

JUNGLE FEVER: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF WHITE WOMEN

JUNGLE FEVER:
THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF WHITE WOMEN IN
INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH BLACK MEN

By

KATERINA DELIOVSKY, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Katerina Deliovsky, B.A. (York University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Victor Satzewich

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of six White women in interracial unions with Black men. It explores these experiences through the lens of two organizing frameworks. The first framework explores how the socially constructed hegemonic representations of whiteness and gender impinge and determine the life experiences of these women. Within this framework, the theory of whiteness and the concept of “spoiled identities (Goffman, 1963) will be utilized to illustrate how White women’s intimate association with Black men spoil their social identity. The second framework explores how and what these women do to negotiate and manage their spoiled identities. While class, ethnicity and age assume an important role in the context of their interracial relationships, race and gender appear to be the primary variables which affect their experiences.

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Introduction

When I became openly involved in an interracial relationship with a Black man my life began to change significantly. I felt that very peculiar and crazy things started to happen. I was forced out of my home with nothing but the clothes on my back. White men would hurl verbal abuse at me. Black women would give me the “cut eye” and on several occasions they physically attacked me. My family members expressed outrage and disappointment in many forms--physical and psychological. Life became so burdensome and stressful. I never knew when I would be forced to confront some form of anti-interracial sentiment. I lived with the fear of anticipation of what might happen. Many times horrible things did happen. When I became pregnant with my first child my father ordered me to abort “or else”. I feared the “or else”. I lived with the trepidation that possibly some family member would find me and kick my pregnant belly so that I would spontaneously abort and be rid of this “so called” contagion. I experienced what I identify in this research as psychic injury--injury to the spirit that feels like a heavy weight around my heart. It was difficult going out and at times it was actually difficult just being alive. To avoid potentially violent responses, whether psychological or physical, I would isolate myself. In the early part of our relationship I would often wonder how we were going to survive. There were times we did not cope too well. The external pressures were difficult to bear and sometimes we took it out on each other. But over the years life became a little easier. The responses from society are similar, but I am a different person now. The negative energy that strangers try to hurl at me does not touch me anymore.

Life is better now and not necessarily because society has learned to accept or tolerate interracial couples, but because I am a different person.

For a long time my family and societal response just did not make sense to me. Why was I living on the brink of homelessness just because I loved a Black man and was carrying his child? Why the “over the top” responses for simply loving a Black man? What was I doing that was so morally and ethically unacceptable? What was it about the baby growing in my womb that needed to be destroyed? What was it about this man’s body that made him dangerous, *a priori* to any contact? These questions reverberated in my mind over the years. I needed to find some answers. However the search for the answers was really a quest in solitude, only sometimes shared with my partner. In the earlier years as a sociology undergraduate student I eagerly read any book that might give me clues to the answers that I was seeking. And I found some clues, some tentative answers. But I didn’t share my new found knowledge with anyone outside my intimate circle. I didn’t think anyone was interested or sympathetic. Many of my experiences from society were of hostility and disgust, and so I didn’t speak. In anticipation to any possible negative or derogatory response I silenced myself. I didn’t feel strong enough to share my knowledge with the world. But as I became stronger, more confident in my quest for self-understanding, I developed a sense of the importance of giving voice to my experiences. In being silent I was hurting myself. And I did start to speak, perhaps timidly but I did none the less. It was an act of personal liberation. I received both hostile and sympathetic reactions, but most importantly I was speaking. The more confident I became the more I realized that not only did my experiences need a forum for expression, but so

did the experiences of other White women in interracial relationships with Black men. And so this is where I find myself today--*speaking* about these experiences. This research is not only an act of giving voice and legitimacy to my own experiences but to those women.

My brief personal expose illustrates that I am not a disinterested observer. In fact, these women's narratives moved me deeply. At times it felt like I was hearing my own life story. On a couple occasions I found myself crying with the research participants and many times we laughed at the absurdity of people's response to our unions. Their lives were and are meaningful to me not just as a sociologist but as a woman in a similar situation. And as a White woman of Macedonian descent involved with a Black man of African Jamaican descent, I am indeed an interested observer. I have approached my research as an interested observer and from a standpoint perspective--the perspective that advocates that the researcher be located in the same critical plane as the subject of research (Smith,1987). Coming from a standpoint did have its difficult moments. Many times during the interviews I had to relive agonizing moments that I long tried to bury. During the actual transcribing of the research I found myself having flashbacks of my own life. It was a painful process because there is something about being on the same critical plane as your research subject that forces you to be honest with yourself. You are not afforded the luxury of being a disinterested observer. It was very important to me that I accurately capture the voices of these women which meant I had to reflect on my own attitudes and behaviours. So when I identified the consistent and prominent themes in the research I had to ask myself if I fit those themes. For instance when I spoke about the theme of colour evasion, whereby a person denies the prominence of their partner's colour in pursuit of

some anti-racist stance, I had to ask myself if I was colour evasive. Did I engage in this selective process of willful colour blindness? I found that in looking at the lives of women, that sometimes mirrored my own, I needed to ask myself the same questions I asked of them. And although it was painful and exhausting at times, it was completely worthwhile. It was worthwhile on three primary levels. First, I finally have some of the answers I have long been searching for. Second, I believe I have become a better person for it. I am more aware of how I am engaging life as a White women in an interracial relationship with a Black man and more in tune to how the complex variables of race, ethnicity, gender and class impinge on my own life. Third, it is meaningful intellectually as a topic of inquiry that is relatively uncharted. I feel that this work contributes to an area of study that is somewhat neglected. Understanding how White women in interracial relationships with Black men perceive and experience life through the lens of whiteness brings whiteness as a cultural construct to the forefront, where, as a topic of inquiry, it needs to be.

Hazel Carby (1985:315) writes: “everyone in this social order has been constructed in our political imagination as a racialized subject”. All people living in North America have a place in the social and racial hierarchy. For the most part it has been people of colour that are viewed and constructed as racial objects to be examined. In comparison, White people as objects of analysis, in relation to their whiteness, have been left unexamined. Richard Dyer (1997:3) writes:

The invisibility of whiteness as a racial position in white discourse is a piece of its ubiquity...In fact for most of the time white people speak about nothing but white people, it's just that we couch it in terms of 'people' in general...Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as norm they seem not to be represented to themselves

as whites but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualized and abled. At the level of racial representation, in other words, whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race.

My research contributes to an area of study that attempts to make whiteness visible and particular. In exploring the lives of six White women I wish to explore how whiteness as a "location of structural advantage, of race privilege" (Frankenberg, 1997) informs the experiences of these women in a Canadian context. In bridging the connections between the personal and social I aim to fulfill the promise of sociology for which C Wright Mills (1959:129) intended. He said:

In the classic tradition of social science, problems are formulated in such a way that their very statement incorporates a number of specific milieux and the private troubles encountered there by a variety of individuals; these milieux, in turn are located in terms of large historical and social structures.

In bridging the connections between the personal and public, I hope to provide some information for White women in interracial relationships with Black men that will help them make sense of their experiences. I don't expect to provide all the answers. These women represent a small sample and their lives and experiences are not homogeneous. Their lives are complex and on many different levels are informed by race, class, ethnicity, age and psychological makeup. Having said that, there are some answers to the many questions and ambiguities raised by the research participants. But these answers are not all encompassing truths. These answers are my interpretations of the raw data supplied by these six women, and as interpretations they are sifted through the lens of my own experiences and ideological positions as a sociological researcher. In this sense, they are not all encompassing truths. They are interpretations or "answers" that represent

little pieces in a larger puzzle. This research, as a piece of a larger puzzle, is a work in progress. With each addition the puzzle becomes clearer and more discernible.

Organization of Thesis

In Chapter one of this thesis I present a literature review that is consistent with ideas that will be developed in the conceptual framework of this text. In Chapter two I discuss some of the questions that motivated the initial stages of the thesis, but more importantly I introduce the six women who participated in my research. These participants are diverse in terms of their class, ethnicity and psychological make up. Chapter three and four encompass the data analysis section of the research. These sections explore the complex and at times peculiar experiences of the research participants. It is divided into two organizing themes. Chapter three focuses on the macro/structural level of their experiences while Chapter four focuses on the micro/personal level of their experiences. Finally, in chapter five I conclude by outlining some of the significant themes from the narratives of this text and their implications for understanding the social milieux of Canadian society.

Chapter 1

Colouring Whiteness

I've got jungle fever
 She's got jungle fever
 We've got jungle fever
 We're in Love
 She's gone black boy crazy
 I've gone white girl hazy
 Ain't no thinking--maybe we're in love
 She can't love me
 I can't love her
 Because they say we're the wrong colour
 Staring, looting, laughing, looking
 Like we've done something wrong
 Because we sure love strong
 Calling things too bad to mention
 But we pay them no attention
 For colour blind is our inner feelings
 If we feel happiness and know our love is the best
 Forget the rest

Song "Jungle Fever" by Stevie Wonder

When an interracial couple, consisting of a Black man and a White woman, walk down any North American street they are not simply a man and a woman walking down the street. Their bodies signify much more. Their bodies, as raced and sexed subjects, are interwoven and constitutive of systems of meaning, representations and signification. On one hand their bodies are signified and signifying; on the other, their bodies are objects within systems of social coercion and sexual, racial and economic exchange. How their bodies have been signified, represented and defined in opposition to each other does not allow them anonymity and invisibility. They are marked by the whiteness and blackness

artificially ascribed to their skin tones and the relationship of their racial artifices to their

sex. Richard Dyer in White (1997:20) asserts that concepts of race are always

representations of the body and also of heterosexuality. Race, as is practiced in the west is a way of categorizing different types of human bodies. By doing so the assignment of characteristics to certain bodies and skin colour is a way to systematize differences and to relate them to differences of character and worth. Heterosexuality is the means of ensuring as well as endangering the reproduction of these differences (Dyer, 1997:20).

Consequently, Black men and White women exist in not only a “saturated field of racial visibility”, as Judith Butler (1993:17) would argue, but a field of visibility saturated with racial and sexual visibility.

In understanding how the bodies of White women and Black men have been assigned different characteristics and value is to understand how their bodies have been constituted by regimes of representation and cultural production. This research is concerned specifically with White women in interracial relationships with Black men. In order to understand their experiences it is important to understand how whiteness and blackness have been mapped on to both the bodies of White women and Black men. This is not to suggest that whiteness and blackness are static and closed systems of representation, rather they can be seen as historically self-renewing practices of signification which tend to have hegemonic force. As representations with hegemonic force, blackness and whiteness organize, impinge and at times determine the life experiences of these women (see Higginbotham, 1992). While variables of class, ethnicity and age also play determinative roles in the context of these relationships, race and gender

seem to be the primary axes around which the experiences of White women with Black men revolve

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

What are the representations that are mapped onto the bodies of White women and Black men? Where did these representations come from and do they still have salience in the present. And if they do have importance, what are the lived consequences for White women involved with Black men? According to Paul Hoch in White Hero Black Beast: Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity (1979:43), ideas about whiteness and blackness are as old as class structure of Western societies. He explains that in class stratified societies of the West, masculinity is often established through various forms of competition between men for domination: domination over other “less worthy” men and domination over women. Hoch explains that one of the ways to ensure the successful establishment of hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity is through the creation of cultural myths. One of the most salient myths in Western society is the conquest of White manhood over the Black, bestial villain for the possession of ‘the White Goddess’ (Hoch, 1979:43). Hoch believes that if we dig deep enough we will find that this cultural myth is at the heart of almost all Western myth, poetry and literature. The White female and Black male are vitally important symbolic characters in this dominant social drama. Particularly since chattel slavery, the White woman’s image became a tool of legitimation for repressive social and racial controls in our hierarchical society. Hoch explains that, for the most part, White women in Western society have been symbolically constructed as goddess-like, untarnished and in need of protection. And, it is the noble White male who is

in charge of her protection. There is no act, however small, against which her virtue must not be protected. Hoch explains that the antagonist in this drama from whom the White women must be protected is essentially the Black male and all that he represents: evil, unrestrained sexuality, bestiality, and filth. In White cultural mythology "[t]he white goddess [is] clearly in danger; [and usually] her would be attackers [are] super-masculine black beasts." (Hoch, 1979:51). Hoch explains that this social drama performs three primary functions. First, it allows for the restraint and control of White women's sexuality by White men. Second, it provides a rationale for the enslavement and brutal treatment of Black peoples and particularly in this case, Black men. And third, it allows for the legitimization of White male domination and superior social standing. Hoch also explains that the "beast" in many ways is the most important archetypal figure in this drama because without some foreboding presence there would be no justification for the repressive powers that were called into existence: "Social hierarchy would be impossible without such beasts." (Hoch, 1979:56).

In an argument very similar to Hoch, hooks in Black Looks: Race and Representation (1994) explains that the presence of Black peoples in early North American society allowed White people to sexualize their world by projecting onto black bodies a narrative of sexualized disassociation (see also Jordan, 1977). This psychological displacement specifically allowed White males to engage in brutal sexual acts without guilt or remorse and allowed for the mass exploitation of Black peoples.

Hooks contends that Black sexuality has been historically and socially constructed as negative and against the socially constructed positive image of innocent White

womanhood (hooks, 1992:159). She locates the construction of innocent White womanhood in the nineteenth century and explains that there was a shift away from fundamentalist Christian doctrine that perceived women as a sexual temptress. A new image was constructed that was diametrically opposed to the old. The nineteenth century White woman was depicted "as a goddess rather than sinner; she was virtuous, pure, innocent, not sexual and worldly." (hooks, 1981:31). Hooks explains that this new White male idealization of White womanhood served as an act of exorcism, transforming her image and cleansing her of the curse of forbidden sexuality. Once the American White female was mythologized as pure and virtuous she would become worthy of love, worship and respect (hooks, 1981:31). Hooks states that most 19th century White women accepted the new glorified de-sexualized identity imposed on them. She also explains that this idealization of White women did not alter the fundamental misogyny White men felt towards White women, rather it became disguised and displaced onto the bodies of Black women. At least in America, the shift away from White women as immoral and sexual to that of virtuous and innocent could not have occurred without the mass economic and sexual exploitation of enslaved Black men and women.

