

# **RACE COGNIZANCE AND COLORBLINDNESS**

## ***Effects of Latino/Non-Hispanic White Intermarriage***<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

Latino racial/ethnic intermarriage has grown over time, increases with each generation in the United States, and occurs most frequently with non-Hispanic Whites. This article answers the question: How does intermarriage change racial/ethnic consciousness for both partners? Drawing on in-depth interviews with thirty intermarried Latinos and non-Hispanic Whites, I critique assimilation, Whiteness, and colorblindness theories, finding two predominant racial consciousness outcomes of intermarriage: race cognizance and racial colorblindness. First, intermarriage can enhance Whites' understanding of race/ethnicity and racism, a phenomenon I call race cognizance. Second, intermarriage can produce colorblind discourse that focuses on similarity, yet in ways inconsistent with colorblind racism. Racial consciousness varies by ethnicity: most intermarried Whites reported race cognizance, an outcome unforeseen by traditional theories of integration, whereas Latinos more often espoused colorblindness. These understandings are used in different contexts: race cognizance is stimulated by the public domain, whereas colorblindness is evoked in private space. These findings demonstrate that racial consciousness is fluid, and influenced by intermarriage and ethnicity.

**Keywords:** Intermarriage, Latinos, Whiteness, Race, Assimilation, Racial Attitudes, Colorblindness

### **INTRODUCTION**

Racial/ethnic intermarriage involving Latinos has grown over time. Endogamy among U.S.-born Hispanics declined from 77% in 1970 to 61% in 2005 (Rosenfeld 2008). Accordingly, intermarriage with Whites increased for U.S.-born Hispanics over 1980–2008 (women from 27% to 35%; men from 31% to 38%) (Qian and Lichter, 2011, p. 1071). In 2010, 9% of Whites married someone who was Hispanic or of another race, nearly tripling the rate from 1980 (Passel et al., 2012). Generation in the United States also increases the likelihood of intermarriage for Latin American immigrants and their descendants (Murguía 1982; Saenz et al., 2007; Telles and Ortiz, 2008). Latinos most frequently intermarry with non-Hispanic Whites, with regional

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specificity in the United States and proximity to coethnics moderating intermarriage rates (Lee and Bean, 2010; Qian and Lichter, 2011; Telles and Ortiz, 2008). Racial/ethnic intermarriage has been viewed by classical assimilation literature as the gold-standard of integration (Gordon 1964), an endpoint indicating the collapse of group boundaries. The notion of intermarriage as a hallmark of integration processes has tremendous staying power, influencing much scholarship that documents changing intermarriage rates and race relations theory. The task for this article is to move beyond this understanding and answer the question: How does intermarriage shift racial consciousness, that is, understanding of race/ethnicity? In-depth interviews with thirty intermarried Latinos and non-Hispanic Whites<sup>2</sup> reveal two outcomes. First, intermarriage enhances Whites' understanding about the salience of race in the social world, an outcome I refer to as "race cognizance." Second, intermarriage can minimize the importance of race/ethnicity and produce colorblind discourse. In sum, intermarriage among Latinos and Whites can produce acute racial/ethnic awareness as well as minimize ethnic distinctions, outcomes mediated by ethnicity, context, and length of marriage.

## ASSIMILATION, WHITENESS, AND COLORBLINDNESS

Theories of intergroup contact are firmly situated in literature on immigration, assimilation, and intermarriage. Assimilation theory—which only concerns itself with the movement of the minority group *toward* the mainstream (Whiteness), never the reverse—assumes that increased closeness between groups will minimize attention to difference. This literature was inspired by researchers at the University of Chicago seeking to explain immigrant adaptation from southern and eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century (Park 1950; Park et al., 1925; Wirth 1956). Robert Park's (1950) seminal "race relations cycle" (p. 188) envisioned immigrant integration as a step-wise progression that moved from contact to eventual absorption into the Anglo-American middle class mainstream. Immigrant groups were envisioned as undergoing an "unlearning process" (Warner and Srole, 1945, p. 295), implying that it was incumbent upon immigrants to change while the majority culture remained unmodified. Even when assimilation is understood as occurring on multiple dimensions, as Milton Gordon (1964) theorized, the presumption remained that integration was uni-directional, requiring the immigrant ethnic group to adapt to the Anglo-dominant mainstream. Predicated on notions of European racial superiority, the objective of Anglo-conformity is to maintain "English institutions...the English language, and English-oriented cultural patterns as *dominant* and *standard* in American life" (Gordon 1964, p. 88, emphasis added). This presumption (or prescription) of "Anglo-conformity" has reigned throughout American history.

As a whole, the immigration and incorporation literature misses reactions from the host society. Even when contemporary scholars who study post-1965 immigration from Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean acknowledge that the mainstream is "remade" with inflows of immigrants, and that "assimilation, as a form of ethnic change, may occur through changes taking place in groups on both sides of the boundary" (Alba and Nee, 2003, p. 11), dominant society largely escapes analytic attention. We presently lack a sophisticated understanding of the mechanisms that produce this "remaking" as well as what this "remaking" consists of beyond demographic makeup. The concept of "boundary blurring" is useful here, that is, the process whereby the social boundary and accompanying distinctions become less distinct (Alba and Nee, 2003, p. 60). Improving upon outmoded models of assimilation as a one-way process, this "new" assimilation theory posits that the mainstream is changed through immigration and increased inter-group relations and yet we are left to wonder how and to what end.

Intermarriage remains a critical measure of integration, as it is thought to demonstrate decreased social distance between groups.<sup>3</sup> The “equal-status contact hypothesis,” the proposition that people who interact with others who are roughly equal in status are less prejudicial, opens the door for intermarriage as potentially transformative (Feagin and O’Brien, 2003; Yancey 2007). Yet this strand of intermarriage scholarship has not been in dialogue with assimilation theory, which remains vague on how ethnic minorities affect the majority group. That intermarriage may work *counter* to assimilation theory’s prediction of eroded racial boundaries and instead generate racial progressivism and awareness of race/racism among Whites is an important empirical question (O’Brien 2008). Cross-racial/ethnic intimacy, in either the family of origin or family of procreation, can aid the development of Whites’ progressive racial attitudes (Feagin and O’Brien, 2003; O’Brien 2008; Twine 2010; Yancey 2007), such as approval of racial intermarriage and affirmative action, and denouncement of racial discrimination. France Winddance Twine’s (2010) work on Black-White relationships in Britain informs us that interracial intimacy “provides one possible route for transforming one’s sociopolitical vision” (p. 113). Interracial relationships can thus be micro-level “sites of sociopolitical knowledge” (Twine and Steinbugler, 2007, p. 342) that may catalyze racial consciousness. Relatedly, Ruth Frankenberg (1993) found that racism can have a “rebound effect” (p. 112) whereby Whites may feel slighted on a partner’s behalf in reaction to racial discrimination. The notion that intermarriage may produce *race cognizance*, as opposed to deflect attention to race, contradicts the standard position that intermarriage is an indicator of assimilation.

