ethnic identity is an important aspect of interracial relationships and can affect how these couples are perceived by others. Cal Poly students were asked what they consider an interracial relationship to be: 79.9% agreed that it includes partners of different racial identities and 51.7% agreed it should also include partners of different ethnic identities. The majority of participants indicated that interracial meant multiple racial identities within the couples; however, only about half of the respondents reported that it could also include different ethnicities. Couples that are more visibly interracial would be more likely to face adverse treatment due to these observations.

Based on the survey sample of Cal Poly students, 89.7% of students reported that they knew people who have been in an interracial relationship. From this sample, roughly 36.6% also responded that they had previously or were currently in what they identified as an interracial relationship. Students that identified as a minority racial or ethnic category were more likely to have experienced an interracial relationship than those that identified as White.

Participants were presented with statements that they rated on a scale of 1-5: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. For “Cal Poly has a diverse environment”, participants on average rated the statement as a 2 for disagree. The statement, “The people I know are supportive of

interracial relationships on campus”, received an average response of 4 for agree. For the statement, “I consider Cal Poly to be a supportive environment for interracial relationships”, the average was 4 for agree. Finally, the statement of “Cal Poly is a more supportive of interracial relationships than my hometown is of them”, received a 3 for neither agree nor disagree. Overall, participants responded that they did not believe that Cal Poly is a diverse environment. However, the responses revealed that students on average agreed that both the people they know and the campus is supportive of interracial couples.

Due to the respondents disproportionately identifying as White, I hypothesized that there was a difference in responses based on racial or ethnic identity. To test this hypothesis, I conducted an independent-samples t-test with each of the Likert Scale responses to compare the level of agreement among White and minority participants.

“Cal Poly has a diverse environment.”

There was a significant difference in scores for White ($M=2.2$, $SD=0.9$) and minority ($M=1.7$, $SD=0.8$) participants; $t(232)=3.2$, $p = 0.001$. These results suggest that racial/ethnic identity did affect participant responses regarding Cal Poly’s diversity on campus.

“The people I know are supportive of interracial relationships on campus.”

There was not a significant difference in scores for White ($M=4.2$, $SD=0.9$) and minority ($M=4.0$, $SD=0.8$) participants; $t(232)=1.3$, $p = 0.2$. Based on these results, racial/ethnic identity did not affect if participants felt that the people they know are supportive of interracial relationships on campus.

“I consider Cal Poly to be a supportive environment for interracial relationships.”

There was a significant difference in scores for White ($M=3.8$, $SD=0.9$) and minority ($M=3.4$, $SD=0.9$) participants; $t(232)=3.0$, $p = 0.003$. The results suggest that racial/ethnic

identity did affect participants' responses how much they agreed that Cal Poly is a supportive environment for interracial relationships.

“Cal Poly is more supportive of interracial relationships than my hometown is of them.”

There was also a significant difference in scores for White ($M=2.7$, $SD=1.2$) and minority ($M=2.3$, $SD=1.2$) participants; $t(232)=2.3$, $p = 0.021$. Based on these results, it suggests that racial/ethnic identity did affect the responses for Cal Poly's level of supportive versus their hometowns.

Using the results of the t-tests, a trend suggests that the White participants had a significant difference in responses for Cal Poly's diversity, how supportive Cal Poly is, and Cal Poly being more supportive than their hometowns when compared to the minority participants. The White participants had a slightly more positive level of agreement. While respondents indicated that Cal Poly is a supportive environment for interracial couples, these results suggest that there is difference in perceptions between White and minority respondents.

Qualitative Results

Through the interviews, I discovered major factors that influenced the quality of these interracial relationships by analyzing their experiences. Using the grounded theory method, I found common factors that were prevalent throughout each of the interviews. I organized my results into categorical codes based on their significance. It allowed my theory to develop on the influences of the environment that they were in, how aware of it they were, their own identity and the perceptions that each participant held, and the amount of support and communication that each couple received.

Environment and Awareness

On Cal Poly's campus, there are a limited amount of students who experience interracial dating. As a result, many of the couples suggested that social acceptance had an impact on the quality of their relationships. They felt that this could be attributed to Cal Poly's lack of diversity amongst the student population. Diego, who had been in a relationship with Lindsey for three months, noticed people staring at them but did not feel that his partner was as aware.

Diego (Hispanic male):

She doesn't see things the way I see because I'm Hispanic and she's Caucasian...
like sometimes I don't know if it's just me or not but sometimes I see people
staring at us or people staring at me but not her. I don't know if it's us together or
just me getting a weird vibe.