Hooks maintains that contemporary mainstream culture still reads Black bodies as a sign of sexual experience and lust. Representations of the Black bodies in current popular culture are still informed by 19th century racism. Hooks offers a powerful explanation of the historical and social construction of the Black male body. She illustrates how a historical narrative of pornographic sexual projection of fantasy and fear was displaced onto Black men. This narrative, hooks explains, was fabricated by White men and is about

the apparent “desperate longing Black men have to sexually violate the bodies of White women.” (hooks,1992:58). Hooks explains the central character in this story is the Black male rapist who is a dangerous menace to White society. Hooks suggests that mainstream White supremacist media manipulate this historical image to manufacture the belief that a “Black menace” is at large and the only viable means of safety is repression and violent domination. Not only has the media manipulated this image, so too have politicians, government officials and entertainers. Much of the intent of using this cultural currency is to deflect from the actual material, economic and moral consequences of perpetuating White supremacy and its traumatic, life-altering impact on Black people (hooks,1990:61).

Alongside the myth of the Black rapist, another mythological representation was constructed: the virtuous innocent White woman (and the fallen lascivious Black woman). Hooks explains in a White supremacist sexist society all women’s bodies are devalued. However White women’s bodies are deemed more worthy than all other women. She asserts that to fully comprehend the multiple meanings of this myth, the images must be interrogated from an analytical standpoint that considers the impact of sexism and racism. Beginning from this point enables one to understand that the myth is an expression of misogyny and White supremacy which attempts to legitimate violence and terror based on those two relations of ruling (Smith, 1992). Hooks adds that using an analytical perspective that interrogates race and masculinity allows for the understanding that Black men specifically, and men of colour generally, are not able to exercise patriarchal power in the same way as White men.

Hooks also notes that alongside the image of the Black male rapist was the image of the ultimate traveling man, drifting from place to place, free and unencumbered, only interested in drinking and having a good time. Black masculinity, hooks explains, was/is viewed as the quintessential embodiment of the "outsider" and the "rebel" (hooks,1992:96). Within what hooks calls White supremacist capitalist patriarchy, this rebellious Black masculinity is both idolized and punished, romanticized yet vilified (hooks,1992:96). Hooks maintains that all of these constructed representations of the Black male have extremely powerful social currency and are used time and time again for White supremacist intentions. Hooks argues that at times it was used to deny the significance of Black male labour, to deny the brutality of White supremacy and to deny white people's role in all of it. Currently, as White mainstream culture has responded to transforming gender roles and the feminist movement, it appears White people have turned their attention, yet again, to Black men for articulations of the "ultimate" misogyny, sexism and phallocentrism. Current examples of this phenomena are Mike Tyson, the "brutish rapist"; O.J. Simpson, the "jealous wife-beater/killer"; and Clarence Thomas, the "supreme male chauvinist".

Hooks also discusses how hegemonic notions of whiteness inform popular culture. She illustrates how Madonna embodies the social construction of whiteness that emphasizes White purity and pure aesthetic form (hooks,1994:20). She explains that in a White supremacist culture a female must be White (and blonde) to occupy the space of sacred femininity (hooks,1994:19). In her book Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representation she quotes Richard Dyer's essay "White" to illustrate her point that Hollywood's

idealization of White femininity converges with aesthetic standards informed by White supremacy: “the codes of glamour lighting in Hollywood were developed in relationship to White women, to endow them with a glow and radiance that has correspondence with the transcendental rhetoric of popular culture” (hooks,1994:19). Significantly hooks points out that only a White skinned female could be imagined as innocent, virtuous and transcendent. In relating this to Madonna, hooks explains that Madonna’s desire to assume a Marilyn Monroe persona denotes her investment in a cultural expression of whiteness that is tied to colonialism and imperialism. Hooks illustrates that over the last few years Madonna has taken on the “mantle of the White colonial adventurer moving into the wilderness of Black culture (gay and straight), [and] White gay subculture.” (hooks,1994:20). Within these diverse realms of experience, hooks explains that Madonna never divests herself of White privilege. What is important about hook’s analysis of Madonna and whiteness is that it illustrates how historical representations of whiteness and femininity are currently used as self-renewing practices of signification.

Similar to Hoch's and hook’s analysis of how whiteness informs White women’s femininity, Richard Dyer explains that the idealization of White femininity converges with aesthetic standards informed by White supremacy. In White, (1997:127) Dyer states “The white woman as angel...[is] both the symbol of white virtuousness and the last word in the claim that what [makes] whites special as a race [is] their non-physical, spiritual, indeed ethereal qualities”. However to sustain these unique qualities it is vital that the cultural transporter of these qualities, the White woman, remain “inhouse”. She must not betray her function to the White masculine order. When White women do transgress the cardinal

rule of White supremacy there is indeed a dilemma, for as Dyer explains “interracial heterosexuality threatens the power of whiteness because it breaks the legitimization of whiteness with reference to the white body” (Dyer,1997:25). Following this assertion to its conclusion, he explains that “if white bodies are no longer indubitably white bodies...then the ‘natural’ basis of their domination is no longer credible” (Dyer,1997:25). Dyer explains that perceptions of White femininity are a worldview that is shaped by Christianity and, although there has been a decline of Christianity as a belief system, the social conditions it has bequeathed are still constitutive of European culture and consciousness in the colonies and excolonies that Europe has produced, notably the USA & Canada (Dyer,1997:15). According to Dyer, the gender ideal that has been promoted by Christianity derives from the symbol of the Virgin Mary . She, like the White woman, is constructed as the penultimate model of behaviour for passivity, virtuousness, purity and motherhood.

Marilyn Frye in “On Being White : Toward a Feminist Understand of Race and Race Supremacy” (1983) makes an argument similar to Dyer, however her argument takes on a feminist perspective. Frye states that White men and women are tied together in their need to reproduce racial dominance. She problematizes notions of “compulsory” motherhood to highlight how it is used for “compulsory” White supremacy. In the course of her argument, Frye states that White feminists have commonly thought of the pressures of compulsory motherhood as men’s desire to subordinate women. However she differs from feminists who argue in absolutist terms that there is a universal patriarchy orchestrating compulsory motherhood when, in fact, this compulsion is linked to

performance pressures to sustain the White population. This aspect of compulsory motherhood for White women has not been made explicit, however the implicit assumption does exist. Frye illustrates that the implicit assumption resides in the discourse against lesbian and gay unions. The critics against such unions usually exclaim that if *they had their way* the human species would die out. Frye suspects that these critics, since they are concerned only with White lesbian and gay unions, confuse the White race with the human species and ultimately what they are saying is the *White race would die out*. Frye asserts that this demand for White women to keep the White race afloat is disguised as a sermon, within an all White context, about the duty of women to keep the species afloat (Frye, 1983:124).

Although the demand to increase or at least sustain White population levels is not currently an overt demand, it was at one time, specially during the colonial period of the United States and Canada² Abouali Farmanfarmaian in "Did You Measure Up? The Role of Race and Sexuality in the Gulf War" (1992), discusses this very issue. She illustrates, in a brief historical overview on whiteness, colonialism and identity in American society, that colonial administrators were obsessed with the reproduction of the White colonial family (Farmanfarmaian, 1992:118). Although her illustrations are used to argue that many of the emotions, fears and images justifying the Gulf war arose from this history that is internal to American identity, it is very useful for the purposes of this literature review.

In order to ensure the continued and "pure" reproduction of whiteness, boundaries were

²Within a Canadian context there has been a more recent demand to sustain the White population. In the last Quebec referendum (1995) Lucien Bouchard alluded that White Quebecois women must step up their efforts to stem a declining White French population in that province.

drawn along racial lines, however “the terrain on which they were drawn was sexuality” (Farmanfarmaian, 1992:118). Boundaries were set up in such a way as to ensure the consistent distinction between self (White people) and Other (generally people of colour). In order to have these boundaries “stick”, notions of White womanhood and motherhood were constructed and turned into sacred and idealized representations. By sanctifying White womanhood and motherhood with metaphysical qualities its protection became justifiable by any means necessary. White women were both forced and complicit in the responsibility for the reproduction of the colonial community and empire. Farmanfarmaian states that the rape scares that permeated empire were a fabrication of the White colonialists, however it was precisely the fabrication of a threat that served to define the boundaries of whiteness. She explains that White womanhood “could only be sanctified in contrast to a transgressive Other” (Farmanfarmaian, 1992:119), in our case, namely the Black male rapist.

It appears that White women were the captives of a White male dominated social and cultural inheritance. Precisely this notion of coercion is found in Sarah Carter's Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in the Canada's Prairie West (1997). Carter asserts that White ~~women in particular~~ and women in general are not “free to project their own images or identities, nor are they free to author their own texts fully” (Carter, 1997:XV). In nineteenth century Canada for example, she explains that White women were central to the establishment and reproduction of the new prairie west community. In a colonial context White women became the symbols around which a new society was to be built. White women's image was constructed as the “true ‘empire

builders', their children the cornerstone of a strong nation" (Carter, 1997: XIV). They were projected as essential to the moral fabric and the religious and economic health of the new nation. Carter explains that culturally constructed images of White women as the moral and cultural custodians of the new nation, were manipulated to create and sustain racial and cultural concepts of difference, the purpose of which was to convey the message of the necessity to police boundaries between different peoples in ways which privileged white domination.

It is important to note that as much as all of White womanhood was captured to reproduce patriarchal colonial society, class boundaries played a role in how White womanhood was constructed and practiced. Martha Hodes in White Women, Black Men (1997), for example, looks at the responses to interracial relationships between White women and Black men in the southern United States. She found that class boundaries played a role in White responses to their sexual liaisons. Hodes explains that poverty defeminized White women. Therefore when poor White women had sexual liaisons with Black men it would be a signal of their promiscuity and debauchery. (Hodes, 1997: 5)

Hodes writes:

White women of lower classes and especially those who defied the rules of [White] patriarchy, could not count on ideology about female purity to absolve them of alleged illicit sexual activity. Poorer white women...were subject to abuse that ranged from insulting language to rape...sometimes black men and white women were simply accorded the same treatment. In Georgia, angry whites 'burned three coloured men, and three white women, alive, because they lived together (Hodes, 1997: 200).

The brutal and at times fatal sexist treatment directed toward lower class White women was not experienced by middle upper class White women. When the sexual liaison occurred

That is why poor white women + black men were treated the same

between Black men and elite White women the assumption was that a White woman of her stature could never have consented freely. It was always a case of rape. It was believed (or fabricated) that elite White women could never harbour lascivious desires towards Black men because they were too virtuous to entertain such ideas of men who were cast as beast-like. Their elite status was conflated with White womanhood. Hodes however points out that a significant transformation occurred in the late nineteenth century; after Emancipation, convictions about the depravity of poor White women began to command less power. The dominant ideas about White female virtuousness, resulting from new socio-economic and political imperatives, came to include poor women. Hodes explains that in the desire to preserve a racial hierarchy in the absence of slavery, White male southerners created extremely fixed boundaries of colour in attempts to ensure White women gave birth to only White children. Without slavery to differentiate Black people from poor White people, it was vital that ideas about the purity of White women include poor women (Hodes, 1997:202).

In The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters (1993), Ruth Frankenberg also tackles the topic of whiteness in a current American context. She analyzes how whiteness operates as a raced category conferring privilege. Frankenberg defines whiteness as a location of structural advantage, of race privilege and also as a standpoint, a location from which White people view themselves others and society. She emphasizes that whiteness is not a static location nor a historical essence. It is a complex construction given to local, regional, national and global relationships, both in the past and in the present. It is a part of a referential system which signals for White people the

production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality and privilege rather than disadvantage. In other words, not all White individuals have absolute privilege, any more than all males have absolute privilege. Rather individuals whose ascribed characteristics include whiteness (and maleness) will find the benefits of that ascription accruing to them. However whiteness is also a relational category because it is constructed within a range of other cultural categories such as class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality.

Frankenberg found during her interviews with 30 White women that the construction of whiteness and gender were most visible in the area of interracial relationships. She suggests that White women who crossed the boundaries of colour and race no longer fit neatly in the racial order of North American society. Symbolically these women's inclusion into their "rightful" place in the racial hierarchy is altered due to their interracial transgressions. For such women the "range of possible meanings of white femininity... [is] transformed in interracial contexts" (Frankenberg, 1993:136).

Frankenberg found that White women in relationships with men of colour were frequently reduced to sexual beings, as well as constructed as less bound by social controls.

Frankenberg also suggests that these women experience a phenomenon she identifies as a "rebound effect" which is a "force that owes its existence and direction to an earlier aim and impact, yet retains enough force to wound" (Frankenberg, 1993:112). The impact of racism on these White women originates from, and is shaped by their intimate involvement with, a Black man. However the effect is "neither identical nor merely a weaker version of the original impact: it is qualitatively new" (Frankenberg, 1993:112). Similar to

Frankenberg, Porterfield in a study conducted in the late 70s in the United States (1978) found it was not unheard of for young White women who dated Black men to be sent to mental institutions, or psychiatrists or to be disowned by family members. It was seen that only psychologically unstable White women would date Black men. Those White women who could not be saved from themselves were aggressively cut off from family members. Given Frankenberg's assertion and Porterfield's findings, what happens currently to these women's lives in a racially hostile context? Does this "rebound effect" create lives that are marked with emotional and physical injury? Is their whiteness deemed null and void due to their interracial transgressions? And how do they negotiate and live with their altered place in society's social and racial hierarchy?

Erving Goffman--Spoiled Identity

These questions around the instability and conditionality of White femininity hint at what Erving Goffman called "spoiled identity" (1963:19). This conception appears to support Frankenberg's contention that White women experience a "rebound effect" for their "racial transgressions". Like Dubois' (1965:215) double consciousness, one private and one public, Goffman's work suggests there exists a discrepancy between a person's virtual and actual identity. When this discrepancy becomes socially apparent "it spoils [the White woman's] social identity. "It has the effect of cutting [her] off from society and from [herself] so that [she] stands a discredited person facing an unaccepting world" (Goffman, 1963:19). Goffman explains that society establishes the means of categorizing people and categorizing those complimentary attributes deemed appropriate for those people in each category. Likewise "social settings establish the categories of persons likely

to be encountered there” (Goffman:1963:2). He illustrates that the routines of daily living in those established settings allow people to handle “anticipated others” without much thought. Goffman adds when a stranger comes into a person’s life then it is the initial appearance of the stranger that enables that person to anticipate the stranger’s category and attributes--meaning her/his social identity. Goffman states that people lean on these anticipations and transform “them into normative expectations, [and] into righteously presented demands” (Goffman,1963:2). When a stranger possesses an attribute that makes her/him different from others in relation to the normative expectations or categories, he or she is reduced from a whole and “usual” person to a tainted, discredited person. Goffman calls this attribute a *stigma*. It is the apparent stigma that causes the discrepancy between the virtual and actual social identity. Goffman discusses three different types of stigma but for the purposes of this literature review the stigma of race is worth noting. He notes that such a stigma can be transmitted through lineage and equally contaminates all family members (Goffman,1963:3). This suggests that a White women’s involvement with a man who has the stigma of race contaminates her and consequently discredits her virtual social identity. Thus, ¹ this literature review suggests that White women who involve themselves with Black men experience a discrepancy between their virtual and actual identities and hence “spoil” their White social identities which result from their transgressions.