Assimilation literature treats intermarriage as an outcome, presuming that changes in norms and attitudes occur *prior* to intermarriage. By treating intermarriage as a result, this body of scholarship conceals the possibility of intermarriage as an explanatory factor behind people’s changed perspectives on race and ethnicity. This prospect turns assimilation theory on its head, reversing the direction of causality. I further critique assimilation theory for its proposition that erosion of difference accompanies integration. While assimilation—or the *reduction of* difference—is typically thought to reduce *attention to* difference, bilateral integration may actually shape the *recognition of* difference. Attentive to the two-way nature of assimilation, this article uses the traditional yardstick of intermarriage as a point of departure rather than an endpoint and is mindful to how intermarriage affects both the minority and majority group.

Whiteness studies, which dawned with pioneers W. E. B. Du Bois (1920) and James Baldwin (1963), and gained momentum in the early 1990s, aimed to theorize Whiteness, like subordinate racial/ethnic categories, as a historically, legally, and socially constructed category (Frankenberg 1993; Haney López 1996; Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998; Roediger 2005). These early studies revealed that lower-class Whites sought to distance themselves from lower-class racial minorities in order to gain racial advantage (Ignatiev 1995; Roediger 1999). Whiteness studies highlights how Whiteness, like other non-White racial categories, is socially constructed and that meanings associated with Whiteness are tied to class status and are context-specific, influenced by race and class compositions of different localities (Hartigan 1999; McDermott 2006). The insight that Whiteness is produced locally and is a byproduct of racial and class relations lay the groundwork for the extension this study provides: that not just White racial *identity* but the White racial *consciousness* is similarly variegated.

Whiteness studies have largely missed the opportunity to theorize possibilities for changes in Whites’ racial consciousness. Whites are understood to be “possessive” of their Whiteness, guarding the material and symbolic privileges it yields (Lipsitz 1995, p. 369). Yet Monica McDermott’s (2006) regional comparison of Whiteness urges us to consider White racial identity “as a set of patterned experiences,” an insight which

“can help in understanding the connections between identity and context” (p. 58). If White racial identity, and I would add racial consciousness, is informed by context, then marital and family context warrant close examination. Without claiming that marriages are inherently equal (they can involve disequilibria of power as well as racialized, gendered, and capitalistic desires [Nemoto 2009; Thai 2008]), I posit that racial/ethnic intermarriage can disrupt Whites’ “white habitus.” Following Pierre Bourdieu, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) defines “whites habitus” as Whites’ “set of primary networks and associations with other whites that reinforces the racial order by fostering racial solidarity among whites and negative affect toward racial ‘others’” (p. 16). Diversified social environments and cooperative interaction among people of equal status can lead to “personal growth and deeper understanding of different perspectives” (Perry 2002, p. 67), making intermarriage a suitable site to study shifted racial consciousness. In this article, I position Whites as interactive subjects whose agency and interpersonal relationships expose them to different racialized perspectives that may animate them about race and ethnicity in new ways. My contribution to Whiteness studies is to expose Whites’ racial consciousness as varied and influenced by interethnic intimacy.

Not exclusive to Whites, racial colorblindness is “the belief that racial group membership should not be taken into account, or even noticed” (Apfelbaum et al., 2012, p. 205). Humans, of course, do not actually *not see* difference. In a conceptual sense, everyone “sees” race, for it is “encoded into individuals through iterative social practices” (Obasogie 2010, p. 585). In the post-civil rights era, “new racism” involves the replacement of overt forms of racism with “structured racism” or “colorblind racism” where White privileges are deeply embedded in the organization of society. Bonilla-Silva (2003) defines colorblind racism as discourse which “explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics” (p. 2). A linchpin of colorblind racism is White “transparency”: the tendency of Whites not to think of themselves in racial terms or to consider their norms, behaviors, experiences, or perspectives as White-specific (Haney López 1996, p. 111). Ruth Frankenberg (1993) calls this phenomenon “color- and power-evasiveness” (p. 15), a discursive strategy that conceals inequalities and emphasizes cross-racial similarities. Colorblind silence only entrenches and immunizes race through non-recognition (Haney López 1996). Moving beyond the superiority/inferiority divide that characterizes race relations requires that Whites transcend transparency and recognize the salience their own racial identity.

While colorblind racism and colorblind silence are harmful to the project of racial justice, this is a totalizing theoretical framework that does not capture the colorblindness articulated by intermarried couples. A departure from documented trends, I found that intermarried couples invoke colorblindness *optimistically*, signaling a moment when race/ethnicity does not inhibit relations or bespeak inequality. Furthermore, colorblindness literature oversimplifies racial consciousness by conceiving of it as dichotomous: one either is race conscious or colorblind. This bivariate conceptualization of mental constructs around race is unrealistically sharp and nullifies the possibility that people may view race as a powerful principle of social organization in certain circumstances but not others.

By putting three disparate strands of race relations literature in conversation with one another—assimilation, Whiteness studies, and colorblindness—one can now ask: How might Whites’ perspectives on race and ethnicity be shaped by interactions with non-Whites?<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this article, the question is sharpened to: How do ongoing, intimate relationships (intermarriage) between Latinos and Whites affect both parties in terms racial consciousness?

## METHODS

This article draws from interviews with thirty adults (fourteen married couples and two divorcees)<sup>5</sup> who are—or were—in Latino/White heterosexual intermarriages. Of the thirty adults, ten are Latina women, six are Latino men, five are White women, and nine are White men. Ten couples were comprised of Latina women and White men pairs, while six were Latino men and White women. While actual Hispanic/White marriage rates vary insignificantly by gender (Wang 2012), White males are more likely to date non-Whites than their female counterparts (Feliciano et al., 2009). This was reflected in the greater representation of Latina women and White men pairings in my sample. Thirteen couples hail from the northeast region of Kansas (Topeka, Lawrence, and Kansas City) and three from California (Los Angeles County). Four couples were married ten years or less, ten couples were married eleven years or more, and two individuals were divorced. While I sought both heterosexual and homosexual couples (I used the language of “lifetime partners” in requests for interviews), this article does not include any homosexual couples. I loosened the necessity of being currently married, since two divorcees wanted to participate.

This data is a portion of a larger comparative project on ethnic in-marriage and out-marriage among Latinos that contains 109 interviews from fifty families (twenty-four in California, twenty-six in Kansas). The subset of data used for this article includes *all* respondents who are currently or were married across the Latino/White ethnic line. Latino/White marriages account for the greatest share of intermarriages that took place in 2008–2010, accounting for 6.2% of new marriages, followed by other mixed (4.8%), White/Asian (2.2%), and White/Black (1.7%) (Wang 2012, p. 46). The Latino/White pairing is the most frequent out-marriage combination and therefore an appropriate site to gain insight into intermarried couples’ changing racial consciousness.