Cal Poly's environment is a source of some uncertainty that the participants felt due to their race or ethnicity. It was also apparent to them while with their partner on campus. Rae, a Black and Hispanic female, described a similar experience and expressed that she did not feel as welcome on Cal Poly's campus. Rae stated, "I think I notice more than he does because already being on campus as a Black person, as just a minority, period, I already feel unwelcomed in a lot of places so then I keep a lookout for that." As a minority on campus, students may not feel as welcomed at Cal Poly and it has led these partners in interracial relationships to be more aware of these occurrences.

The length of time that a couple has been together, was another factor for how aware they were of others' reactions. The longer the couples were together, the more comfortable they were with expressing their awareness of the societal interactions they encountered while on campus together. Nathan and Kylie, a Black male and White female, had been together for three years

and were able to openly identify and express the reactions they received from others around campus. Nathan explained that, “There was one [time on campus] when the tours were going on...and I got the weirdest look from like almost the entire group.” The couple was able to discuss why they felt they had been singled out. Kylie realized it was most likely because Nathan is Black and he had responded that it could have been because “I was holding a little White girl’s hand.” Although the couples interviewed expressed some knowledge of outsider reaction and awareness to their interracial dating, the most prevalent issue was the social discomfort that they experienced when they did not feel fully accepted.

Perception

From the interviews, I gained a better understanding of how the participants’ outlooks were developed and the influence that it has on their actions. Their perspectives on the topic varied according to their hometown, upbringing, exposure to diversity, and their racial or ethnic identity. They discussed their differences in regards to race, family, and where they were raised. Often, the minority within the couple had more experience with diversity and social awareness due to their position in society. Socioeconomic status also played a role in their perspectives. For example, many respondents that identified as White or half-White and grew up in lower-income areas had a better opportunity to establish empathy and understanding.

Dan (White and Native American male):

I grew up in low poverty in San Francisco so I was able to see that firsthand and experience that firsthand so like I never grew up in like higher, middle to upper class neighborhood... I was able to see what low poverty is like and then once I saw interracial couples, I just didn’t see anything that was wrong with it.

In this instance, Dan discussed how his upbringing in a low-income, highly diverse

area shaped his perspective as well as how people perceived him. While he was not the minority in the relationship, he had more social awareness, which influenced his understanding of being in an interracial relationship. In another interview, Cole, a White male, grew up in an affluent home in a predominantly conservative, White area. This impacted his ability to understand the standpoint of his partner, Jaylen, a Black female. Cole had not experienced discrimination, stereotypes, or social rejection and had not been exposed to any form of diversity. Therefore, it was difficult for him to display empathy and understanding.

Jaylen explained her perspective:

So for [Cole], I feel like it's really hard for him to see my perspective of things being female and Black in America... And ya know, I see how sometimes Black people in the media or just in life just being more attacked than others. I'm a lot more empathetic towards that and I definitely internalize other people's struggles more and I feel like... he's had everything like handed to him his whole life and he hasn't had to work for anything so he doesn't see what I see.

In this instance of perspective, hometown and upbringings as well as racial identity played a huge role in the development of empathy. The difference in perspectives caused a divide between the couples that have had opposite experiences.

Identity

Similarly, how they defined and viewed their racial and ethnic identity played a role in their relationship. They experienced cultural differences, which either made a positive impact on their relationship or put a strain on it. Religious differences were often problematic especially if their families had strong religious affiliations. Many participants were mixed race; they had trouble identifying with one race and feeling accepted by either race they identified with. Based

on their racial and ethnic identity, each individual in the relationship experienced social acceptance and stereotyping differently. These factors translated into their relationships affecting the quality, which was more or less apparent based on how long they had been dating. Based on the interviews, the partner that identified as the minority in each relationship had more experience with discrimination. In general they felt societal discrimination, which affected their identity and relationship.

As the minority in the relationship, their racial identity was more of an identifier than the White partner; this difference was heightened in an interracial relationship. Their racial and ethnic identities became contrasted, and brought it more to the surface. Outside observers also used their race as a key identifier in their relationships. Jaylen, a Black female, described her experience saying, “It’s literally only like an identifier. It’s like if they don’t know who you are, it’s like ‘is it that Black girl that you’ve been around?’” She responded to this issue by saying, “I don’t want to think of myself as that one exception... I don’t want people down the line to be like ‘oh I dated this Black chick one time.’” She also experienced a lot of stereotypes for dating a White person. “People tend to tell me that because I don’t, more often than not, date Black people that I’m like ‘whitewashed.’” This term was used in a negative way in order to police her behavior based off her racial identity. In another instance, Dan, a White and Native American male who grew up in a low-income diverse area mentioned the comments he received for not ‘behaving’ like his race. He stated, “I get a lot of that because of two things, because I grew up in low poverty in San Francisco because I’m... in an interracial relationship.” Dan was also often told that he was “not *really* White”. He was viewed as more cultured and socially aware by his partner and friends. Racial and ethnic identities influenced their personal experiences within the relationship, their understanding, their perspectives, and how people perceived their relationship.