It is important to note that although most of the texts used are American-specific, primarily because there is an absence of Canadian material, Canada has “to a large extent share[d] American views on Black male sexuality.” (Valverde,1998:83) Within a Canadian context, in the early 1900s it was perceived that no upstanding White women would freely

consent to sex with a Black man. In 1908 a Black Canadian male living in Chatham Ontario was punished for “luring a white girl from her home” (Thomson,1979:46). He was given a five year jail sentence and forty lashes. In another incident a mob of White citizens surrounded a Black man’s house yelling “hang the nigger” (Thomson,1979:47) for reportedly “forcing” a young White girl to carry his child. Colin Thomson in Blacks In Deep Snow: Black Pioneers in Canada (1979:46) argues that these incidents are only a few of the “many which indicated the Canadian taboo on interracial sexual relations.”, a view shared by the first prime minister of Canada. In a letter written in 1868 Sir John A. Macdonald wrote:

We still retained the punishment of death for rape...We have thought it well...to continue it on account of the frequency of rape committed by negroes, of whom we have too many in Upper Canada. They are very prone to felonious assaults on white women: if the sentence and imprisonment were not very severe there would be a great dread of the people taking the law into their own hands.

We primarily associate the negative responses towards interracial unions as American. Canada however, has its own historical experience with the construction of interracial unions of Black men and White women as threatening to the social order.

Conceptual Framework--Locating White Women

Given the historical significance of White women’s symbolic representation, the purpose of this research is to begin an exploration of the realities and experiences of White women who break from the socially constructed imagery of White womanhood. In order to comprehend the complexity of the experiences of White women in interracial relationships with Black men, whiteness must be made visible and problematized. To

accomplish this critique of whiteness and White femininity, the theory of whiteness and Erving Goffman's concept of "spoiled identities" will be employed. In wading through the complexity of White racial construction and lived experience, I hope this research will accomplish two primary objectives. First, I wish to contribute to the body of knowledge about White women whose actions symbolically and literally transgress the constitutiveness of the White racial order. In order to do so, the body of theory that deconstructs whiteness is critical to my research. This body of theory is articulated along a multi-disciplinary and seemingly anti-disciplinary trajectory and for this reason it has been essential to draw on and synthesize relevant information from several selected works. These works are grounded in understanding how whiteness and blackness are socially constructed as hegemonic representations in knowledge production, popular and mass culture. It is vital to understanding these hegemonic representations for they work at a structural level that informs experiences at the personal level. Based on these works, I argue that the representations that are inscribed on to the bodies of White women determine and impinge on their life experiences.

In conjunction with theories of whiteness I will utilize Erving Goffman's concept of the "spoiled identity" (1963:19). As noted in the literature review this is a concept which suggests that there exists a discrepancy between a person's virtual and actual identity. The literature review suggests that White women who involve themselves with Black men experience a discrepancy between their virtual and actual identity and consequently "spoil" their White social identity. The spoiling of their White social identities lies in their association with a stigmatized individual, hence the spoiling of their White social identity

which I call *stigma transference*. I have developed this term because similar concepts in both Ruth Frankenberg and Erving Goffman do not adequately address the complex dimension of stigma in these women's lives. As noted in the literature review Frankenberg discusses the boomeranging of the Black male stigma onto the White woman. Frankenberg however, does not substantively explore how this stigma occurs and how it is experienced by White women. For this reason, as I will soon explore, *stigma transference* extends beyond her concept to explore these insufficient dimensions. Before discussing further however, it is important to take into account Erving Goffman's notion of "courtesy stigma" (1963:30). Although it is a useful sociological concept that attempts to capture the effect of transferred stigma, in the context of my research participants it does not nuance the complex relationship between structural and personal power. Indeed, it would appear by Goffman's own usage of the term it was not intended to tease out the specificities of White women's experiences in interracial relationships with Black men. Courtesy stigma is meant to illustrate the general phenomenon of sharing the stigma assigned to a stigmatized individual. However as a general term it does not tease out the particular relationship between whiteness as a location of structural advantage and of race privilege.

Understanding how hegemonic representations of whiteness operate at a macro level is imperative towards understandings how White women's identities are spoiled. Simply put, the stigma these women encounter is not a "courtesy". It is an imposition that at times invades their life and informs or "deforms" the quality of their lives. These women are not only condemned for their intimate association with a Black man they are condemned for their choice to be with him. This research explores the defining characteristics of this

stigma transference and how these women negotiate and experience their “spoiled identities”. A fuller discussion of *stigma transference* and its distinction from “courtesy stigma” is best elucidated in the context of the data itself. This can be found in the thematic section titled “Stigma Transference--Once you go Black...”.

Second, this research will provide the space for White women in interracial relationships to articulate and validate the ambiguities and complexities of their own experiences. Considering that people, for the most part, do not passively accept their stigma it is important to explore how the women experience it. Goffman(1963) states that people engage in strategies and methods of managing and coping with their assigned stigma. For example, one possible way of coping with stigma is to deny that one is stigmatized (Goffman,1963:3). This research will explore some of the ways these White women in relationships with Black men cope and manage their “spoiled identities”. Finally, given that I am deeply implicated in this work by virtue of my involvement in an interracial relationship, I will also integrate my own experiences as a White woman in an interracial relationship with a Black man.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Although I am involved in an interracial relationship and have occasionally seen White women with Black men, locating research participants proved difficult and challenging. In my preliminary investigation in finding research participants, I have found that there are no Canadian organizations representing these women's issues and interests. This fact contributes to the difficulty of locating research participants. In the earlier part of my research I feared that I would suffer the fate of having no research participants at all. When I eventually made some contacts, the women were not interested, claiming to be very busy with their lives. Several times the women that initially appeared interested did not come through. Many times I felt compelled to stop virtual strangers who were apparently in interracial relationships and beg them to talk to me. Well, I never resorted to accosting strange White women or Black men on the street, but my partner did. As evidence of the challenges in finding research participants, the details of how I met my first two research participants are both interesting and unorthodox.

My partner had been grocery shopping when he glimpsed an interracial couple. He was painfully aware of the difficulty I was having locating White women in interracial relationships with Black men, so he took it upon himself to save me (and himself) from the fate of having no research participants at all. When the couple was separated my partner approached the woman's partner and explained my research interest. He asked if his partner would be interested in speaking with me. The boyfriend felt his partner would be

interested and my partner gave him our phone number. When my partner reached home he immediately explained what he had done and before he finished his story the phone rang and it was my potential research participant. She informed me that she would gladly participate and that she worked with another woman who was in an interracial relationship as well. She felt her co-worker would provide a very rich and interesting account of her experience. I was overjoyed. We arranged that I would interview her in a few days after which I would meet the other participant. When I arrived at my research participant's place of business, the other woman involved was there and was willing to be interviewed. Considering that finding these participants was a painful "hit or miss" experience, I felt it would be beneficial to interview both at the same time. The decision was a good one because the interview proved to be interesting and dynamic for several reasons. On one level, it allowed each participant to draw on the other's narrative which in turn enabled each participant to recall, formulate and reformulate their experiences. Also, there was an immediate comparison available for each participant which allowed them space for meaningful introspection. Finally, the group interview allowed for the diffusion of my "authority" as researcher which, I believe, enabled the women to feel freer in providing the raw material for this research.

Eventually I did locate four other research participants and most of them came by word of mouth or personal connections. Three of the women were strangers to me while the other three were casually connected to my life. In each interview I informed the women that I was in an interracial relationship with a Black man and to a large extent the purpose of my research was to give voice to the unique experiences of White women in

these relationships. On many occasions during the interviews I would relay some of my experiences in hopes that they would feel comfortable and safe enough to “open up”. The majority of the women needed no prompting. I received the impression that it was a welcome relief to talk about their experiences with someone who “understood”. However, the women with whom I was personally acquainted appeared to be more reserved than the women who were strangers to me prior to the interview. It appeared that having a prior history with the research participants work slightly against the “candidness” of the interviews. It is possible that these women felt compelled to impress me and create a picture of marital bliss. It led me to believe that they might have omitted some important details of their experiences to cast themselves in a favourable light. In this context being familiar with the research participants may have worked against the openness of the interviews. However, I was able to partially resolve this dilemma by disclosing some of my own personal struggles. I believe the disclosure of intimate details helped to create an atmosphere of casual camaraderie and like the group interview, allowed for the diffusion of my “authority” as researcher.

My criterion for choosing the research participants was that the women have had a intimate involvement with a Black man that they defined as committed and serious. They did not need to be with him currently but there needed to be involvement that spanned a minimum of six months. The rationale for this six month criterion is that a longer and more serious intimate involvement would increase the possibility of a variety and diversity of experiences. A greater variety and diversity of experiences would help to create a more indepth and complex account of these women’s experiences. Each interview was tape

recorded and approximately 45 to 90 minutes in length (except for the group interview which was a little over two hours). I had 40 questions in total (See appendix A). Although some questions focused on biographical information and specific issues concerning the quality of life since the women's interracial relationship and/or having an interracial child, most of the questions focused on how the women interpreted the social and familial response to their interracial relationship. Many of the questions I formulated sought to understand if they experienced a dislocation from their whiteness and consequently their race privilege. Did these women experience a spoiled identity and did they recognize it as "spoiled"? Other questions sought to uncover if these women perceived their personal experiences of loss as a structural phenomenon that was shared by other women. The interviews were transcribed and coded according to themes which were either prominent or were consistent throughout the research participant interviews. Roughly half of the themes were already formulated from the literature review and my own personal experiences, while the other half crystallized as I analyzed the transcripts. The themes were analyzed using a mixture of interpretive and critical sociology founded on theories of whiteness (which included anti-racist feminist texts) and Erving Goffman's notion of the "spoiled identity". To reiterate, this research does not propose to generalize the experiences of these six women to the experiences of all White women in interracial relationships with Black men. It really is an exploration of this relatively new topic for the purposes of laying a foundation for a larger future study.

Handwritten note:
 I think I should have included more questions about the women's experiences of loss and how they perceived their personal experiences of loss as a structural phenomenon that was shared by other women.

Research Participants--an introduction

Kelly³

Kelly is one of the two research participants who participated in the group interview. She was a stranger to me prior to the interview. Kelly identifies herself as a 22 year old Anglo Canadian whose ancestors have been in Southern Ontario, for “a *very long time*”. Probably a fifth or sixth generation Canadian, Kelly does not use ethnicity, but rather her Canadian nationality as the basis of her identity. She has been in her current and only serious relationship of note with David, a Jamaican Canadian, since she was 13 years old. She describes her nine year relationship with David as very happy and conflict free. Kelly recalls that when they met in grade seven or eight, her first impression of David was that he was a “really friendly guy” who was easy to get along with. She states that she did not see his “blackness” but rather was attracted to his “cuteness”. Kelly emphasized that she has had no objections to her relationship with David from family and friends, except from her grandmother. She tells me that her grandmother “totally denies we’re engaged or together”. She states that her finance’s family is also very accepting and supportive of their relationship. With considerable enthusiasm she states that David’s “family is great!”.

Considering that my experiences as a partner in an interracial relationship were so different it was difficult sympathizing with her experiences. During the interview I would ask myself, how could this woman be involved with a Black man and have only positive experiences? As the interview progressed I did find out that it was not all “wonderful”. She did experience social stigmatization. However, that stigmatization did not appear to affect how she experienced and conceptualized the relationship (see chapter 4 for further

³The names are pseudonyms.

discussion). As far as Kelly was concerned her relationship with David is primarily conflict free and gloriously happy. In Kelly's words "We're just, we're in love [and] we talk about everything [and] we just totally compromise on everything..."

Marina

Marina is the second research participant who participated in the group interview. She also was a stranger to me prior to the interview. Marina identifies herself as a 27 year old Italian Canadian who has been "raised [to believe] that you gotta take care of the man". And she does just that. Marina describes her two year relationship with her partner Jonathan: "I do everything, I do the cooking, I do the cleaning. He doesn't even take the garbage out. He's a king in his castle basically". She admits though that she willingly "martyrs" herself to this situation, "I like cooking, I don't mind [doing all the work]...I enjoy cooking. I don't mind keeping my place clean". However, in spite of her patriarchal conditioning, she identifies her relationship as "rocky". She states "there's just some things going on right now. I need some things to be changed and I don't think he is ready for those changes." Although Marina identifies that there are current problems that need be resolved, she emphatically asserts that she loves Jonathan and would eventually like to marry him. She recalls that initially she was not attracted to Jonathan, but as she explains, "he just kind of grew on me..."

Overall, she portrays her life and relationship as extremely troubled and burdened. Marina recalls many negative experiences during the interview which leaves the impression that her experiences have been endlessly traumatic. Marina's family aggressively cut her off as a family member. The only family member she has remained in contact is her mother.

Her father especially felt that she had betrayed the family. “As far as my parents are concerned I’ve hurt them...”. Not only has she had to bear the responsibility of hurting her family, she explains she has had to withstand the accusations of betraying her Italian heritage. Marina explains how she has lost employment because her former boss found out she was dating a Black man. She also describes the horrible nightmare she experienced trying to get housing. The climax to these traumatic experiences almost cost Marina her life. She identifies the reasons for her attempted suicide as primarily because of her interracial relationship and the responses she has received from her family and White society. During the interview I was extremely moved by Marina’s experiences. In many ways it felt like I was hearing my life story. She was the first White woman I had ever spoken to who shared some of my experiences. It was both painful and liberating to know someone else understood the agony that came from being in an interracial relationship with a Black man. It is very evident that her experiences had wounded her deeply and that she was still recovering.

Tammy

Tammy was my third interview. She is twenty nine years old, born in Canada and of Slovenian and Italian descent and works full time as a receptionist. I knew Tammy casually from the hair salon that I frequented. However, I was unaware that she had been in an interracial relationship and had a biracial child. My hair stylist, aware of my research pursuit, asked Tammy if she would be interested in speaking with me. Tammy, being a very open and congenial person agreed to the interview. The interview occurred in her home while her three year old daughter ran in and out of the house in youthful exuberance.