The rationale for drawing samples from California and Kansas is to compare a traditional migration gateway that borders Mexico and boasts a racially/ethnically diverse population with a new gateway for migration that is removed from the border and predominantly White. California’s population is 40.1% non-Hispanic White whereas Kansas’ population is 78.2% non-Hispanic White. The nation is composed of 16.3% Hispanic persons (of any race) whereas California, at 37.6% Hispanic, is over double that average and Kansas, at 10.5% Hispanic, is about half the national average (U.S. Census 2012). California’s non-Hispanic White population is about half that of Kansas and its Hispanic population is triple that of Kansas. California is not just diverse but boasts a very high intermarriage rate, 23.3% of marriages occurring in 2008–2010 crossing racial/ethnic lines, as compared to 16.4% in Kansas and 15.0% nationwide (Wang 2012). These intermarriage rates have implications for multiracial reporting on the Census; California has high rates of multiracial identification and is the only state in the union with a multiracial population exceeding one million (Lee and Bean, 2010). Population characteristics, intermarriage, and mixed race reporting all signal the greater diversity in California than Kansas and speak to the racial/ethnic landscape that individuals and couples navigate in their daily lives.

Concerning changing nationwide demographics, as of 2012, non-Hispanic Whites account for a minority of births in the United States for the first time (Passel et al., 2012). As a result of the growing share of minority births, projections forecast that non-Hispanic Whites will become a minority of the population (47%) by 2050 (Passel et al., 2012). Hispanics, the nation’s largest minority group, are expected to account for much of the population growth. In this article, I focus on Latino and non-Hispanic White couples because Latinos are most likely to intermarry with Whites than any

other racial/ethnic category (Lee and Bean, 2004). These findings shed light on consequences of intimate relationships that are becoming increasingly common.

The sample of thirty individuals representing sixteen couples is comprised of U.S.-born Latinos and the 1.5 generation—those who were born in Latin American countries but immigrated to the United States prior to their twelfth birthday (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001)—and their White, U.S.-born marital partners. Since intermarriage increases with generation in the United States (Murguía 1982; Telles and Ortiz, 2008), this research design captures Latinos who are more likely to intermarry than their immigrant counterparts. My recruitment strategies involved working through institutions that serve the community such as Catholic churches, Latino business organizations, and pre-existing professional contacts. Snowball sampling, as a second stage in the recruitment process, whereby I asked interviewees to recommend relatives, friends, neighbors, or work associates that might be suitable interviewees, was extremely effective. I used several social networks in order to get referrals for interviews, careful not to rely on a single source, since friends and relatives of one person likely vary in key features from the wider population. Utilizing the recommendations of several interviewees allowed me to expand in different directions than solely working with institutions would allow. By following various channels, I am confident that a reasonable variety of people, with a range of experiences and perspectives, are represented. The sources for recruitment for couples (not individuals) represented in this article include: snowball sampling (9), Latino organization (3), Catholic Church (1), and professional contacts (3). There is likely a selection bias to my sample in that Whites who intermarry may be predisposed to racially progressive stances. This bias is an unavoidable artifact of any research design concerning intermarriage and, I believe, does not undermine the study's contribution.

I interviewed both partners of all the married couples. I conducted the interviews individually and did not share information yielded in one partner's interview with the other. I paid each interviewee twenty dollars as a thank you for their time. Pseudonyms are used; all names have been replaced with fictitious names that correspond to interviewees' Hispanic or Anglophone first and last names.

In-depth interviews that allow for discovery, complexity, and unexpected insights that emerge from people's narratives (Chambliss and Schutt, 2010) were appropriate for my research. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to reply at length on meaningful points and a semi-structured interview protocol allowed me to prompt for detail and pursue themes. The semi-structured interviews took a life history approach, inquiring about respondents' racial/ethnic background, identity claims, natal family, marital family, childrearing strategies if they were parents, and cultural practices. The interview protocol was sharpened over time, a process of "progressive focusing" (Chambliss and Schutt, 2010, p. 207) wherein conducting interviews provides insight into which questions are crucial, which need to be re-worded, and those that need to be added to access pertinent themes. This process of discovery and progressive focusing hones the interview schedule, improves the interview technique, and leads to conceptual categories which are used during data analysis.

In the interviews, I attempted to tap the consequences of intermarriage on both partners. Individuals are my unit of analysis, not couples, which allows me to illustrate important differences within couples. Given that I conducted interviews years (or decades) after the decision to marry, people may over- or under-estimate the effects that their marital partners have had on their ideas about race/ethnicity. Adhering to the notion that "truth is perspectival" (Ruddick 1989, p. 16), I did not search for an objective truth, but instead desired to hear, document, and question the connection between intimate relationships and racial consciousness as the respondent articulated it.

I tape-recorded and transcribed all interviews in order to utilize verbatim narratives in the coding and writing process. Writing field notes after each interview captured personal affect that gets lost in written transcripts; I noted any pertinent material about a respondent's physical appearance, demeanor, and tone during the interview (laughter, tentativeness, etc.). In the field notes, I documented both similarities and differences across cases and analyzed the reasons for repeated themes or departures from a trend.

I used an inductive, grounded theory approach to analyze the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss 1987), allowing for categories to emerge from the data upon analysis, as opposed to approaching data analysis with preconceived categories. I used ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software program that allows researchers to code sections of interview material based on keywords and themes. During the coding process, I identified common patterns and exceptional cases as well as key quotations that illustrate prominent themes. Grouping interviews according to emergent themes and teasing out associations is the basis of the findings section.

## FINDINGS ON RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Understandings of race/ethnicity are contextual and partially contingent upon intimate relationships. The two racial consciousness outcomes, race cognizance and colorblindness, refer to what extent race/ethnicity is overtly discussed and deemed relevant. I use the umbrella term *racial consciousness* to embrace both *race cognizance*, which acknowledges racial differences and racialized outcomes or experiences, as well as *colorblindness*, which deemphasizes racial/ethnic features. Whites are highly represented in the race cognizance category compared to Latinos because intermarriage introduces racial/ethnic issues in newfound ways for Whites whereas Latinos *already* possessed race cognizance as result of experiencing racialization as non-White firsthand. In contrast to Whites, Latinos minimized racial/ethnic distinctions in their intermarriage. In sum, Whites apprehended the social power of race/ethnicity whereas Latinos more often downplayed racial/ethnic difference, these contrasting strategies reveal how intermarriage works uniquely on each racial/ethnic group represented in a union. In addition to ethnicity shaping racial consciousness, two smaller findings are notable. First, situational contexts elicit different forms of racial consciousness: public situations of discrimination or inequality stimulate race cognizance whereas private sphere themes encourage colorblindness. Second, duration of marriage also influences racial consciousness, the more recently married typified by colorblindness and the long-lasting marriages characterized by race cognizance.