Support

The level of support received from friends and family and the influence it has, greatly affects the quality of interracial relationships. I found that acceptance from friends and family members affected the couples' relationships. Friend approval provided a great deal of support for these interracial couples. Julia, a White female, stated that her friends and family were supportive of her relationship and loved her partner. "All of my high school friends love him, they've never actually liked someone this much that I've ever brought around." Both of the participant's high school friends and current friends from Cal Poly approved of her partner. "My current friends here all get along with him really, really well. So everyone seems to really like him which is really easy for me." The ability for her to have her friends give that level of support positively influenced her and appeared to generally improve the quality of her relationship.

Other participants reflected on how they had the same friend groups as their partners and it further allowed the friends to be more supportive of the relationship.

Jessie (White and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander):

They're all very supportive of it because we have the same friend-group. So we were friends before we got into this relationship and I think it was really just...

They're okay with it. And then my friends back home are very supportive of it as well.

Jessie found the influence of having the same friends to be helpful toward their relationship.

Nate, a White male, said that he "had a lot of friends who were in interracial relationships and no one looked twice at it." Nate benefitted from his friend group already normalizing interracial relationships; his friends did not question that the relationship was interracial.

At times, the level of support from friends even exceeded family acceptance for the participants. Karen, an Asian American female, said that both her friends at Cal Poly and in her hometown were accepting and supportive of her relationship. Karen stated that “they’re like more supportive... than my family sometimes, so that’s nice.” With the additional support and acceptance received from Karen’s friend group, she was able to better handle the potential lack of support from her family. Claire, a White and Filipino female, warned of entering an interracial relationship if there was a lack of friend support available. Without that additional support and the potential disapproval from friends, additional stressors and difficulties could be added to the relationship and negatively impact it.

Family influence also affected the quality of the couples’ relationships. Multiple participants mentioned that members of their family had previously or currently been in interracial relationships or marriages. This allowed the participants to feel more secure in their relationship when informing their family members because they knew it would already be accepted. Matt, a White male, said that, “my uncles married people of other races so they didn’t have any problems with it, I didn’t really expect them to.” Due to having family members in already established interracial relationships, Matt had anticipated having support from his other family members. His partner, Karen, also had family members that had been dating interracially.

Karen (Asian American):

I think my grandparents, since my aunts were dating interracially, they kinda like got over it. But I feel like if I, when my aunts were doing it there was like issues, and then now they’re kinda just like we can’t do anything.

While there had been previously been issues regarding interracial relationships within Karen’s family, having members that had previously navigated through these issues allowed it to be more

acceptable for Karen. There could have been issues for Karen dating interracially, but she felt that she had gained her extended family members' support due to her aunts introducing their interracial relationships first.

Certain participants expressed that they had generally accepting family members but that other members who were more conservative revealed their hesitancy toward the relationship. Jessie, White and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, said, "my immediate family is very accepting and my grandparents are very accepting." However, her other relatives were more conservative: "They're just kind of a little hesitant towards it 'cause it's not something, I guess, they're accustomed to." In this case, Jessie did not have other family members' influence with pre-established interracial relationships in the family. This held more issues for participants that had family members that were more hesitant and uncertain of their relationship.

Generally from the interviews, participants had overwhelming support and acceptance from their family members. Dan, a White and Native American male, said that his family were "all completely accepting of it." Rae, a Black and Hispanic female, realized that one of the most positive influences on their relationship were "friends and family! Just support—our support systems." A strong support system had a great impact on the quality of these interracial relationships and became a positive influence for the participants involved.

Communication

From these interviews, I found that communication was an essential part of these relationships and aided their ability to navigate any interracial related issues and difficulties. The partners that were more understanding and communicated more efficiently, felt more comfortable in their relationships. The ability for the participants to convey understanding toward their partner and communicate was essential to the quality of their relationships. Claire, a

White and Filipino female, noticed that their common friend group was more supportive toward her which affected her partner negatively. “I try to understand where he comes from more. So if they’re like *break up with him*, I’m like well they’re telling me that, I wonder how he feels about it. So, you know, it’s listening a lot more.” Claire makes sure to pay attention to her partner more and listen to his feelings to ensure that he can be more secure in their relationship. When communication was strong between the partners, they were able to overcome issues more effectively and felt more comfortable with each other.