The most striking thing about Tammy was her commitment and devotion to her daughter. You could not talk to Tammy without getting the clear sense that her daughter was/is her primary focus in life.

She is separated from her baby's father and has very little contact. His infrequent contact is something she agonizes over. She is concerned that her daughter does not have an involved and caring father who is there to see his daughter develop into a beautiful human being. She told me "This is what I fight with myself everyday...He should be there even if he doesn't have the money. Is it gonna be like this when she is a teenager?"

Although Tammy primarily identifies her family as supportive and loving, she also feels that her family has stereotypical notions about Black men that are a constant source of conflict. She told me that her parents think "that Black men are all criminals...and they don't stick around for their children." Although she feared telling her father that she was pregnant, much to her surprise he turned out to be the greatest support. She told me "I was so scared to tell him. But I'll tell you...he was so understanding." Initially when both parents were informed of her pregnancy they warned her that it would be difficult for her because of the social stigmatization that she would suffer, however they stressed she made her "own choices" and therefore it was "her business".

Linda

Linda was my fourth interview which was arranged through a student in a class for which I was a teaching assistant. She is a twenty two year old early childhood educator. She is of Ukrainian background and has been in the relationship with her 23 year old fiancée for five years. She describes her relationship as "wonderful".

It was a difficult interview. She did not want to meet in person and so we agreed to do it over the phone. She was very reserved and offered very little personal information. I am unclear as to why she was so withdrawn. It could have been for a number of reasons. It may be that she has become generally guarded and suspicious of people due to her experiences. It simply could be that she was very busy and felt imposed upon. Or it could be that the medium for the interview was the telephone which was cold and impersonal. Even though the interview was tough, I was able to obtain some details about her experiences in an interracial relationship. She characterizes her experiences as extremely difficult because her parents have cut her out of their lives. She is unable to communicate with her younger siblings or other extended family members. Initially when her parents found out she was seeing a Black man she was forced to leave her home. Fortunately, her fiancée's family let her live at their home until she was able to finish school and find employment. What I remember most about our interview was that at the end she became animated and started to volunteer information. I had asked if there was anything she wanted to add. Linda started to talk about an "amazing" song that she had heard on the radio that she felt captured her experience. It was a song by *Blessed Union of Souls* and the main chorus is:

I was seeing Lisa now for a little over a year
 She's never been so happy but Lisa lives in fear
 That Daddy's gonna find out that she is in love with a Nigger....

Barbara

Barbara was my fifth interview. She is a middle class 49 year old market researcher of British descent. She describes her 16 year marriage with David as a very

happy relationship. She has two children aged 14 and 20. I have known Barbara casually for about 5 years because she was a member of an organization to which my children belonged. My partner is also acquainted with Barbara and her husband and decided he would initiate the contact. The interview took place at the organization amidst many exuberant children and with numerous interruptions. The most striking thing about the interview was the degree to which Barbara expressed hurt by the imposed image of the highly sexualized and promiscuous White woman who dates Black men. It was evident that this was the most disturbing aspect of being in an interracial relationship. However she was the most adamant of all participants at how “normal” her relationship was and resented all the attention.

Donna

Donna was my last interview and she was sent by an angel. She came at a point in the interview process when I needed at least one more research participant. The other possible research participants I had lined up were cancelling or backing out and I was feeling extremely frustrated. Donna had a slight connection to my life. I knew of her but did not know her personally. She is married to Steven, an ex-boyfriend of mine. We had remained friends over the years although our intimate involvement ended many years ago. As a last resort I asked Steven if he wouldn't mind if I spoke to his wife. To my great relief she agreed. I feared the interview might be tense but surprisingly it was so comfortable it felt like we had been friends for years. It actually felt like I had met a comrade in the struggle.

Donna describes herself as 32 year old Czechoslovakian Canadian who is currently finishing her Ph.D. She has two children, aged 3 and 7 with a Jamaican Canadian police officer. She describes her relationship of ten years as “the most rewarding relationship [she] ever had and probably will ever have except the relationship with her children...”. However, she also describes it as a “difficult relationship” primarily because of the “constant intrusions by society”. She explained that initially her family “freaked out” when they discovered she was in love with and carrying a Black man’s child. During the interview it was very evident that she has spent a lot of time thinking about the issues that affect interracial couples. In this way she was unique from the other participants.

Conclusion

The next chapter will analyze the raw data collected from the six research participants. The analysis of data is divided into two chapters. Chapter three is divided into the following three themes: *Physical Violence, Psychological and Psychic injury; Stigma Transference--Once you Go Black...; Only Old, Ugly Fat, White Women Allowed.* Chapter three focuses on the experiences that occurred *to* the women. It primarily examines the structural or macro component of the women’s experiences by exploring how these women’s White social identity has been spoiled.

Chapter 3

Transgressive Whiteness

The following chapter primarily examines how society, family and friends perceive, construct and react to their intimate relationships with Black men. It illustrates how gender constructions of White femininity and beauty inform many aspects of their spoiled identities. It also defines and elaborates on the experience of *stigma transference* which is a primary element of their experience. Chapter three also explores the violent, psychologically assaultive and dehumanizing dimensions of their experiences.

Physical Violence, Psychological and Psychic Injury

Violence in a general sense is defined as the exercise of physical force usually intended to effect injury (Collins Dictionary, 1986). Given that not all of the women encounter physical violence I wish to expand this theme to include the terms psychic and psychological injury. These terms incorporate the intention or the effect of harming, intimidating or damaging someone physically, as well as psychologically and psychically. Psychic injury is somewhat different from psychological. Psychological injury primarily deals with the exercise of harming or intimidating someone and attacking their emotional sense of well being. Psychic injury, as I define it, is the accumulative effect of psychological injury and/or physical injury which leaves a negative imprint on one's spirit or soul. It can be defined as an intangible weight or burden on one's spirit alternating in intensity depending on life circumstances. If someone's life circumstances are fraught with hardship then the experience of psychic injury will be greater. Patricia Williams in

“Spirit-Murdering The Messenger: The Discourse of Fingerpointing As the Law’s Response to Racism” (1994:147) identifies this phenomenon of psychic injury as “spirit-murder”. She defines it as “an offense so deeply painful, assaultive...[and] as devastating, as costly and as psychically obliterating as robbery or assault.” (Williams,1994:147).

Given the difficulty of measuring or quantifying psychic injury I developed a marker which helped me to identify psychic injury. I would look for those narratives that referred to or spoke about a *weight, a burden and/or a pain* that was primarily identified as emanating from the experiences of being in an interracial relationship. All of the narratives had some references to psychic injury. While half of the women experienced physical violence, all of the research participants experienced psychic and/or psychological injury.

The theme of violence spoke to me on a personal level as well as a researcher. It informed many of my experiences with society and my family. During the interviews, I relayed some of the violent and profoundly disturbing experiences I had undergone because of my involvement with a Black man--my father and I wrestling on the kitchen floor, my brother spitting on me, Black women attacking me, and constant verbal abuse. I hoped that sharing some of the horrors of my life would allow them the space to share their experiences. My experiences had left an indelible imprint on my soul⁴. I was curious to see if the women shared a similar relationship to violence. I found that all of the women

⁴Soul is something I define as the intangible and incorporeal part of my personhood. It is the unquantifiable part of a human being that encompasses one’s emotions, intellect, personality, beliefs etc.

had shared similar aspects of my experiences. However, I found how each coped with the experiences were quite different (I will return to this topic in a later theme).

Psychological Injury

All of the participants experienced psychological injury. They spoke of being called “White slut”, “nigger lover” and “White trash” and/or made to feel “crazy”. Barbara said “when I was in my twenties you know people would shout out of the car windows ‘nigger lover’ and stuff like that”. More recently, Marina had a similar experience. She said, “we were downtown going to the hair dresser holding hands, a car drives by and only White guys [are in the car and they yell out] ‘hey you nigger lover’”. But Marina had other verbal responses that most of the women did not. She recounted her father’s response when he found out about her partner Jonathan, “You are a whore, you are a slut, you are White trash...you are worse than dirt”. These verbal assaults were not restricted solely to her family relations. Marina also told me about her experience with her former boss and his many verbal attacks on her character. Her former boss had said to her “...Nigger lover. White trash. We don’t need White trash working in our store...”. In an all too familiar narrative, Donna states that, “You get really tired of being called a nigger lover, White slut, White trash, White bitch...”

Linda maintained that she did not have the experience of being verbally assaulted. She did mention feeling schizophrenic because of the deceptions she engaged in when being with her boyfriend. She comments, “There was this feeling of being schizophrenic because I had to lie to everybody. It was 100% kept a secret.”...[but] when my mother got another suspicion of it [she] had the phones tapped.”

The defining characteristics of the psychological injury are the verbal assaults.

These verbal assaults are evidently meant to denigrate the women, put them in their "place" for their "transgressions". However there are some very peculiar and consistent responses that need to be deconstructed and analyzed. The consistent response is "White slut, White trash, White bitch and nigger-lover". Why not slut or bitch? Why even call a woman who is involved with a Black man "slut"? When strangers drive by a same race couple do they yell out the car window "White slut", let alone "slut"? When a father learns that his adult White daughter is in love with a White man does he call her "White trash"? The answer in each case is no. These questions seem almost absurd. But we need to go to the absurd to understand and deconstruct this phenomenon.

From the literature review it is understood that when a White woman involves herself with a Black man she is constructed as promiscuous and immoral. But why is she a "White slut" and not just a "slut"? The answer lies in understanding the association and relationship between whiteness, blackness and sexuality in this society. In order to understand the association one must ask the question, how does a White person know they are "white" and not "pink" or "beige"? A White person only knows they are White because they are the opposite of "Black". In the same vein, how does a man know he is a man? A man knows he is a man because he is the opposite of "woman". These binary opposites are not just colour or sex designations they are social definitions and symbolic connotations that mark the boundaries of power and privilege. In this context, when a White woman takes a Black man for a lover/husband her whiteness and femininity/sexuality come into being and therefore into question. The power of whiteness

resides in its invisibility, in it not being distinctive in its corporeality. In support Richard Dyer (1997:45) states “Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen.”. In this context, a White woman’s whiteness remains non-distinctive, as long as she is with a White man which, by extension, means her whiteness is mediated by whom she forms intimate attachments. And in this context, her whiteness and sexuality is a commodity used for its exchange value. Its exchange value is the reproduction of whiteness (and maleness) and therefore White, male, racial dominance. This fact never comes into question when she remains “inhouse”. So when she transgresses the colour line she is not only a slut, she is a “White slut”. She has closed off her womb to White racial reproduction and therefore she is to be publicly denigrated-- made to be a spectacle by the “appellation” (Althusser,1971) of her transgressive White femininity. In the appellation she is hailed as an object of transgressive virtue and in being made a spectacle she serves as a disciplinary example to other would be transgressors.

Physical Violence

Kelly, Marina and Donna also experienced physical violence. Kelly spoke about her experience in high school when she was physically assaulted by Black female students for crossing the colour line: “I was jumped by a couple of Black girls because of our relationship. All these Black girls jumped on me and beat me like with their hands and their feet.” Donna recalls having many hostile encounters with Black women. She explains that, “In fact I had been attacked by Black women on several different occasions. One had tried to stab me, bite me and beat me up all at the same time because I was dating

a Black man...It is really crazy how people respond to interracial relationships.” Donna also told me about her father’s response when he found out she was seeing a Black man, “My father freaked out and physically attacked me”. Donna also experienced hostile reactions from White male strangers. She told me “I have had worse experiences... where I had been spit on by White men, strangers no less...”

Although Marina had not experienced hostile reactions from Black women she did experience volatile responses from family members. She spoke specifically of her father’s volatile response to her relationship with Jonathan. She recounts, “I would have got it from my dad if I didn’t run out the door, oh yeah. I was being chased with an axe and then instead of him axing me he broke all the kitchen walls, yup. So, I was kind of lucky actually.” Marina never actually received the blows from the axe, but in her mind, her father’s intention was real and threatening.

To date most of the research on physical violence undertaken by feminists has focused on male violence against their female partners (hooks,1984). Very little has been written about male violence against their adult daughters (and sons) and violence between women. In the case of these research participants, the majority of the physical violence or threat of injury encountered were at the hands of their fathers, Black women and White male strangers. To understand the experiences it would be useful to employ aspects of a radical feminist approach. However on its own, it would not suffice. Radical feminists conceive patriarchy as a system of total domination in which groups of men strive to control other men, but especially women by means of imperialism, racism and class structures (Hartmann,1981:15). Male control of women’s bodies is the fundamental tenet

of radical feminist analysis. When a woman transgresses the boundaries of patriarchy it is within the man's jurisdiction to "discipline" her, even if that means physical "discipline". Evidently Marina and Donna had done the unthinkable, at least in their father's eyes. Their fathers' responses, although violent, are justified within a system of patriarchy. Patriarchy, as a social system, allows for male domination to be structured into household relations, thereby allowing the man to exercise "petty tyranny" (Luxton, 1980:65). However, conceptualizing patriarchy as a constant universal would be theoretically inaccurate and undesirable. A theoretical approach that incorporates variables of race and ethnicity would be essential. Not all men are allowed to participate equally in a western patriarchal system, therefore it is only reasonable to assume the motivating factors for their aggression would differ. An anti-racist and feminist approach would be most useful in analyzing the aggression specifically against Marina and Donna by their fathers.

Part of the answer for these fathers' aggression against their daughters lies in Donna's narrative. Donna explained that her "father freaked out and physically attacked [her]. When I asked her why her father would respond in such a violent way, she commented:

Well, I think it is a complicated thing. I think the response I got from my father hinges on three things--one, that I am a woman and so I am his possession. I am not supposed to take charge of my life and two, I have tarnished his image and three, the black man is considered shit and oh, he has a super huge penis...

Donna's explanatory narrative of the violence she experienced at the hands of her father is validated by Dyer's (1997) discussion on the boundaries of whiteness. Whiteness as the cultural signifier of privilege is not a fixed and stable category. Dyer helps to explain

how whiteness as a cultural signifier has been more successful in uniting people across national cultural differences under the tribe of whiteness, even when it is against their best interest. He explains that whiteness as a coalition creates unstable categories that either 1) let different groups of people into the category of whiteness, for example, the Irish, Mexicans, Jews, Italians etc. (Dyer,1997:19) and/or 2) incites the notion that some Whites are whiter than others, for example Anglo-Saxons, Germans, Scandinavians. An internal hierarchy of whiteness and a continually shifting border allows for the transmission of rewards and privileges based on notions of whiteness. It has seduced and “enthralled [many groups of] people who have had any chance of participating in it” (Dyer,1997:20).