### Race Cognizance

Interracial and interethnic relationships may destabilize racial boundaries, enabling Whites to empathize with less privileged racial positions (Frankenberg 1993). This outcome contradicts assimilation theory. Rather than the minority becoming *socially Whiten*, intermarriage exposes Whites to “rebound effect[s]” of racism (Frankenberg 1993, p. 112) and may foster progressive racial views. In contrast to the assimilation, Whiteness, and colorblindness literatures, Whites may become *socially browned* through intimate relationships.

White spouses experience race cognizance in reaction to instances of public discrimination they witness or undergo with their Latino/a partners and children. Fifty-eight-year-old White Trudy Ybarra, married to Luke, a Mexican American, has moved toward race cognizance since her intermarriage. She recounts two occasions,

one involving her son and another involving her husband, where she detected racism. Her junior high-school-aged son was wrongly accused of sexual harassment by a teacher who misidentified him based on a parent's complaint about a boy who sat in his section of the classroom. Trudy directly asked the girl's mother and discovered that her son was innocent. As he was sitting amongst White boys, he was misidentified by the teacher as the perpetrator, Trudy reporting, "The only one she was accusing was the minority kid...." She combated this racist judgment by meeting with the school principal where she used her White privilege to speak for her non-White family members. She felt like the White administrator would take her, but not her husband Luke, seriously. She explained why she acquiesced to dominant racial scripts and became the advocate for her mixed family:

We went to the principal. This is racist too—I was the one who did all of the talking. If Luke did it—and we knew this—it would be like, "you're being overly sensitive." But if I did it, they would listen to me. I didn't think that was fair. But, they did listen to me. I realized that . . . I was gonna have more effect than others. It put me in a position that I had to speak up. . . It makes you uncomfortable because you know that if a person of color says anything it's gonna be swept under the rug. . . Luke and I were still a team but I did all the talking.

In situations like this—her multiethnic Mexican American son is wrongly accused and, while "still a team," she speaks on behalf of herself and her husband—Trudy displays her burgeoning race cognizance and makes strides to overcome her White "transparency" (Haney López 1996). Observing, "this is racist too," she is the spokesperson for her family, playing racial politics to advance her family's agenda of vocalizing a concern. This narrative showing that Whites are presumed to be equal, rational, and proper, as compared to minorities who are alleged to be subordinate, emotional, and improper taps into how racial groups become endowed with meaning (Omi and Winant, 1994).

Race cognizance is peaked in situations of public discrimination. Public authorities ranging from school administrators to federal agents who draw racialized conclusions about people heighten Whites' awareness of race and racism. In a second lurid biographical narrative, Trudy confronts racism in two ways: her Mexican American husband's citizenship is rigorously questioned at the U.S.-Mexico border and her mixed-ethnicity family is not recognized as a family. Trudy recounts how she and one of her sons crossed the international border without incident while Luke and her second son were interrogated: "They [Border Patrol] wanted to know. . . how he came to be crossing into the U.S. and where the child came from. That was a bit of racism. We were all together." First, as a White woman, her U.S. citizenship was unquestioned whereas her Mexican American husband's citizenship was doubted. In a time of tightened border control and concerns over the "browning" of the nation (Huntington 2004), Latino men are more likely than others to be questioned, detained, and deported to home countries (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013). Since an assumption of foreignness is often linked to perceived ethnicity (Jiménez 2010; Ochoa 2004) (and Mexican American citizens have been erroneously deported during times of mass deportations such as the mid-1950s [Gutiérrez 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1997]), even citizenship does not prevent extra scrutiny at the border. Second, the mixed-ethnicity family is not recognized as a family unit, a prejudgment based on the assumption of homogamy (Twine 2010). Public discrimination against minority family members pushes Whites to achieve race cognizance, a perspective that recognizes racial inequality.

Formerly colorblind people can become cognizant of race through intermarriage. By becoming familiar with their Latino spouses' personal histories that are inflected with racism, Whites learn about racism and elevate their race cognizance. Forty-six-year-old Courtney Flores, a White ethnic Kansas native who was raised "colorblind" due to her "99.8% White" (laughing) hometown demographics, shows how exposure to minority perspectives is foundational to race cognizance. Considering herself more aware of racial/ethnic stereotypes since her intermarriage, Courtney discerns racial slights against her Latino husband, including a time she believes he was overlooked for a promotion. Instead of dwelling on this lost opportunity, she instead addresses how familiarity with Roland's history shapes her race cognizance: "He grew up here [Lawrence, Kansas] in the '60s and the '70s when all the racial violence. . . was going on. . . [His] Grandpa sat on the front porch with his shotgun or rifle across his lap and a bottle of Old Crow beside him. . . He has much more of a sense of insecurity with his surroundings than I do." Roland's personal history is a lesson for Courtney in racial politics. In response, she attempts to educate her children and others about prejudice, illustrated by how she gently chides her pre-teen daughter who scorns classmates who have different cultural styles: "I get upset. . . 'Mija [sweetheart], don't be so judgmental." In contrast to assimilation theory that, aside from focusing only on minority groups, assumes a diminishing of racial/ethnic distinctions over time, Courtney's story reveals the theoretically surprising outcome of *increased* racial awareness through interracial contact.

Race cognizance is a mental orientation, an attitude, yet might it prompt action? Repeated incidents of discrimination that foment racial awareness may also stimulate behavioral changes, ranging from consciousness-raising efforts to occupational pursuits. Trudy Ybarra has become more attentive to racism and combats it through direct conversation. Courtney Flores moves from race cognizance to consciousness-raising action when she uses racism as an educational moment: "I feel. . . a real strong sense of indignation. . . Not only am I processing it for me but [I am] also creating an awareness that this crap is still out there and helping other people to be aware of it [so] maybe we can change it." Intermarriage and close friendship that crosses racial/ethnic lines can alter Whites' racial attitudes as well as serve as a "springboard to taking action against racial prejudice or discrimination" (Feagin and O'Brien, 2003, p. 245).

Intermarriage has the potential to aid the development of Whites' progressive racial attitudes (Feagin and O'Brien, 2003; Twine 2010; Yancey 2007). One critique of intermarriage scholarship is that intermarriages may contain people who are predisposed to liberal racial ideologies (Yancey 2007). Yet, even if this is true, intermarriage can *continue* to encourage racially progressive attitudes and actions. Deirdre Gonzalez describes her method of working toward racial equality as "helping people," an aim that predated her marriage with her Latino husband. A social worker, Deirdre works at a college assistance migrant program that aids Southeast Asians and Latinos. She connects her intermarriage to her career in education: "Because I was married to Ignacio and we had biracial kids [and] I feel connected to his side of the family, I thought I could connect with these students. I think I might be able to do something for them." Familiar with her in-law's migration history and thankful that they promoted her husband's education, Deirdre is compassionate toward immigrant families, aware of the barriers they face. Race cognizance among intermarried Whites may convert to action such as dialogue or career choices. By moving beyond the "white bubble" (Feagin and O'Brien, 2003, p. 25) of racial separation, intermarried Whites can become empathetic and work to remedy racial inequality.