Julia (White):

I love the fact that I can talk to him. And we have gone through hard things in our relationship...just life happening and the fact that like he is so understanding about it... So I think the fact that we’re like able to talk about everything.

Julia found that in her relationship, communication and openness were one of the most positive aspects. Being able to discuss and work through the difficulties that they faced increased the quality of their relationship. Karen, an Asian American female, expressed that “if we have issues we just talk it out, no matter what it is which is a lot better, and I think that like helps.” She believed that communication aided their relationship and made it more beneficial.

Personal insecurities and lack of communication between partners appeared to have a negative influence on the quality of their relationship. The inability to communicate efficiently lead to more difficulties between them.

Jaylen (Black):

From my like observation of him it doesn’t seem like he’s attracted to... my attributes... my characteristics? So just like sometimes I’ll question it... and I’ve asked him before like are you happy? Like I won’t straight up be like are you ok

with me being Black?! But sometimes I'm just like are you happy? And he'll be like 'ya I'm completely happy!' So I just push it out of my mind a little bit.

Jaylen questioned some aspects of her relationship due the lack of communication between her and her partner. While she was feeling insecure over whether her partner was directly attracted to her being Black, it caused a rift when she was unable to effectively communicate her concern to him. From the lack of communication, he remained unaware that this was an issue that continues to worry her.

Additional difficulties were caused due to miscommunication and how the situation was interpreted from the partner. Rae, a Black and Hispanic female, mentioned that her brother joked that he has a preference for all the sisters to date Black people. When Rae told her partner, he "took that as in my brother saying that he wouldn't accept him because he wasn't Black, so we've had problems with that." The miscommunication caused insecurity within Rae's partner based on the assumption that he would not gain acceptance due to not being Black. Jaylen, a Black female, also elaborated that she has a large, outspoken family that will actively announce differences such as race. She did not think it would be appropriate if they did that in front of her partner and she did not "want him to feel uncomfortable and for it to like ruin our relationship or put a strain on our relationship but it's like... that's the only challenge." Jaylen found this to be a challenge because of the risk of her partner misinterpreting those actions which could negatively affect their relationship. Increased difficulties were common among relationships where partners were unable to effectively communicate with each other.

Discussion

Through these findings, I revealed the level of support on Cal Poly's campus that the students perceive and also provided students' experiences of interracial relationships in this

environment. These findings highlight the importance of social acceptance and the environment that the couples come from and currently reside in. Cultural differences and perceptions have a large effect on the quality of interracial relationships. Acceptance from friends and family members is crucial for individuals to feel more secure in their interracial relationships.

Being aware of outsider's observations and reactions toward interracial couples affected the quality of their relationships. Being overly aware of these reactions could lead to the couples feeling uncomfortable in their relationships. The more secure that couples were, meant that they were better able to brush off these outsiders' reactions and not let it affect the quality of their relationship; however, the environment also changed these factors. Certain couples felt more comfortable in San Luis Obispo because it was more liberal than their conservative hometowns, leading this to not be an issue for them. In contrast, other couples had grown up in more diverse areas and they felt more discomfort at Cal Poly. The lack of diversity on campus, and in this city, increased the reactions toward the couples due to it not being a usual occurrence. Multiple couples acknowledged that it was not a common experience to see other interracial couples at Cal Poly. Students also agreed that Cal Poly lacks diversity but that they still felt some level of support from campus.

The couples' perceptions affected their outlooks and it influenced their actions within the relationship. The individuals within these couples experienced differences due to their upbringings and own personal perceptions on life. This caused tension between couples if they had different political stances or outlooks on policies because of these different upbringings. Their varied perspectives, at times, left them at odds with one another. However, other couples also expressed their enjoyment at learning about these cultural differences that they experience as a couple. They viewed having cultural differences as a positive aspect of their relationship that

they could both benefit from. How the individuals defined and viewed their racial and ethnic identities also played a major role in their relationship. Those that had mixed races or ethnicities experienced more issues at times. Being unsure of which of those communities they best fit into was a difficulty. Certain couples had different religions from each other which caused future concern regarding celebrating holidays, marriage, and potentially raising children. Identifying as different religions also meant the possibility for the partner's family to not accept the relationship. Stereotypes were a cause for concern when entering into the relationship or when revealing their relationship to friends and family. These apprehensions were that family members would develop preconceived notions about the partners based on their race or ethnicity. They also faced microaggressive comments from friends and family that left the individuals feeling concerned.