In support of Dyer’s contentions, Donna stated:

[My mother] and my father wanted to shed the mark of being an immigrant. After years of being here in Canada they have become somewhat [Anglo-identified]. My bringing a Black man and a Black baby, to boot, to their front door, has ruined their climb up the Anglo ladder, if you know what I mean. It took them so long not to be defined by their immigrant status and here I am bringing a ‘nigger’ into their home. They felt that I ‘blackened’ their image.

Understanding how whiteness is not necessarily a fixed and stable category helps to illustrate why Donna and Marina’s father would express such violent opposition to their interracial union. Within the internal hierarchy of whiteness, Marina and Donna, being of Italian and Czechoslovakian descent, were not “fully” White. This helps to explain Marina’s and Donna’s family’s violent response to their interracial unions. Possibly Italians and Czechs, who have recently been included and fought hard to be included in the “White tribe”, feel less secure in their whiteness. Marina and Donna’s interracial “transgression” betrayed this hard won “accomplishment”. In addition, Donna and

Marina's womb is no longer available for the reproduction of whiteness. Their fathers' struggle to climb the hierarchy of whiteness has been thwarted by their daughters' sexual and emotional transgressions. In addition, as White patriarchs, their manhood has come into question because of their daughters' transgressions. Donna explains:

My association with a Black man is brought on to [my father], at least that is how it is perceived in my community. It is seen, in his mind that, he has raised a daughter who loves "niggers" and it is such a disgrace. It is despicable. He, as the head of the family is supposed to control his daughter. He is supposed to have control of all the women in the family because they are his rightful possession. Anyway, my being with a Black man is a sign that he has lost control of his daughter which consequently illustrates he is not man enough. Ultimately to show to the world that he has regained some control he must disown her. He has to cut her off to regain his manhood. Does that make sense? I know it must sound weird.

Using an anti-racist feminist approach to understanding the violence experienced at the hands of their fathers' has been useful, but it is limiting towards understanding the violence experienced by these White women at the hands of Black women. At the heart of theories of violence lies the assumption that violence is perpetrated by the powerful against the powerless. While this may be true most of the time, it is not necessarily the case when addressing the issue of violence against White women in interracial relationships with Black men.

Bell hooks (1984) states that Black women are in an unusual position in society because their overall social status is lower than any other group. She asserts that Black women have not been socialized to act the role of exploiter/oppressor because they are not allowed an institutionalized other that they can exploit or oppress (hooks, 1984:14). Hooks states that "white women and Black men have it both ways. They can act as oppressor or

be oppressed.” (hooks,1984:15). If we are to accept hook’s assertions, how can the violence experienced by these White women be explained? It should be White women attacking Black women. However this is not the case. It would be more useful to take Karen Warren’s concept of “power against power” (1994:185). In her article “Towards an Ecofeminist Peace Politics” she defines “power against power” as the exercise of power by the oppressed against their oppressors (Warren,1994:185). Warren states that it can be seen that the oppressed lack the privilege and power necessary to exercise institutional and consequently personal power in the same way as their oppressors. In this context, the oppressed may feel justified in using whatever means necessary including injury to get their legitimate needs met. Warren does not justify that use of power, however she does offer a way of perceiving or understanding why the oppressed lash out at their oppressors or those who share certain associations with them.

Warren’s concept of “power against power” is a useful concept towards understanding the violence perpetrated by Black women against White women. It can be perceived as the pursuit and exercise of power in a world that disempowers Black women daily. They may be lashing out at those whom they believe are the source of their anguish. Donna’s narrative about being attacked by a Black woman is very telling of the motives behind it:

There is one incident that sticks out in my mind because it was the most traumatic. To make a very long story short, there was a Black woman that wanted my fiancée and went out of her way to let me know. She would follow me to the bus stop and verbally harass me. She would tell me that I was a ‘White bitch’ and that I didn’t deserve him. She vowed she would take him away from me because he ‘belonged’ to her. At the time I didn’t really understand what she was saying. I just thought she was crazy.

Anyway, one day she came over to our apartment. I made a huge mistake and let her in. She immediately ran into the kitchen and grabbed a butter knife. She tried to stab me with a butter knife. It was so crazy. I totally did not expect it. Well, I defended myself and well, it got real crazy. As she hit me and bit me she kept screaming that I was nothing but “White trash”. I was nothing but “a White slut” that stole Black men away from Black women.” Luckily for me, my fiancée came home and managed to get her off of me. It is really difficult to talk about. It still pains me to remember the incident. I just don’t want to talk about it anymore. But I will say this. I now understand why she said the things she said.

When I asked Donna why the woman that attacked her said the things she said, Donna replied:

I now understand that there is a long history that preceded my relationship with my, then, finance. We are no longer together. This history is one of extreme denigration of Black people, especially Black women, at the hands of White people. That wound has never healed and it never will as long as White people, in particular, are denying that racism and systems of White supremacy still exist.

Psychic Injury

I found that all of the women had experienced psychic injury though the majority did not have a formalized discourse. Donna and Barbara were the exceptions. Although they did not use the terms psychic injury their narratives follow very closely my definition of psychic injury. Donna alluded to this psychic injury as the constant intrusions by society. These intrusions brought many challenges to her life. She explained:

Some of the challenges are external to us and some of the challenges are internal of course. But the external aspects are the constant intrusions by society, by people that cross our path who obviously don’t like interracial couples. They impinge on our lives sometimes and that can be hard...Those are the external challenges that kinda weigh on you and take their toll and you aren’t even aware of it until you start having outbursts all over the place.

Donna’s narrative indicates that the constant surveillance which results from “the looks of disgust, the stares, the whispering...” all combine to intensify her feelings of insecurity.

Like Donna, Barbara's narrative also suggests experiences of spiritual denigration. She comments on the unquantifiable feeling of being tarnished and less than human:

It is offensive. Somehow you are some sort of scum bag because you dated some black guy, somehow you are easier...Those kinds of things degrade you...I think that hurts very much that sort of stuff--like there was something wrong with you. You just weren't a nice person because you were going out with black guys.

Both Donna and Barbara's narratives illustrate the weight of the psychic injury.

Marina, also experienced psychic injury and in her particular case the effects may have been the most intense. Her narratives suggest that the interference she encountered in her life surrounding her interracial relationship has contributed to her attempting suicide.

Marina said:

Right in the beginning of our relationship it was bad....I couldn't handle it...it was really bad. I attempted suicide. There is so much interference in our relationship. We're both surprised that we've lasted as long as we have. With the way my family is ...there's just a lot of interference...like right now our lease is going to be up in July and I really want to move...but I'm thinking 'oh god, we have to go through all of that again' because the places that I do like, nobody's gonna rent to us because of [Jonathan]...

Tammy's experience suggests a slightly different psychic injury. Her narratives focused on the pain of feeling alone. During our discussion she became quite emotional. She told me while trying to hold back her tears, "Its hard because its like me against everybody else...You want [understanding and empathy] to come from your family. Its hard when they don't see. I'll get emotional through this..."

The psychic injury experienced by these women is the accumulation of experiences both psychological and/or physical that intruded and impinged on their lives. They live, because of their involvement with a Black man, with the threat of violence, verbal assaults

and/or social ostracization. The responses are a heavy burden that at times take a toll. This toll manifests itself in different ways: Donna spoke about having outbursts; Barbara spoke of the pain of being degraded; Linda spoke of feeling schizophrenic; Tammy spoke of feeling alone; Marina tried to commit suicide. This is not to say that the feelings these women articulated were the singular outcome of being with a Black man. Their lives and emotions are far more complex than to be affected by one variable. However to say that it is not related to being with a Black man would also be erroneous. Their experiences relate to the fact that they are in a relationship defined as taboo. The connections between the acts of physical and psychological injury and the reasons behind the acts were clearly expressed. As Marina's father chased her with an axe he called her a "White slut" and "nigger lover". Although he was not pleased, Marina's father did not react violently when she was dating a Sicilian or a French man. According to Marina:

To my father I was going from bad to worse because I had gone from a Sicilian man to a French man...right so and when I went to the Black [side] I was like the dirt on the bottom of his feet he says...

When Black women attacked Kelly and Donna they hurled verbal slurs of "White bitch" because they felt White women had no claims on a Black man. It could not be said that these women would never experience violence in their life if they were with a White man (feminist and sociological research on violence against women indicates as much).

However, the violence these women have/are experiencing is as result of their involvement with a Black man.

It is important to note that these women do not live lives of daily terror. I do not wish to paint a picture of these women as perpetual powerless victims. Having said as much, that is not to say that these women are not victimized. While they are victims of violence and social ostracization, they are also women of immense strength. Also not all of the opposition to their relationships was/is hurtful or violent. Some of the participants spoke of the humorous ways people manifested anti-interracial sentiments.

I had relayed an incident that occurred to my partner and me in the hope that it would trigger similar memories. I told them my “Cashway” incident. My partner and I were purchasing an item at a lumber store and needed it transported to our vehicle. A clerk was called over the intercom to assist a customer at the cash register. When the clerk arrived I told him that the item was beside my husband. I pointed to my husband who was standing near the item. As I paid for the item I watched the clerk walk over to the White man right next to my husband. As I called over to the clerk that he was going to the wrong person I pointed, once again, to my husband. This occurred three times and each time he went up to a White man. My partner caught on to what was happening and directed the clerk over to the item. It was quite evident that the clerk could not imagine me, a White woman with a Black man. The natural association was that I would be with a White man. Even when I directly pointed to my partner and the item, he did not “see” my partner. As Barbara comments, “The natural association is that you are supposed to be with a White person”. Each time I relayed the story to the research participants we would have quite a laugh. We intimately understood the experience because, at one time or another, it

happened to all us. Linda told me about her grocery shopping experience with her future mother-in-law:

Well, even if I go grocery shopping with his mother. They will ring her stuff in and they think we're separate. And then they will go 'Oh you are together?' And she would go 'ya!'

Linda's experience exemplifies the subtle ways some people make it known that White and Black people do not "naturally" associate. The cashier automatically made the assumption that Linda and her fiancée's mother were not together.

In a similar vein Barbara told me of her experience where she was matched to the wrong person in a restaurant. "When you are with a Black woman and a White guy that are married and they fit you with the wrong people. I am with the White guy and she is with the Black guy". Barbara comments on this experience as "those humorous moments when people are stereotyping all over the place. The natural association is that you are supposed to be with the White person".

In some cases however, the false assumptions of White people were no laughing matter. In Brenda's case, because of her youth, she experienced being admonished and patronized by older White adults. For example, she described how it was made known to her that she should not be with Paul. On several occasions older White women would stop her and Paul on the street and ask "Does your mom know you're doing this?" Kelly told me "Ya, we were just walking home from school with our school bags, we were never one to hold hands or anything like that. We could have just been friends and old ladies would say...'Does your mom know you're doing this?'"

At times the belief of unnaturalness of the association between a White woman with a Black went beyond “innocent mistakes”. Marina described a scenario which demonstrates the visibility and risk to which young interracial couples are susceptible. While at Canada's Wonderland, a popular theme park, her boyfriend had won a pink rubber bat and was playfully hitting Marina with it when the police were dispatched onto the scene. She explains:

He won a stupid pink rubber bat. He's chasing me and hitting me with it. It's rubber. It's rubber! The police [say] 'ma'am' are you OK?'. [They] grab Jonathan, slap his hands behind his back and [start] to take the hand cuffs' out. [They] try putting me in the car. [I] say 'don't touch me. I am fine.' I am laughing O.K., like ha ha--like we're playing.

In Marina's mind the police aggression towards Jonathan was clearly an act of racism. In their playfulness there were no indications of physical violence--the bat was pink and she was laughing the whole time. Only within what Judith Butler (1993:15) calls “a saturated field of racial visibility” can a pink rubber bat be seen as a weapon. Borrowing from Franz Fanon, she explains that the Black male body is constituted as dangerous prior to any physical threat. The reaction to the Black body by the White body is one of fear, a fear that the “virgin sanctity of whiteness will be endangered by the proximity of the black body” (Butler, 1993:18). Within this racist episteme, any Black man, by virtue of his blackness is always on the verge of exhibiting violence towards whiteness therefore, the police and all White citizens must be primed for those “imaginary blows”. The police response to Jonathan can be seen through this light. Marina articulates that she clearly was not in any danger from Jonathan or the pink rubber bat. Although we can't be sure exactly why the police responded so quickly and aggressively to Jonathan, it can be said

that the response was exaggerated. Many of the responses received by these women from society, friends and family is informed by this exaggerated response.

Conclusion

Much of the violence and anti-interracial sentiments encountered by these women were contingent on the fact that they were **White** women in an interracial relationship with **Black** men. The bodies of White women and Black men are infused with exaggerated notions of social and cultural differences. As White women they are literally the bearers of children and therefore the indispensable means by which the White “race” is reproduced. The notion that White women must be loyal both to whiteness and White men is a key factor in the discourse against interracial couples. These women have transgressed the colour line and therefore betrayed the means by which White men can guarantee White racial reproduction and their supremacy.

The physical violence, psychological and psychic injury they experienced was related to their breaking the socially expected norms that were contingent on race and gender expectations. They were race traitors because they closed-off their wombs to White reproduction and they were not supposed to take charge of their lives. They were not supposed to define how and with whom they want to live and love. That right is reserved for White men. Although White women are privileged due to their whiteness they do not have the same relation to power as White men. Kate Davy (1995:197) argues that the archetypal role of White women has been to foster individualism in White men while denying it to themselves. These women, particularly Marina and Donna, took for themselves a subject position that is usually reserved for White men, and in doing so

suffered the consequences. The punitive measures taken by family, friends and society were consistent: verbal assaults, physical violence and psychic injury. These responses are more than just a slight reaction to the fact that these women are loving, marrying and make a life with a culturally unfamiliar or undesirable person--it hinges on a response to very specific phantasmatical and manichean notions of blackness and whiteness. Race, gender and at times ethnicity are inextricably bound in the responses these women have received. The boundaries of whiteness and femininity/sexuality collide in an explosive mix when White women transgress the colour line with Black men. Although the women have experienced violence as a result of their involvement with a man defined as taboo, the key point is not so much that the Black male is taboo, but the nature and quality of the taboo. Understanding the mythological cultural, social and biological representations inscribed on the Black male body and the White female body is a pivotal point towards grasping the experiences of these women because it is these representations that play a determinative role in the quality of life their lives. The *stigma transference* (see following sections for further discussion) they experience produces a potentially dangerous or intimidating situation from male family members, White male strangers and at times, Black women.