Most women, including *all* White women, expressed race cognizance as a result of intermarriage, suggesting their openness to empathizing with another axis of oppression.

All Latina women were sensitive to race issues yet are not represented here because their awareness peaked *before* marriage. Take for example Glenda Carlisle who became acutely aware of race and how “legal classifications maintain historical racial and class inequalities” (Gomberg-Muñoz 2012, p. 350) prior to marriage: “I got accepted into different colleges. . . I love school and I wanted to keep going. . . I couldn’t [go] because of the financial side of it. I couldn’t get scholarships because of my. . . lack of [legal] status. So, that broke my heart.”

While more women than men expressed race cognizance as a result of their intermarriage, intermarriage undeniably shifted men’s perception of race. Just over half of the men interviewed experienced race cognizance, such as forty-four-year-old Derek Nava Kelly, who grew up in a predominately White area of Madison, Wisconsin. Derek is married to Sylvia, a half Cuban, half Czech woman who grew up amongst her father’s fellow Cuban émigrés. Upon getting married, the couple combined their surnames, becoming “Nava Kelly.” Outsiders associated Derek, as a White man with a dual surname, with Hispanic culture and made incorrect assumptions about him: “You can see how people are. . . making snap judgments. . . based on very small pieces of information. . . One place where I interviewed [for a professional job] . . . when I showed up it was pretty clear that I wasn’t meeting their visual expectations.” First and last names are often used as the starting point for assumptions about ethnicity, skills, qualifications, and physical appearance (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004; Bushman and Bonacci, 2004; Vasquez 2011). Encountering assumptions based on Hispanic names gives Whites an uncommon look into the privileges and costs associated with race/ethnicity.

Experiences with migration and legal status can spur race cognizance and prompt critique of a social system that privileges Whites. Since twenty-five-year-old Ryan Carlisle married his Mexican-born wife, Glenda, he is far more attuned to the ways that Mexicans are derogated by the legal system and in public discourse. Asked whether watching Glenda become a permanent resident and obtain work authorization affected his awareness of race, Ryan expounded on the relationship between corporations, class status, immigrant reserve armies of labor, and race:

I think a lot of people have this. . . misconception that. . . anybody can work hard and get up to this status. It’s really not true. . . It’s obvious that minorities are closer to the bottom and Whites are closer to the top. I’m having to explain to people that the system is set up so that it continues. So, I’ve definitely been made aware of that especially with her situation [as a visa over-stayer] . . . It makes me really mad to see the two faced [stuff] . . . It’s like, “illegal immigrants are taking these jobs.” First, they’re not taking any jobs that you would want to do. Second, you always hear about raids on farms or meat plants. . . [and] all these people who get deported but you never hear about the consequences of the people that are taking advantage of this and employ these people. . . There are different things that I’ve looked at now that I wouldn’t have considered before. . .

Informed by his wife’s position as an undocumented immigrant (a visa-overstayer who arrived at age three with her documented parents), Ryan offered informed ideas about immigration reform, keeping central immigrants’ need for legal entrance into the United States and jobs with living wages. Comprehending how his wife and her parents were treated in the public domain—constrained to a secondary labor market, ineligible for college scholarships, and publically scorned—ignites Ryan’s race cognizance. The crucial connection between intimacy and racial consciousness is important here. As he phrased it, “sadly enough. . . when things don’t directly affect us then we

don't think about them as much." It is through marrying a foreign-born woman that Ryan comes to understand the salience of race in the United States and how race and nativity either enhance or undermine opportunities (De Genova 2005; Gonzales 2011; Menjivar 2006; Zhou et al., 2008).

Race cognizance was a common consequence of intermarriage, experienced by nearly three-quarters of White spouses. By sharing life histories and daily life with their Latino spouses, Whites virtually experience or actually witness differential treatment or hardships that are perceived to be due to race or ethnicity. Through experiences mediated by a partner, Whites come to understand the differential social value of Whiteness and non-Whiteness, knowledge that challenges their "transparency" (Haney López 1996) and reveals racial dynamics. By stepping into a loved one's shoes, as the saying goes, empathy and understanding increased, the power of race/ethnicity revealed in a way unique to intimate cross-racial and interethnic relationships.

### Colorblindness

Colorblindness, or the minimization of race/ethnicity, is the second chief consequence of Latino/White intermarriage. Colorblindness, a dominant ideology that refuses to see or acknowledge race, has been called racist and a tool of White dominance by denying the centrality of race in social organization (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Haney López 1996). While not acknowledging race certainly stymies progress toward rectifying race-based inequalities, colorblind ideology is attractive because it is shrouded in a veneer of political correctness and humanism (Childs 2005). In contrast, my intermarried respondents used colorblind rhetoric as a way to bridge a cultural gulf and highlight commonalities but not in a manner that casts race/ethnicity as universally unimportant. Colorblindness was most often employed when describing private life, a way to clarify that ethnicity is not a barrier to married lives without arguing that race/ethnicity never influences life outcomes.

Colorblind rhetoric is not always inherently racist and invested in White dominance but can instead underscore similarity and be a basis for emotional bonds. While colorblindness does not address the realities of race/ethnicity such as structural inequalities, intermarried partners deployed it to explain the triumph of similarity over difference in their personal relationship. Colorblindness that hinges on *denial* of difference and is the basis of colorblind racism was undetectable among intermarried respondents' rhetoric, possibly filtered out prior to marriage or altered in the course of the union. Colorblind *racism* was not prominent, with intermarried respondents acknowledging distinctions but not deeming them barriers to interethnic intimacy.

As articulated by intermarried respondents, colorblindness is the belief that the fact that humans are embodied in various colors and phenotypic assortments does not preclude a fundamental sameness. Colorblindness understands racial/ethnic difference as a rather superficial component in comparison to other shared human traits. As Susan Herrera, a White woman, quipped, "I think with everyday living [race doesn't matter]. We all get up and brush our teeth." Susan's Mexican American husband, Julio, also advances colorblindness as he discusses the Latino/White intermarriage of his sister and brother-in-law, Cynthia and Mitch Redgrave (also respondents): "Once you start living with somebody every day you really notice that...there's not that big of a difference...." Colorblindness was most often discussed with reference to everyday, mundane life rhythms that are undisturbed by ethnic distinctions.

Colorblindness does not deny the *fact* of differently embodied people who span a vast skin color and phenotype spectrum. Instead, it nods to those visual differences without impeding interpersonal relationships. Colorblindness is not blind to color

gradations but considers them inadequate to justify social divisions. Chuck Stroeh, a forty-four-year-old White man, discusses his Whiteness:

I probably identify [as White more] along religious and political lines than. . . from an ethnic standpoint. Politically, I'm more conservative and, obviously, [that is a] White man kind of thing. My skin happens to be White, but so what? . . . Three kinds of families [are] there [at his children's schools]: Hispanic families, Filipino families, and mixed families. . . very few White families. . . I know I'm White. . . I. . . have. . . self-deprecating humor about being a White guy [laughs]: Can't jump, can't dance, can't speak Spanish very well [laughs]. But. . . I don't wake up every morning like, 'yeah, I'm White!'"