Previous research involving interracial couples on college campuses only focused on quantitative surveys to determine their level of acceptance and did not directly interview interracial couples. My research contributes to existing literature by including the addition of in-depth qualitative interviews involving interracial couples, and provides the context of their experiences while in college. The previous qualitative studies that involved interracial couples mainly emphasized family support or opposition and did not take into consideration peer support. They also did not specifically study interracial couples on university campuses. My results indicated that students of all races and ethnicities felt their peer group on campus was supportive of interracial relationships. The couples interviewed also felt that their friends were incredibly supportive. The level of support received from friends and family was crucial to how comfortable individuals felt within their interracial relationships. Having acceptance from friends and family members was necessary and couples considered their support systems to be an

important positive influence on their relationships.

Another important finding not specified in previous research, was that previous family interracial relationships aided in gaining family support. Friends and family members that had already engaged in interracial dating meant that the individuals could feel more confident that their relationships would be accepted from these different groups. Couples that did not have as supportive family members, were able to rely on a supportive friend base instead. Some difficulties did arise out of less supportive family members. Often the immediate family was more supportive while extended members were the ones to express hesitancy. This had the potential to cause stress on the relationship. Some of this uncertainty was alleviated once partners met with the respective family members. An interesting finding was that while it could be expected that White relatives would be more hesitant toward the interracial relationship—and in some cases were—other cases of uncertainty involved relatives of minority races. A few of these instances include relatives that were either Black or Asian. Participants explained that these relatives would prefer they would date partners within their own racial group. This indicates that certain racial groups would prefer to keep some form of racial endogamy intact through their relatives. However, this was a rarer occurrence and the majority of the couples had, to some degree, a positive support system that enhanced their relationships.

The ability for the partners to effectively communicate their thoughts and feelings to one another was important to maintaining a positive relationship. The couples that expressed openness and understanding between the partners meant that they could more productively work out their issues. However, the couples that lacked these communication skills were more likely to develop issues related to being interracial. These difficulties included not being comfortable as the minority in the relationship or whether they would obtain acceptance from family members.

This had the potential to lead to insecurities within the relationship when not expressed effectively. If the couples were able to be open with one another and work out their issues instead, they were able to have a more positive, understanding relationship where they felt secure within it.

The implications of this research are that there are multiple aspects which establish how individuals experience their interracial relationships. Previous research had “not examined the narratives that circulate between interracial partners around their experiences of co-authoring their relationships in a structural context that favors homogamous, intraracial relationships” (Killian, 2002, p. 603-604). My research explored these experiences of interracial couples while being in a predominantly White environment and allowed them to share their perspectives. Despite being on a mostly White college campus, interracial couples were still able to feel secure within their relationships. While interracial couples felt generally supported on Cal Poly’s campus or at least by the people they know, the results explored that minority students were more likely to perceive a difference in the environment when compared to their White classmates. These results added onto Killian’s study (2002), where the interracial couples “agreed that Black spouses were more likely than White spouses to notice and be emotionally affected by negative public reactions” (p. 608). As a result, Cal Poly would benefit from increasing the campus’s amount of diversity and programs that further reinforce their level of support. Referencing Levin, Taylor and Caudle’s (2007) suggestion, creating more interracial clubs would be a beneficial way to intermingle students of different races and ethnicities. Cal Poly as a whole would advance from improving how minority students feel on campus. In turn, this would create a substantially positive effect on interracial couples that are currently feeling some insecurity due to their racial and ethnic identities.

Conclusion

Limitations from this research project include that more interracial couples were unable to be interviewed. The sample size for the qualitative interviews included twelve interracial couples at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. It was difficult to find interracial couples due to the lack of diversity at the university, and a limited timeframe did not allow for the research to be taken further. The research could have been expanded on by interviewing people outside of the relationships to see how they perceived interracial dating as well. Another variable for future research, would be to include a more diversified group of interracial couples such as where both partners identified as different racial/ethnic minorities. These factors would have given an outlook from both parties, and would have provided more details on how accepted Cal Poly students are of interracial dating.

I provided a mixed methods approach to previous research that only focused on quantitative data for interracial relationships on university campuses. My quantitative research provided specific data while allowing these couples to provide their experiences as context. This research provides information on how the racial and ethnic identity of the partners influence their relationship and affects the perspectives that they bring to it. Exploring information on participants' hometowns and upbringings allowed for further analysis on how these partners developed their perceptions. It also aided in explaining how the partners' cultural differences potentially benefit or harm their relationship. Overall, this study helped explore how accepted interracial couples feel on a predominantly White campus to provide details on how they experience their relationships.

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