Stigma Transference-- Once You Go Black ...

In the time I have associated with Black men I always felt there was a very strange and exaggerated response from family members, friends and the public. Over the course of 12 years with my partner I have heard numerous times "once you go Black you never go back.". It was always said to me with a grin, or a chuckle and/or a wink. Did they know something that I didn't? Invariably questions followed: "Was *it* true?", they would ask. In

response I would ask "What was *it*?" . "You know, *it*--his penis, is it really as big as they say? Is sex with a Black man better?" Initially, I was dumbfounded by these questions. However, I eventually learned to sarcastically respond: "I wouldn't know. I haven't screwed every Black man on the planet to find out." What I had learned from these experiences was that invariably the association with Black men was about sexual pleasure and penis size.

My experiences around sexuality and race particularly resonated with Barbara. She commented on her belief that White men are sexually intimidated by Black men:

I think that White men are totally intimidated by Black men, anyway from a sexual point of view. I think they sort of resent that the fact that you might not find them attractive because you hung out with Black guys therefore that is your standard of attraction and so you wouldn't be attracted to them and they resent that.

In my discussion with Barbara, I related my experience with, Andrew, a White man that I had been dating years before my involvement with my current partner. Andrew and I had a casual and platonic dating relationship. On one occasion while driving to the corner store he decided to make a personal confession. Being a co-worker with my Black ex-boyfriend, Andrew told me that he was aware that I had been seriously involved with a Black man. In light of this, he thought it only fair to tell me that he had a small penis. I was stunned by his disclosure and I thought I misheard. Not understanding the reasons which compelled his disclosure, I asked him why he would feel a need to tell me such a thing. He said he felt it was an important issue because I had been with a Black man and in the eventuality of us having sex, I would not be terribly disappointed by his size. As I relayed my story to

Barbara she laughed hysterically, all the while nodding in recognition. She exclaimed at the end of my narrative,

Exactly! I think there is a lot of penis focus from White guys, 'once you go Black you never go back' You must have heard that a million times...it's wild eh? It's because White men have tiny little penises, very small (she says sarcastically). When you are in a society that has developed penis enhancers, you know you are in big trouble.

After speaking with other women, it was evident that the association with Black men and large genitalia was not exclusive to myself and Barbara. It was a common mythology about Black men that was made known to the other women. Donna also commented on the same point when she spoke about what she believed shaped her father's response to her interracial relationship. She said,

He has a super huge penis and so, I think, [that my father] thinks, and all other White men, that I am being fucked real good. Excuse my vulgar language. But I really think that is what goes through their minds. When they see me with him, they see lots and lots of wild insatiable sex.

The discourse of "once you go Black..." has wider implications than its usual sexual connotation. Not all of the research participants spoke about the association of large genitalia to Black men. However most of the women were told "once you go Black you never go back". But whether it be sexual or more generally relating to culture there is something about "blackness" that is framed as overpowering and so when "you go Black, you never go back". The implication in this statement is that going Black is like a drug addiction. And like a drug addict, these women crave the drug. The black male is equated to the drug--addictive, but pleurably overpowering and to be avoided because there is no point of 'return'.

An example of this extra-sexual connotation is when Lisa's parents expressed fear that she would loose herself to her partner's culture. She commented that her parents think "I am being driven into his culture, his music, his everything." What that something is for Lisa's parents was not made explicit, however, in general terms there is something about *his culture, his music, his everything*, which will subsume Linda and by extension her parents, her race, and her culture.

In Marina's case, her family associated blackness with evil. Prior to her total estrangement from her family Marina explained that whenever she was in the presence of her nephew, her sister-in-law "gets his horn [pendant] and pins it on him, as if I'm gonna like curse my nephew...they wouldn't even let me hold [him]". She explained that her family acts in this way "because Jonathan is Black and...they think I'm going to put some 'Black' on [my nephew]". Explaining the significance of the horn and its correlation to the blackness of her boyfriend, she explained that it is a Mediterranean and Eastern European symbol that has power to ward off evil. In other words, the horn pendant provides the protection against the blackness to which Marina has succumbed or been contaminated. Although the association between blackness and evil is present, so too is the idea that all Black people are prone, more than others, to engage in lascivious and immoral behavior. In this respect, Marina explained that her family believed that "all black people are druggies, are robbers, are cheaters, cannot have a family." As Marina's boyfriend was permanently marked by an evil organic to his race she too, by virtue of her association with his blackness, was also marked as more lascivious and prone to evil. Along the same line, Barbara commented,

The fact that you were going out with Black men made you somehow out of that norm way more than anyone else. Your friends may have slept with 15 guys but if you slept with one Black guy it was way worse than anything else you could have done...Somehow you are much more promiscuous, more more loose...than some little White woman in a White only relationship who screws everything that moves.

Donna also mentioned the exaggerated response she has received because of her involvement with Sean. She explained that she is now contaminated by her partner's Blackness and must be avoided. Donna said,

No matter what. No matter how many degrees I have, whether I have Doctor in front of my name, behind my name, whether I am driving a BMW--I am with him and my kids are mixed--*I am stained* [emphasis mine].

She also explained how some people treat her because of the stain: "[You] get treated like there is something wrong with you. I can't explain it. It is like people don't want to touch you, they don't want to look at you too long. If they look at you somehow it will *rub off* [emphasis mine] on them". Barbara also referred to the same issue, "People don't want to get too close to you because they don't want to get tarnished. You find you don't have many female friends--that's how it translates". Similarly Donna mentioned that she has not made friends because of her association with Black men. She commented, "I think that I have probably not made friends because of it". What is it about blackness and those associated with it that make people act like it is a contagion, something that will rub off or tarnish them? The answer lies in the women's narratives. Marina's family associated blackness with evil. Barbara's experiences illustrate that society associates blackness with some kind of metaphysical power that overtakes women who are involved with Black men.

As well, the narratives illustrate that Black men are associated with large genitalia and sexual potency. None of these discourses are new or surprising.

The association of Black people with evil and lascivious behavior has a long history. One of the representations that had great cultural currency was the “Great Chain of Being”, (Hoch,1979). It was an eighteenth century model that assigned human groups within a racial hierarchy. Black people were positioned only just above the apes. Within this hierarchy, Black people were depicted as icons of deviant sexuality. Black men and women were constructed as embodying all that was “lower” and “sexual”. Black men represented the dark bestial forces of lust and were prone to raping (White) females above them in the “Great Chain of Being” (Hoch,1979:52). The conception of the Black male was constructed in predominantly genital terms--he was a “walking phallus”. He was thought to be endowed with large genitalia and in a world that had a phallocentric idealization of masculinity, the Black male reigned supreme. He became the model of super masculine potency and absolute debasement. The inculcation of this representation into hegemonic discourse has been successful. It’s success is evident in the narratives of these women.

Stigma transference

What is so interesting is the extent to which these women are stigmatized by their intimate association with their Black partners. This phenomena identified as a “rebound effect” in Ruth Frankenberg’s (1993) The Social Construction of White Women: White Women Race Matters resides in the transference of the stigma of blackness. Goffman (1963) also discusses the phenomenon of stigma experienced by those with whom the

deviant is intimately associated and defines it as “courtesy stigma” (Goffman,1963:30) . His definition was intended to apply to “spouses and offspring of [psychiatric] patients, families of mentally retarded children, and convicted felons, parents of gays and others who are required to share the discredit assigned to the stigmatized individual” (Pfuhl &Henry,1993:178). To be sure, White women in interracial relationships with Black men do experience a social liability. However, the concept of “courtesy stigma” is insufficient to fully capture the depth and complexity of these experiences with the social ascription of race. As with “courtesy stigma”, stigma transference lies in White women’s association with what Goffman defines as a *discredited* person (the Black man), which as a result makes the White woman a *discreditable* person. The difference between the discredited and discreditable, Goffman explains, is that the discredited are known to the world as stigmatized. It is not something that can be concealed. The discreditable have the ability to “pass” because the stigma may not be immediately perceivable to society (Goffman,1963:4). In this context, White women who date Black men, are *discreditable* and only become *discredited* when they are in the presence of their Black partners who carry the stigma of “race” or when the fact becomes publicly known. Their intimate association to a stigmatized individual marks them as well, therein lies what Goffman would define as “courtesy stigma”. However, where Goffman’s concept of “courtesy stigma” differs from my concept of *stigma transference* is in the fact that the White women are condemned for their **choice** to be with a stigmatized individual. In the case of spouses and offspring of alcoholic parents or psychiatric patients, although they experience stigma, they are not socially condemned for having made a choice in their associations. In

point of fact they may well experience a stigma qualitatively different from Goffman's "courtesy stigma" because they may also experience pity and compassion. They themselves are not the ones stigmatized. White women in interracial relationships are however, seen as making a choice. A choice which marks them as traitors to their race and willful enactors of female agency. In essence, White women do not experience this stigma as a "courtesy", rather they experience a stigma commensurately close to the racism perpetually associated with their partners' blackness. And although they experience "courtesy stigma", the explicitly political nature of their choice to associate with a discredited social person and to become discredited themselves, extends beyond the "discrediteness" which results from "courtesy stigma". A further distinction arises when race, as a relation of ruling, is complicated by whiteness as a structural location of social power and advantage. Because of the fluidity of whiteness White women do not "own" the stigma and therefore, they can oscillate at different periods, between being a discreditable and a discredited person. Simply put these women do not possess the stigma of "black" skin. They are White women. The actual visibility and perceived knowledge of their association to the stigmatized Black male is the pivotal factor in the phenomenon of *stigma transference*. If they were to separate and close off all attachments to their Black partners there is a possibility that they would lose the social stigma and be redeemed, as long as their previous "transgression" was not known. Once the Black male is absent there is no visible cue to their "transgression", unless there is an interracial/biracial child involved or some lingering social knowledge of their past transgression. Although family members and people in close proximity to their lives (friends, neighbours and work associates) may still fault them for

their involvement, their access to the benefits accrued to them for their White skin remains intact. Consequently, the White skin privilege lost or altered due to their involvement is reinstated. Their access to housing, their risk of physical and psychological injury, their overall quality of life will *not* be negatively affected by their involvement with a stigmatized male. In addition, family members who previously condemned them for their choice to become intimately involved with a Black male may rethink their position and allow them their one transgression--as long as it is the only "transgression". They cannot be repeat offenders.

As illustrated in this section it is constructed that blackness is so overpowering that it may be perceived that they have succumbed to the power of Blackness. If they sever their attachment and develop another intimate relationship with a Black man, then they would be viewed as repeat offenders. As repeat offenders they are irredeemable and therefore unforgivable. However, having said that it is important to note that forgiveness is not always possible, even if the women are not repeat offenders. Some people may always condemn these women for their choices because they took subject positions that are usually reserved for White men. Hooks explains this phenomenon, "engaging in sexual encounters with non-white females, [is] considered a ritual of transcendence, a movement out into a world of difference that [will] transform, an acceptable rite of passage...the presence of the Other, the body of the Other, [is] seen as existing to serve the ends of white male desires" (1992:28). These White women acted inappropriately according to the code of White femininity and for this indiscretion they may be condemned forever by family members.

Whereas Goffman's "courtesy stigma" is unclear in defining the relationship between the fluidity of personal relations with institutional structures of power, *stigma transference* seeks to account for the fluidity and complexity of individual and structural power. *Stigma transference* is complex because of the fluidity with which personal and structural power operate. Given the fact that the White women may not always be damned for their "transgression" and that the privilege of whiteness remains intact as long as the Black man is absent indicates the power, privilege and fluidity of whiteness that operates both at the individual and structural level. In this context whiteness as a location of structural advantage and of race privilege that signals the production and reproduction of dominance and power. However given that it is a relational category it is mediated by other categories of class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality (Frankenberg, 1993:1). In this context, as White women they have access to the benefits and privileges accrued to them for their whiteness but as White women in interracial relationships to Black men their benefits and privileges are mediated by the *stigma transference*. This complex relationship between personal and structural power is illustrated by the phenomenon of *stigma transference* experienced by these White women. In validation of this point, Donna and Tammy both comment:

Donna: When I am by myself, and that is not to say I get treated wonderfully when I am by myself, I think being a woman kind of marks you as well, but overall I am treated well in terms of going shopping, service. People don't gawk at me. People don't stare at me. People don't call me 'White slut'. I think there is a privilege I get at just being White--doors will open. I will get served. People will greet me. When I am with my children and/or my partner there is a funny response.

Tammy: I don't get the hassles...the fact of the matter is that I am *White* and I will still have it *easier* than Black [women] and especially Black [men]...

The phenomenon of *stigma transference* echoes the point made by Dyer (1997) that whiteness, as a cultural signifier of privilege, is not a fixed and stable category. Its stability resides only in its continued reproduction and perpetuation. However for this to occur White reproduction must for the most part go unnoticed and unhampered. These women in particular have ceased participating in the continued reproduction of whiteness. Their intimate association with their Black partners symbolically signals to the (White) world that their wombs are closed off to White reproduction. Some of the anti-interracial discourse identified by these women centered on their wombs and the production of interracial/biracial children. The discourse revolved around two central themes. One was the issue of what would happen to the children growing up in a racially hostile environment. The sentiment was that it would not be fair to bring children into a world hostile to them. The other issue revolved around the belief that interracial/biracial children would somehow be confused at best, and defective at worst. There was a belief that a mixture of White and Black genes would produce a congenitally undesirable specimen. Marina maintains that her father sustained this belief. She tells me that her father has mentioned that, "If Jonathan and I get married and have children that our children would become retarded." Kelly too, notes that when the issue of children arose, "I started to notice that's when other people [start] saying to me, '...my goodness, think about your children'".

Similar, yet in a slightly different context, Donna identifies how her union was perceived since she had interracial/biracial children. She explains that "...it kinda legitimated our union but at the same time it was repulsed because it was a permanent marker of our interracial violation." What these themes reveal is that the physical reproduction of whiteness is an essential part of the collective White consciousness. Jesse Daniels in White Lies (1997) identifies this point in her analysis of White supremacist discourse. She writes:

The penultimate affront to white men's control over white women's sexuality and reproductive lives is a white woman who chooses to not only have sex with, but also bear children with, a Black man. (81)

In this context, these White women's association with a "walking phallus" designates them "race traitors". Importantly, though, in the perceived absence of their Black partner their access to the White membership is redeemed. Only in his presence is their membership revoked. In this sense, the Black man is what brings the White woman's whiteness into being. Ideologically, he is what *particularizes* her identity and uncovers that whiteness is a social constructed category of power and privilege. In his absence her whiteness is non-particular. Its non-particularity makes White domination difficult to grasp in terms of the characteristics and practices of White people. As Dyer (1997:57) states "Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen." In this context, the *stigma transference* identified in this research makes the women visible and consequently disempowered or empowered in their in/ability to support White racial reproduction and domination. Indeed, Donna's life experience validates Dyer's assertion:

Ya, its funny because I now see myself as White although I recognize that I am Czechoslovakian...what is different now is that I see myself as White whereas I didn't before. I just was. But now that I am with my Black partner it has been made so clear to me that my whiteness is some kind of currency that I am suppose to guard.