Not just an interethnic marriage but a surrounding heterogeneous community bolsters claims of colorblindness. In the West, 7.5% of husband-wife pairs are interethnic (one is Hispanic, the other is not), as compared to Midwest, 2.4% (U. S. Census 2010). Context is important to racial identity (Hartigan 1999; McDermott 2006) and racial consciousness. All California respondents drew only on colorblind discourse, revealing how in diverse communities and households, race/ethnicity is considered a basic piece of background information that does not impede relationships or community.

Another Californian, Mexican American Kyle Solis, demonstrates how his racially diverse environment normalizes his intermarriage. He downplayed the ethnic difference in his five-year marriage with a White woman: "I try not to look at people as, 'Oh he's White, oh she's Black, oh she's Asian' . . . Getting into a relationship with someone who isn't like me was not a big deal to me personally. . . Interracial marriage. . . is normal to me." In heterogeneous Los Angeles County, where intermarried couples experience little racial boundary policing (Osuji 2013), Kyle did not view interracial relationships as atypical or problematic. Colorblindness, as articulated by the intermarried, does not disregard differences but instead renders them an inadequate reason for conflict, especially in a diverse urban area where people may circulate among many disparate social groups daily.

In contrast to California, colorblindness among the intermarried was experienced as a greater achievement in Kansas because of the relative lack of diversity. Sheldon Hoffman is a fifty-four-year-old White man originally from Kentucky who has spent most of his life in Kansas. He has an overriding orientation of colorblindness despite becoming aware of race during the race riots of 1970 when eight o'clock curfews were imposed, he observed violent interracial fights, and he was derided as a "White honkey." As is typical, it was this public situation of racial turbulence that provoked Sheldon's race cognizance. Nevertheless, in his private life, colorblindness reigns. These two perspectives vary in when they emerge: race cognizance tends to materialize in the public realm whereas colorblindness more often pervades the private realm.

In his marriage to Cassie, his Mexican American second wife, Sheldon became part of a racially heterogeneous family, now socializing with Mexican American and African American extended family (his step-daughter has a Black biological father). His lived reality as an intermarried White man in a racially-mixed family allows him to compare racial/ethnic stereotypes with his firsthand knowledge and render stereotypes inaccurate. Sheldon answered my question about whether his relationship with his wife has changed his view on racial issues:

Sheldon: I've learned that the preconceived perceptions are wrong.

JMV: Did engagement with your wife and her family provide ammunition to... reject them?

Sheldon: Oh, absolutely. . . The societal conceptions being what they were and just finding out on my own that it's not true. If you take the time to. . . socialize you'll find out that they have the same needs, the same concerns. . . So, it's having that opportunity to reach common ground and to really see other races as human.

For Sheldon, consorting across racial/ethnic boundaries allowed him to prioritize the humanistic inclination "to really see other races as human" and led to discovery of "common ground." This excerpt provides two extensions to our current conceptualization of colorblindness. First, colorblindness is not a unitary perspective that overwhelms all others. A person can simultaneously hold two supposedly opposing racial philosophies, showing that racial ideologies are not all-encompassing or equally pertinent to all situations. Instead, colorblindness appears to operate as one of many racial narratives (Frankenberg 1993; Omi and Winant, 1994; Swidler 1986, 2001) that is most often employed in situations of interpersonal familiarity or intimacy. Second, in contrast to colorblind theory, which holds that colorblindness is inherently *racist* (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Haney López 1996), colorblind tenets of equality can underscore common humanity and offer a hopeful vision for the future. This optimistic take on colorblindness has been thus far unacknowledged in colorblindness theory.

As shown, colorblindness can take on a utopian hue, akin to Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous line from his "I Have a Dream" speech that people "will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." While this quotation has been contorted to justify colorblind rhetoric and policies that *deny* racial/ethnic difference and inequality, fundamentally, it is an optimistic hope that race will not inform prejudgments. This utopic type of colorblindness actually endorses multiculturalism rather than obfuscates difference. For example, Cynthia Herrera-Redgrave, Julio's forty-six-year-old sister, views her mixed-ethnicity children as a harbinger of a multicultural future. A blueprint for this optimistic colorblindness occurs here due to cultural and phenotypic intermixing; as blurred intermediate zones expand, rigid racial/ethnic categories rupture. Cynthia sees a multicultural future in her five children (her oldest from a Mexican ex-boyfriend and four with her White husband) who range in skin tone and hair color from light to dark:

When I was younger I thought more about being Mexican. Most of my friends were Mexican. . . Before, you just kind of [thought], "I know you're one of my people." Now, you can't really tell anymore because we've all just intermixed and intermingled. . . I just don't notice race all the time. . . as much. . . My kids, they're all five so different looking, that you wouldn't be able necessarily. . . to tell exactly what a couple of them are.

In a locale where mixed-ethnicity households are rare, Cynthia's boundary-blurring family provides an optic on how multiethnic families' colorblindness may expedite multiculturalism.

People draw on God to support their optimistic vision of colorblind multiculturalism. The concept that "we're all God's children" is used to highlight shared traits over difference, as expressed by Courtney Flores:

Roland will tell me stuff about. . . some of the struggles that [his] particular family has been through. For me, I think it has just really solidified that we are all individuals that are God's children. We're still human beings and we all struggle day to day with various things. What might be a struggle to me isn't to somebody else. . .

I know there's a cultural piece to it but for me it's just still that individual and family make up. . . We're all the same but yet we're different.

“Cultural” or “international” difference is a softer way to distinguish people from one another than the hardline term “race” (Lee and Bean, 2010; Root 2001). By using the word “culture” to distinguish between her and her Mexican American husband, Courtney honors that both are American. The focus on “culture,” “individual,” and “family make up” addresses basic commonality that allows for variation. Here, difference is a descriptor rather than a value judgment.

Courtney clarifies that her colorblindness is diametrically opposed to colorblind *racism*, which denies difference in the service of maintaining White dominance (Haney López 1996). She discusses her awareness of race/ethnicity as an important social fact and her commitment to not letting it become a wedge issue:

I got in so much trouble when I was in graduate school [social work]. There was an African American professor. . . [and] she was talking about how we all have to appreciate each other's differences. And it was all focused on differences, differences, differences. I remember speaking up and saying, “We're never going to get to know each other's differences until we realize how similar we are. . . It's not the differences that bring us together. It's the similarities.” So, we have to find those similarities and then we can start to appreciate the differences. . . I can respect your differences but I'm not going to know those until we've connected and we connect through the similarities.

The colorblindness articulated by intermarried couples upholds similarities as the basis for connection, a foundation upon which an understanding of how social location marks experience is built.

Race relations literature has shown that working closely with others from different racial/ethnic backgrounds can reduce antagonism, break down stereotypes, and underscore a common human condition that transcends racial/ethnic distinctions (Ellison 1994; Lewis 2003; Perry 2002; Root 2001; Vasquez 2005; Wilson 1996). Since race no longer formally determines the types of relationships groups can have with one another due to relaxed legal sanctions, race/ethnicity can feasibly be left in the background in personal relationships. Yet, while minimization of race/ethnicity is progressive in that it becomes “less daunting,” as one respondent phrased it, colorblindness, even among the intermarried, does not automatically entail the recognition of the injustice that is perpetuated along racial/ethnic lines.

### **Racial Consciousness Influenced by Ethnicity and Length of Marriage**

Intermarriage has differential effects for Whites and Latinos: for Whites, race/ethnicity becomes more visible whereas for Latinos it is downplayed. Racial consciousness is shaped by both ethnicity and length of time in an intermarriage. Whites are highly represented in the race cognizance post-intermarriage category: ten of fourteen (71%) Whites as compared to four of nine Latinos (44%). For Whites, intermarriage with Latinos illuminates the issue of race, as they hear about and witness how non-White race/ethnicity differentially affects their partner (and children). Race cognizance was more apparent among women than men, including *all* White women respondents, contrasting with Frankenberg's (1993) finding that White women do not empathize with other marginalized communities. My data suggest that occupying a subordinate gender category *does* incline women to become concerned with other axes of oppression.

While Latinos also discuss racial issues, their race cognizance crystallized prior to their marital relationships.

Concerning colorblindness, about half of all respondents reported that their intermarriage has minimized race in their lives. Latinos were more represented in this colorblindness category than Whites (see Table 1 in Appendix). While these numbers are drawn from a non-random sample and are not generalizable, they suggest that Whites were inclined to perceive the social power of race whereas Latinos minimized social distance as a result of intermarriage. The conditions under which race cognizance and colorblindness occur are instructive: race cognizance is provoked in public situations of inequality whereas colorblindness arises in the private sphere.

Length of marriage also influences racial consciousness. Couples married for a decade or less were more inclined to minimize racial distinctions whereas three-quarters of the couples married for eleven years or more expressed race cognizance (see Table 2 in Appendix).<sup>6</sup> These descriptive statistics suggest that racial consciousness is developmental, perhaps moving from colorblindness to race cognizance over the course of marriage. While more research is needed in this area, the implication that racial/ethnic distinctions are reduced in the beginning of a marital union yet emerge as salient over time is telling about how long-term unions can shape racial awareness.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that intermarriage “blurs” boundaries (Alba and Nee, 2003) by shaping partners’ cognition about race. Rather than serving as a yardstick for assimilation (presumably Latinos’ increasing proximity to Whiteness), intermarriage conditions the *recognition* of difference as opposed to the *elimination* of difference. While I am cautious not to overstate the progressive possibilities of intermarriage, this qualitative study reveals that, in contrast to assimilation theory’s expectation of Latinos’ *social Whitening*, Whites experienced *social Browning* in terms of their understanding about race. This qualitative study using life history interviews is well suited to exploring the relational processes that contribute to changed racial consciousness. This article critiques and extends three bodies of literature—assimilation, Whiteness, and colorblindness—through its nuanced examination of intermarried Latinos and non-Hispanic Whites. By observing the inner-workings of intermarriages—scrutinizing when, where, and in what ways race/ethnicity attracts attention—this qualitative research amends standing literature by illuminating the ways in which intermarriage changes racial consciousness. Contributions include the findings that mental frameworks around race are contingent upon intermarriage, ethnicity, duration of marriage, and whether one is referencing the public (race cognizance) or private (colorblind) domain.

Immigration and assimilation research has been reluctant to shift attention from ethnic minority groups and toward the mainstream. While new assimilation theory acknowledges that immigration “reshapes” the mainstream (Alba and Nee, 2003), it leaves an opening to explore the mechanisms that facilitate this transformation. By seriously investigating the bi-directional nature of inter-group interaction and taking intermarriage as a *starting point* rather than an endpoint, this study on ramifications of intermarriage looks equally at both minority and majority group partners. Counter to assimilation theory, racial/ethnic distinctions and awareness are not inevitably reduced by intermarriage. On the contrary, intermarriage is the means by which intermarried Whites’ race cognizance is sparked, especially concerning issues in the public domain. Already living a racialized existence, Latinos did not equally display newfound race

cognizance. Instead, intermarried Latinos prompted the race cognizance of their partners, further undermining assimilation theory's presumption that attention to race/ethnicity is diminished in intermarriage. Race cognizance, the more prevalent outcome among Whites, not only heightened their awareness of race/ethnicity, but had a ripple effect as they occasionally converted their progressive attitudes into action. Intermarriage is not best viewed solely as the culmination of progressive attitudes; rather, intermarriage may be the beginning of racially liberal outlooks and not simply the expression of them.

Intermarriage can shape *recognition of difference* rather than close social distance. Intermarriage, in this view, is not a measure of "successful" assimilation so much as it is a vehicle for race cognizance among Whites. Due to becoming acquainted with a minority's life history and experiencing a "rebound effect" (Frankenberg 1993, p. 112) of racism, intermarried Whites can comprehend how race/ethnicity shapes life experiences. Interethnic intimacy disrupts Whites' "transparency," the propensity not to consider themselves or their behaviors racialized (Haney López 1996). By disturbing White's "transparency," intermarriage opens the space for recognition of the salience race/ethnicity, thereby destabilizing colorblind *racism* that is upheld by nonrecognition of racial dynamics. A discovery of this research that empirically revises assimilation theory is the degree to which Whites' perspectives on race/ethnicity is becoming *socially Browned* as a result of intermarriage. Recalling that race cognizance is prompted in the public arena whereas colorblindness is more prevalent in private space, interracial intimacy has the potential, but not the guarantee, to transform Whites' racial attitudes.

The field of Whiteness studies has conceived of Whiteness as an overly uniform racial identity. This study has shown that rather than being immutably invested in White privilege and nonracial outlooks, the racial consciousness of intermarried Whites is remarkably varied. Whites' racial attitudes are partially dependent on intimate relationships and are subject to change, as many intermarried respondents' movement from colorblindness to race cognizance attests. Intermarried Whites' perceptions of race and racial inequality develop as they ascertain that they and their spouse occupy different social locations, with disparate sets of privileges. Whiteness literature informs us that White racial identity is contextual and this article has extended that claim by unveiling the relational and developmental nature of racial consciousness among intermarried Whites.