Conclusion

This theme illustrates that there may be a familial and social perception that White women in interracial relationships with Black men do not guard the sanctity of their whiteness. These research participants, acting as agents of their own self interest and sexuality, took a subject position that is usually reserved for White men. Their visible association with Black men particularized their whiteness and consequently made them visible as targets of “transgressive virtue”. As women of “transgressive virtue” they are perceived as having ceased participating in the continuing reproduction of whiteness. For this reason they were/are punished, ridiculed and defined as race traitors. Thus, as race traitors they suffer the phenomenon of *stigma transference* which informs and impinges on the quality of their lives.

Only Old, Ugly and Fat White Women Allowed

“But you are so pretty. You don't have to settle for a Black man. What's wrong with you.” I cannot remember how many times that was told to me by relatives, my parents and friends. It appeared to be one of their many mantras to get me to “wake up” and leave my partner. I found out that it was a mantra told to most of the research participants. The notion that only unattractive and obese White women date Black men was a “common sense” notion made known to the women. Many of the research participants identified this notion and how it was used against them. If they were not fat

and ugly then they should not be dating a Black man. Barbara said to me: “If you are a desirable White woman that any White [man] might want to date, then what the hell are you doing with a Black guy?”” It was as though the most rational expression of desirability which makes the fullest of stereotypical White good looks are, for those good looks, to be placed at the disposal of a White male. In her discussion around the sexual politics of beauty, Marina graphically comments:

If he is going to be with a Black woman she can be beautiful. It doesn't matter. He is Black. She is Black. Its cool. But if a Black [man] is going to be with a White woman she should...well this is what I've been told...‘You're with a Black guy, but you're so pretty, why...your thin and you're' too pretty, and you cook and you clean and Black men don't *deserve* that.’ They should get that only if it's from a Black woman. If it's from a White woman she should be fat. She should be ugly. She should be a White woman that no White man wants.

It was made clear to Marina that her proximity to a stereotypical beauty ideal was to be guarded and saved for White men only. As well, her ability to cultivate a stereotypical feminine ideal of the perfect housewife must too be guarded for White men. It was made evident that only White men deserved such treatment. Black men were not worthy of a certain type of White women. Such an union would only be tolerable when the White woman was unacceptable by practical and mythological standards of middle class Anglo-Saxon ideals: a Black woman or an unattractive, lazy, fat White woman. (These sentiments speak volumes about white societal perceptions of Black women as well)

Similarly Linda comments:

I have been told that I am too pretty for him or I am too good for him from my family of course and other people too. I have been told that they [Black men] want to show off White women, have them like their

trophy, their prize possession sort of deal. He's been able to date, rather than a Black lady, a White lady and he is proud of it and wants to show off.

Once again, Linda is told her attractiveness is only to be shared with someone worthy of her good looks--a White man. In addition she is warned that, as a White woman, she serves as a kind of show piece for her Black boyfriend suggesting that White men are morally scrupulous in not using White women as trophies. The other implication in this statement is that Lisa's boyfriend does not sincerely love her but is using her White femininity to self-aggrandize. This discourse used against her interracial union indicates that a White woman should only settle for a Black man and allow herself to be a "trophy" when she is too ugly and obese to be a showpiece for a White man.

In addition, Barbara's narrative indicates that youth is also a primary designator of desirability and attractiveness:

I am not especially a great sex symbol. I am 48...you may be some sort of sexual prize when you are young and its not that big of a deal as you get older. But I think there is a lot of animosity for younger women [in interracial relationships], particularly, especially if they are not 300 lbs.

In addition to age, Donna's narrative suggests that class location also indicates desirability and attractiveness. She comments:

I think the popular notion is that only the leftovers of society, only the ones nobody wants date a Black man--I think fat, overweight and unattractive White women. But I also think White women are portrayed as having something psychologically wrong with them--like the poorest working class or underclass--only those women would date a Black man. There is something filthy about them, something dirty about them. So, if society is to imagine [a White woman] dating a Black man, and they generally don't because they don't want them together, but if they do, it is with that kind of woman.

These stereotypical notions found in the women's narratives say as much about socially constructed representations about White femininity and Black masculinity as they do about White masculinity. Both Black men and White women are objects to be regulated for the desire and pleasures of White men. At the heart of this discourse is the belief that the bodies of White women are a battle ground of masculine competition between Black and White men. What this discourse reveals is that the desirability of a White woman is not a positive and individually self-referential beauty. It is beauty only when connected to White Masculinity.

Naomi Wolfe in The Beauty Myth (1990:12) asserts that "'beauty' is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics...". Assigning value on a woman's body, based on culturally imposed physical standards of beauty, is an expression of White masculine power relations in which women are ultimately the losers. Wolfe states this assignment of value placed on "beauty" creates a vertical hierarchy in which women must compete. Importantly, she notes that the characteristics or qualities defined as beautiful are really only symbols of *behaviour* defined as appropriate; therefore "beauty" is actually about behaviour and not physical appearance. In this context, the discourse used against these women reveals that the notion that they are "too beautiful to be with a Black man" is a disciplinary tactic. Those words, as a disciplinary tactic, are meant to arouse feelings of insecurity and instability in the women and consequently force them to understand that they are *behaving* in an inappropriate manner as defined by the cultural standards of White heterosexual femininity. If they are "too beautiful" then they have to get "in line", and pair up with someone deemed

Conclusion

Chapter three explored the dimensions of these women's experiences in which familial and social pressures were enacted upon them. The dimensions themselves are informative about the nature of this society. The bodies of White women (and Black men) are ascribed with specific characteristics that signify social and cultural differences and worth. These notions of social and cultural worth act upon White women in ways which are intended to manage and control their behaviour. When White women do not behave appropriately by the code of White femininity they are punished. The punishment took on different forms but the intent was the same, to keep the women "in line". Keeping White woman "in line" is paramount for the continued reproduction of (straight) White male dominance. The next chapter primarily focuses on how the women respond, negotiate and cope with the various dimensions of their experiences.

Chapter 4

Negotiating Transgressive Whiteness

Chapter four is divided into the following four themes: *If I were With A White Man; Negotiating Two Worlds; Why Choose To Be With A Black Man?; Coping Strategies--Colour Evasiveness, "Not so Ordinary"*. These themes explore how the women perceive, understand and cope with their *stigma transference*. Many of the dimensions of their experiences include the negotiating of two worlds, one that privileges whiteness and one that denigrates blackness. The balancing of these two tensions manifests itself in various ways in these women's lives. Although they understand that life would be different if they were with a White man, for them it is a life not worth considering.

If I Were With a White man

I have known, for a long time now, that my life would have been qualitatively different if I had been with a White man. I have watched and been witness to the systematic erosion of many privileges since being in my interracial relationship. That is not to say my life would have been better or happier, but it surely would have been easier in relation to society and my familial relationships. But I had also thought that maybe my experiences were just that--mine and no-one else's. I wanted to know how other White women felt in their relationships with Black men. I found that I was not alone in my perceptions. The women's responses to the question "Would your life be different if you were with a White man?" clearly identifies the interracial relationship as a primary locus for

their hardships. All of the women, except for Barbara, had definitive and emotional responses. Donna said:

It would be completely different. I would not have struggled as I have. It would be different in a million ways...There would be no looks of disgust. There wouldn't be 'I wonder did I not get this job because I have a Black partner?'. I wouldn't have been stabbed. I wouldn't have been beaten up by Black women...None of these things would have happened. I would probably be married living in a huge house two cars with how many kids and family support--probably. I mean that is not taking into consideration how life throws its many curves...I know, without a doubt, life would be easier overall.

In response to her answer I had asked Donna if her life would have been easier if her partner was Czechoslovakian. Could it be, I asked, that the response she received from her family could be a result of her partner not being Czechoslovakian rather than him being Jamaican? She agreed that "I think it may be to a small degree...". However, she noted that "I think the fact that he would be White [would be] the designating factor". Donna's narrative clearly indicates that her involvement with a Black man has contributed significantly to the difficulties of her life.

Similarly, Marina states:

If Jonathan were to [have] been a white man...my parents would [have] helped me...They would not have given me a house but they would have helped me furnish my home. They would have made sure that I had a nice bedroom set and living room set. Because he is Black I am not getting any of that--they won't come to my wedding. They won't help me with nothing. They won't give me *NOTHING!* (her emphasis)

Marina indicates that she has lost privileges that would have come to her if she had been with a White man. Her interracial "transgression" has caused the erosion of material

and emotional provisions that would have been “rightfully” hers if she had acted appropriately by White and Italian standards.

When I asked Linda if her life would be different if her fiancée was White she replied:

Totally, I guess the whole experience. I would get to experience both sides of the family instead of one side, be accepted by both sides of the family instead of getting input and love from one side. I think everyday family life would be a lot easier.

In Linda’s case she identifies the loss of daily love and emotional support from her family. As a racial transgressor she has lost the privilege of family contact and validation. Tammy is no longer with her daughter’s father but she definitively draws a connection between life’s hardships and her association to a Black man. Tammy comments:

I think it would be definitely easier if I was in a White relationship or if [my daughter] was White. Oh definitely, definitely and if you do run into someone who has bad views of other races you would not see it or get it because you don’t have [an interracial relationship].

Interestingly, Tammy indicates that an interracial relationship would act as a trigger to latent racist sentiments. In this context, being in an all White heterosexual relationship acts as a blinder to prevailing systems of White supremacy.

Although Kelly primarily identified her relationship as stress and problem free, she did believe that her life would be easier if she were with a White man. She comments:

If Paul were White it would be a lot easier because of society, not necessarily because of my family...in society and everything else, we would have a few less problems if he were White. I would not have been jumped and things like that. It would have been easier.

Barbara had a surprising response in comparison to the others. When asked the same question she replied, “Gee, how do you think that way? I have no idea?” What was

unusual is that in the earlier part of the interview she commented on one of the issues that White couples do not have to concern themselves with. Barbara said, “they have no idea what the restrictions are on your life. They have no idea. [As an interracial couple] you just don’t go to some places. You know you watch too many movies like ‘Jungle Fever’ to actually want to go [to the United States].” Clearly she identifies travel restrictions when being in a relationship with a Black man and yet, when asked specifically if her life would be different, she had “no idea”. Barbara’s denial can be seen as what Lois Weis (1990) identifies as a “lived contradiction” or what I call a lived asymmetry. In Barbara’s case there is possibly a disjuncture between her lived reality and her cognitive understanding of her lived reality. Therefore her experience of being restricted in terms of where she can travel with her husband and her formalized understanding of how her life would be different if she were with a White man are compartmentalized and therefore separate. In being separate the connection between being with a Black partner and being restricted and being with a White partner and not being restricted are never made. Therein lies the lived asymmetry.

Conclusion

Most of the women’s narratives indicate a loss of privilege due to their interracial relationships. The emotional and material support they indicated that they would have received, if they had been with a White man, was withdrawn. Most of the research participants also spoke about life being “easier” overall. Clearly, for half of these women’s families, loving a Black man necessitated the withdrawal of all familial support, thus

exacerbating already burdensome societal pressure. The narratives indicate that they are cognizant that they have lost some privileges they would have had otherwise.

Negotiating two worlds

On many occasions I remember feeling like I lived in a world separate from everyone else. There were times when I felt nobody understood nor cared about the issues I was dealing with as a White woman in an interracial relationship. After all, having White skin is a privilege. I tried talking to my friends and family but they just could not identify with my issues and experiences. In fact I was told on many occasions that maybe I was exaggerating my experiences. I was even told that I was creating my own problems and that I possibly needed to change my attitude. I found myself trying to explain that many of the problems I was facing came to my door, not that I invited them in. On too many occasions, I found myself needing to defend my perceptions. Inevitably I felt alone in my insecurities and anxieties. Eventually I stopped talking about my concerns and perceptions to my White family members and friends. Was I living in another dimension? Were my concerns that out of the norm? I indeed came to believe that I was abnormal. However, I also came to realize that the feelings I experienced and the concerns I faced had a structural component which resulted from being in an interracial relationship. In speaking to the research participants I recognized a pattern similar to mine. Several of the women spoke about being caught between two worlds as insiders/outsideers: one world defined by White skin privilege and another world defined by the denigration of Black skin and those associated with it.

Barbara referred to living in two worlds as “leading a double life”. She commented:

I kind of lead a double life. At work I am a White person. I never talk about my family...Before I had my new job three years ago, I didn't really bring it up because I didn't want to be dealing with their stereotypes. So I didn't say a whole lot about who I am married to. I think they get all twitchy with you...

Erving Goffman (1963) discusses the processes by which the “discreditable” (see chapter three) manage their stigma. He states that some may try to “pass” as “normal” in their day to day lives and consequently develop a double life. This double life consists of the negotiation of two different realities. One reality consists of people that “know about their deviance and one that does not” (Adler&Adler,1994:233). In this context, Barbara attempts to “pass” as “normal” to avoid the tension and uneasiness with which people would respond to her “transgression”.

Tammy also mentioned feeling caught between two worlds: her family and her own life. However, Barbara's narratives are different. She talked about raising her daughter to have a Black consciousness and “knowing who she is” because she lived in a world which privileged whiteness and denigrated blackness. But her family, especially her father, did not understand Tammy's efforts. Tammy spoke about an ongoing discussion she has with her father:

Even to this day when my dad cracks a joke I giggle but at the same time he better not be saying it around my daughter. I'll put up a wall right there. And he thinks... 'you're just on, ya she's half White too you know. You don't always have to stick up for the Black side of her.' And I'm like 'so who is going to then.' They don't realize that everyday we are a reminder that she is half White, that she has her Italian, her Slovan in her... You know, everyday she sees this.

Tammy said that teaching her daughter to have a Black consciousness has been met by confusion and a lack of sympathy from her family. Tammy states:

My parents, even my brother, nobody understands what I am saying. Its kinda hard because its like me against everybody else. I can go to my friends but its not the same. You want it to come from your family. Its hard when they don't see.