Colorblindness literature is unrealistically bivariate, obscuring middle ground between racial progressivism and colorblind racism. I remedy this inaccurate dichotomy by noting the different contexts in which racial cognizance and colorblindness are employed, in the public and private sphere, respectively. Further, colorblindness has previously only been theorized as neoconservative and racist. In contrast, my intermarried respondents use a different variant of colorblind rhetoric, which acknowledges the *fact* of difference and yet is notably optimistic. By harkening to a utopian future, heralded by intermarried couples and mixed families, these interviewees posit colorblindness not as racially regressive, denying racial/ethnic distinction, but as racially progressive, acknowledging difference but without letting divisions loom as insurmountable. While colorblind rhetoric is dangerous in its tendency to obscure structural inequalities and hamper the destabilization of power relations characterized by White dominance, my research suggests that colorblind discourse need not be racist. Among the intermarried, using colorblind discourse to describe their domestic lives is a way to blur boundaries and humanize their interethnic partners. My theoretical intervention is to highlight an idealistic variant of colorblindness that intermarried couples use, explicitly, to justify their common humanity and, implicitly, to legitimize their families.

This study has shown that not only are understandings of race/ethnicity shaped by intermarriage, they also develop over the course of a relationship. Among the more recently married, race/ethnicity is minimized in everyday life, marriage serving to blur borders. Among couples married over a decade, non-Hispanic Whites expressed race cognizance, comprehending race/ethnicity as an axis of social division. Racial consciousness among the intermarried is relational and appears to be developmental: in the first decade of a marriage, colorblindness is leveraged to justify fundamental sameness and then segues into race cognizance, a perspective sharpened by observed racism in the public sphere.

While my data are hampered by unevenness in couples that hail from different regions in the country, they nonetheless suggest that regional and accompanying population demographics influence racial consciousness. Californians residing in Los Angeles County only drew on colorblind discourse. Given that the highest concentration of intermarried cross-racial couples live in the west (11% compared to 4%–6% elsewhere) (U. S. Census 2010), colorblind language implies the acceptance of intercultural couples, an unexceptional feature of the local landscape. Couples living in California found intermarriage to be consistent with their mixed local racial/ethnic landscape, whereas those in Kansas viewed their intermarriage as a positive example of intercultural exchange and the vanguard of multiculturalism. While inconclusive, this observation suggests that not only do frequencies of intermarriages vary by region in the country but so too do variants of racial consciousness.

Questions emerged from this research, including: Will intermarried Whites' race cognizance be more generally transformative and translate into action? Regarding colorblindness, might that outlook degrade into "color- and power-evasiveness" (Frankenberg 1993, p. 15) in colorblind *racism* fashion or will it continue to be sanguine and foster interracial social justice coalitions? Among intermarried Latinos, will their greater investment in colorblindness spark optimistic moves toward multiculturalism or instead conceal power inequalities? What about the multigenerational repercussions of racial outlooks? Parents' racial ideology, more so than their racial identity, informs how they teach their children about racial matters (Rockquemore et al., 2006). Family is an important "contextual factor" (Rockquemore et al., 2008, p. 28) on racial identity, and I would add racial perception and politics. This elicits questions of how parents' racial consciousness influences their children's racial identity and racial politics. Finally, since length of time in a partnership influences racial consciousness, a more rigorous analysis of this association would lend insight into the power and limits of interethnic relationships to affect social change.

Perspectives on race/ethnicity are collective ventures, relying on inter-group interactions to challenge or expand earlier conceptions. What Twine and Steinbugler (2007) call "intimate contexts" (p. 360) have been underexplored, these vital spaces of intercultural communication and shared experience profoundly affecting racial consciousness. While intermarried couples are not free from racist or sexist tendencies, they do offer a portrayal of recalibrated race relations that might be a harbinger of changes to come in wider society. This study reveals that intermarriage is a crucial space for altering racial understandings and illustrates that there is a life course dimension to racial consciousness that is grounded in intra-family interaction.

What can we learn about race relations more broadly from this case? These findings point to the role intermarriage and mixed families have in changing racial outlooks. While there has been much scholarly attention paid to the shifting color line in the twenty-first century, this article points out how interethnic relationships can blur *cognitive* color lines. Living, loving, and learning across racial/ethnic lines opens up the possibility for reordered race relations. While the transformative potential of

intermarriage should not be overstated, interethnic intimacy can beget change in racial consciousness. Increasing intergroup dialogue that fosters race cognizance opens the possibility for cross-racial coalitions for social justice. Even optimistic colorblindness, while it stops short of railing against racial inequality due to its focus on private sphere connection, offers a utopian vision of the future that intermarried couples and mixed families are uniquely positioned to pursue.

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## NOTES

1. Audiences at the University of Kansas, the Russell Sage Foundation, and annual meetings of the American Sociological Association and Eastern Sociological Society provided useful comments. Thanks to Christopher Wetzel, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Natalia Sarkisian, Michael Omi, and the *Du Bois Review* editors and peer reviewers for constructive feedback.
2. For simplicity, from this point forward I will use the term “White” when referring to non-Hispanic Whites.
3. Intermarriage concerns not only the adults but also their multiracial offspring. This article does not deal directly with the dynamics of mixed race, but it is worth noting that multiracials’ racial identification is a response to familial ethnic socialization (González et al., 2006; Rockquemore et al., 2006), in-group population size (Harris and Sim, 2002; Lee and Bean, 2010), age, education, and racialization from society and reviews of others (Brunsma and Rockquemore, 2001; Cornell and Hartmann, 1998; Telles and Ortiz, 2008).
4. Whether Latinos/Hispanics constitute a racial versus an ethnic category is a much-debated question and one that this article does not directly engage (Gómez 2007; Lee and Bean, 2004; Roth 2012). I write “non-White” as shorthand for “not *non-Hispanic* White.”
5. I included the two divorcees because their experiences while married to an interethnic partner—and their effects on racial/ethnic understandings—were not erased upon divorce. The potential durability of changes to racial consciousness despite the attenuation of a relationship proves useful in considering the aftereffects of intimate relationships.
6. Couples married for ten years or less who expressed race cognizance often did so when considering their prospective childrearing practices and discussing traditions, food, and cultural values they wished to perpetuate.

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## APPENDIX

**Table 1.** Racial Consciousness by Ethnicity\*

	Non-Hispanic Whites (n=14)	Latinos/as (n=9)
<b>Race Cognizance</b>	71% (10)	44% (4)
<b>Colorblindness</b>	36% (5)	66% (6)

\* Divorcees and missing data excluded. N=23. Categories are not mutually exclusive (1 non-Hispanic White and 1 Latino are represented in both categories; all other respondents are represented in only one category).

**Table 2.** Racial Consciousness by Length of Marriage\*

	Married 10 years or fewer (n=7)	Married 11 years or more (n=16)
<b>Race Cognizance</b>	43% (3)	75% (12)
<b>Colorblindness</b>	57% (4)	44% (7)

\* Divorcees and missing data excluded. N=23. Categories are not mutually exclusive (2 people married over 11 years are included in both categories).