Much like Tammy's efforts, Donna also spoke about raising her children to have a politicized consciousness which she feels is essential for their mental well-being. She explains:

I think in a society that organizes people in a racial hierarchy it is important to know where society places you. You can think whatever you want of yourself. You can think of yourself as mixed. You can think of yourself as Black. You can think of yourself as White. It doesn't matter--at home. But when you walk out the door you have to understand in a society that privileges whiteness you are not White. You are marked. You are marked the nigger, the mutt, the half bread. I think if you don't have that kind of understanding then life will be very difficult for all parties involved.

In a similar vein Barbara spoke about her son's involvement with a White girl. She explained that she warned her son to "be prepared when you are going out. When you do go out, go out with a lot of people. Don't just be the couple, you two out there. It's not safe. It is just not safe." Barbara's concerns are consistent with her experiences of animosity toward young interracial couples. Speaking clearly to issues raised in the previous section on age and beauty she comments, "I think the younger you are the more hostility you encounter. There is less hostility for a clearly middle-aged couple right. I think my son with the White girlfriend would get more."

These narratives illustrate the two worlds these women have to straddle. They are no longer exclusive members of the “White tribe” totally oblivious to their structural location of privilege and advantage. Although they do not have a formalized and politicized understanding of how they are dislocated (with the exception of Donna) by virtue of having a mixed child and/or being involved with a Black man, their lives have nevertheless been altered. They are forced by their altered location as an insider/outsider to develop a different consciousness than White women in same race relationships or possibly other non-Black and White interracial relationships. Donna specifically comments on this issue:

I think there is something unique to the White female and Black male that freaks people out, all people. Like the Black female and White male, although they probably get the stares and I am not saying that they don't experience some horrible things as well, but I think the nature of their experiences would be different. The mixed couples that I met have never expressed the same kind of experiences. Its never that fanatic, that crazy--there is probably the looks of disdain, but eventually people come around to it because it is a White boy doing his thing. He can do whatever he wants-- so what if he is with a Chinese women or a Black woman. But a Black male thinking he can love a White female-- that's insane.

As Donna suggests, the concerns the research participant face are qualitatively different than other women, generally, and other women in interracial relationships, specifically. Although some of the concerns these women now face Black women have endured for centuries they are still different because, to put it simply, these research participants are White women. White women by virtue of their whiteness still have membership in the “White tribe”. As noted in the *stigma transference* theme, these women oscillate between being a discreditable and discredited person. They never “own”

the stigma of blackness, therefore, their privilege of whiteness can usually be redeemed in the absence of their partners, children and prior knowledge of their choices.

Oscillating between being a “discreditable” and a “discredited” (see chapter 3) person can give these women an insider/outsider view to the prevailing racial hierarchy that exists and a view of the depth of racial animosity felt toward Black people in general and Black men in particular. Donna comments on White perceptions of Black men and her involvement with them which has forced her into segmenting how she associated with her family and White society:

In their minds the Black male is inferior. He is dirt, shit, the lowest form of human and to associate with someone like that is a disgrace. You are lowering yourself and so for me to consciously bring this man into the family and then reproduce with him, have children with the lowest form of human being, is unforgivable. It is a disgrace...I think the stigma attached to the Black male is so profound. It is so deep, everyone is aware of it, at least in North America. It is like a cultural currency that everyone can tap into.

Similarly Marina comments on the perceptions of herself and her boyfriend:

I hear a lot that I am a stupid White women because he's a Black man and he can't be faithful and a Jamaican man...Yup, a Jamaican man cannot be married and have a family and be faithful and live with one woman. He will either be a drug addict, an alcoholic or be abusive.

Marina also discusses how these social perceptions have the potential for real social consequences. She recounts her experience while working at an Italian bakery. During her employment the bakery was robbed by three Black men. The owner felt because of her involvement with a Black man she was somehow involved with the robbery. She comments, “Well, because I was with a Black man..they blamed me..I got fired”. What is interesting is Marina’s perception of her boss’s response. She told her boss, “If it was a

White man you would not have gone to these lengths because what makes you think that while you're watching this Black man some White guy ain't robbing your ass blind?"

Marina, as an insider/outsider, believes that her boss' preoccupation with the mythology of the criminogenic Black male has made him potentially blind to the possibility of White male criminality. In this sense, she has been forced to adopt an altered consciousness and bear witness to the pathologies that are born from ideologies of White supremacy.

In a similar light Kelly discusses how White society is distracted from its own pathologies by displacing them on to other groups of people. Kelly commented, "In those suburban schools where the children are killing all these people in their schools, none of them are Black. What is that telling you? It is that some White children have some serious problems and no one is looking at". Kelly, also as an insider/outsider, believes that the preoccupation with the mythologies of the drug dealing, criminogenic Black male has led White people to ignore some serious social problems.

Consistent with the theme of insider/outsider, but different from the previous examples, Tammy discusses the response she gets from White people towards her daughter. She perceives these responses as insincere expressions of affection. Tammy talks about how White people, in particular, continually comment on how beautiful her daughter is. She says this about the constant intrusion, "It makes them feel better to come up to my daughter and say 'Oh you are such a sweetie, you're so smart, you're so cute.'...they can pat themselves on the shoulder and think 'I am so open minded' and they have done their part in society."

This dichotomous and oppositional experience, as insider/outsider, has been imposed on their reality and consequently altered their consciousness as White women. And so they literally live in two worlds. Tension, uneasiness and at times guilt develops while they try to maneuver both worlds. Kelly discusses feeling guilty because her fiancé's family is wonderful while her grandmother denies the existence of their relationship. She said:

Paul's family is great. That's why I feel bad when I look at my grandmother. His grandmother...would say 'I love you. I love you', squeeze my cheeks and this is why I feel bad because my grandmother doesn't accept him.

In addition, Kelly feels a need to shield and protect Paul from her grandmother's racism. She tells me, "I mean Paul doesn't know half of it. Like he doesn't know what my grandmother says...cause I wouldn't say that to hurt him." Similarly Tammy expressed a need to defend the rights of Black people because her daughter has African ancestry. She tells me, "I will stick up for the issues that deal with her Black side...I don't like hearing the odd jokes...like in front of all my Black friends my dad can say a joke...and they don't care...but it bugs me."

Conclusion

These narratives serve as an important example of the unique perspectives these women adopt due to negotiating two worlds. As both insider and outsider they find themselves needing to balance the tensions of maneuvering both worlds. As outsiders of White society, due to their interracial "transgression", they face experiences which for the most part are misunderstood and at times painful. As insiders of White society by virtue of

their White skin they have access to a kind of anonymity and privilege, as long as her interracial "transgression" remains hidden. Regardless of which world they negotiate, their experiences are qualitatively unique and at times isolating.

Why Choose to be with a Black Man?

The narratives of these research participants illustrate that the lives of White women are not solely theirs to live. Their social and cultural inheritance as reproducers of whiteness mark them in very particular ways. When they transgress their social and cultural inheritance they can pay a dear price--social stigmatization, threat of injury, loss of social standing, ostracization, loss of family members, verbal harassment and psychological/psychic trauma. Invariably the question that arises is given the societal (and for some familial) opposition, why choose to be with a Black man? Most of the women struggled with the question. They may have struggled with it because it is difficult to reflect on something during a one hour interview that has not had prior reflection. However each woman did have an unique perspective as to why they choose to be with a Black man.

Barbara explained that she could not comprehend why she had to eliminate someone as a mate just because of his skin colour. She told me that she received messages from society that said it was morally "wrong" to date interracially, but these messages never made sense to her. Barbara states:

Well I certainly wouldn't have ever considered myself a racist. I always thought those kinds of things were, those comments people would make really obnoxious comments. I never thought those people that said that were worth anything. So why would I exclude this and that person, based on what? Didn't make any sense to me--the whole prejudice thing didn't

intellectually make any sense to me--why you would remove possible relationships with people, not just men, just because of race--it was not a logical conclusion.

Donna answered in a way similar to Barbara. She also felt that being racist was neither a moral or ethical way to live. She comments, "There is a part of me that believes in this notion that I will rise above all that crap--I will be better than them. I also had a sense that I wasn't doing anything wrong, like in a moral and ethical sense, and so I couldn't stop being with him because he was Black."

In a similar vein to Donna, Linda gives two reasons for being with her fiancée. First, since she does not feel she is doing anything wrong, there is no reason to "stop". Second, she finds the relationship to be challenging and rewarding. Linda comments, "Even to this day I ask myself [what have I done], but I know it's right because I know I am not doing anything wrong. And its most challenging. You learn more from each other." Prior to her interracial relationship Linda had a lot of contact with people of colour in her school. She explains:

In high school it was 50% white and 50% everything else. And it just so happened most of my friends were that everything else. It was such an amazing experience. I picked the right people to have as my friends because I learned so much from the. I just thought it was so amazing like I have friends from everywhere. I looked at that as 'hey this is so really exciting for me' because I never got to know this.

Before high school, knowing people of colour was out of her realm of experience, high school was new and exciting, thus having a Black boyfriend was also defined as new and exciting.

Marina indicated that her reasons for pursuing her relationship with Jonathan might initially have been out of defiance. She felt that it was important that she lived life according to her terms and not her parents. Marina explains:

I'm like that eh? With my parents, when they gave me my ultimatum--'it's either like this or like that', I left. Don't tell me what I have to do. That's just the way I am. You can't tell me who I'm gonna be with. I'm gonna be with who I want to be with. You don't like it --see ya!

Tammy states that she, too, felt it was wrong to hate, ostracize or limit one's mating choices because of racial difference. Her choice to date Black men serves as an act of defiance to racist sentiments. She states:

You should never hate somebody for how they are, in general, whatever the difference is. I use my own eyes, own ears, my own heart. I was never one to listen to what other people thought. I never cared, I don't care what people think--screw you. In general I live life for me.

Kelly had a different experience altogether. She states that she didn't notice the difference between her and her fiancée. Kelly states, "I didn't even see the difference until I was 16-17 when people were telling me [to] think about [the relationship]." Her reasons for being with Paul were because "he was just cute. He was a really friendly guy. He was easy to get along with."

When I reflected on the women's responses to why they choose an interracial relationship it occurred to me that these women could not have known or anticipated the response they received from family, friends and society. I believe that is the case because of two determining factors. One factor is that it is not possible for White women to truly comprehend and therefore anticipate the depth of fear and animosity felt towards Black males. Although all of the women had liberal dispositions towards interracial dating, they

did not nor could not truly understand how their partners were marked by White conceptions of blackness and how they too would be marked by their partner's blackness. While these women's narratives illustrate that they had a sense that interracial dating was taboo, they seemed unaware of the extent to which sanctions would be taken against them. In stating the obvious, prior to their interracial union they were White women living their lives benefiting from the privileges of whiteness. Their dislocation from their whiteness came only after their interracial "transgression". I do not believe they could have intellectually anticipated or comprehended that experience before it happened. By the time they figured it out they were "in too deep". They were already in love and in the cases of Donna and Tammy already pregnant. In the cases of Marina, Linda and Donna the family and social opposition only intensified their commitment to the relationship.

The second factor is that some of the women's narratives suggests that their parents' liberal attitudes towards other racial and cultural groups may have been a contributing factor for these women thinking an interracial relationship may be a viable spousal option for them. In all of the cases except for one, the research participants' parents had liberal humanitarian philosophies that they passed on to their children. However, when these women became involved with Black men four of the women's parents had a profound reaction that contradicted their humanitarian positions. Growing up, Marina was accustomed to having Black people at their dinner table. It was a common event for Marina to bring her Black friends over. Marina explains, "As a friend it was O.K. I had Black friends...that's what really threw me off...I would have Black friends

who would come over to our house and they would have supper with us.” Marina states that she was genuinely surprised that her father reacted so vehemently:

I was genuinely surprised...I went to my dad, ‘dad you remember that guy Jonathan, he was a friend of mine?’ . He goes ‘yeah, so what?’. ‘I don’t really know, but I think I’m falling in love with him. I’m having feelings for him that I didn’t think I would.’ Well, he snapped....and then when he threw me out [he said] ‘you better give me my fucking keys. I don’t want that fucking nigger robbing me blind. I don’t have a daughter anymore. My daughter is dead.’

Kelly also mentions her parents being very accepting of her relationship with Paul. Her grandmother, however, had a very intense reaction. In the joint interview with Marina, Kelly reacted to the story of Marina’s father’s response: “It’s the same thing with my grandmother. It’s the relationship...We always had Black people at the house...but its the relationship...She totally denies we’re engaged or together.”

Linda’s experience was similar to Kelly’s and Marina’s in that her parents had severe objections towards the intimate involvement with a Black man. Linda explains, “I grew up in a Christian family. I was always brought up to love everybody. I tell them you never taught me to hate these people and they say ‘you should know better’”. Linda’s parents espoused a Christian moral ethic to love everybody, but that everybody did not include Black men.

In Donna’s case, “knowing better” was never left to her discretion. Her father clearly specified that for her interracial relationships were forbidden. In response, Donna argues that on some level she was resisting racism. In hindsight though, she thinks choosing to be with a Black man in a “forbidden relationship” gave her the reason to “break away” from the oppressive controls of her patriarchal family. Donna explains:

I think I probably chose an interracial relationship to loose my family. I wanted to break away from them, not necessarily my mother but definitely the men in my family. They made me feel so ugly and worthless and stupid. I wanted to get as far away from that as possible. I do know that and probably on some level I felt that I could do that by being with a Black man...choosing to be with a very forbidden and despised male I could make that break.

Conclusion

In the majority of cases, the women's narratives suggest the initial reasons for choosing to be with a Black man came out of a defiance to racism, an assertion of their independence or a combination of the two factors. In addition, Linda's, Kelly's, and Marina's parents' earlier liberal attitudes gave the illusion that their choice of a Black partner may have been a viable spousal alternative. Evidently it was not a viable option. However, these women remained with their Black partners. I believe one of the primary reasons for this, given their narratives, is that they themselves have liberal dispositions towards interracial dating. Their "progressive" philosophies towards interracial dating precluded them from leaving their partners based on the fact that they were Black. If they were to terminate the relationship based on colour then they would be no better than their parents, nor society. Terminating the relationship would be an indication of shallowness and hypocrisy. As Donna states: I couldn't stop being with him because he was Black. I would leave him because he was being shitty to me, not because he was Black". Interestingly this suggests that the opposition to the interracial union from family and society might actually strengthen the commitment to "stick it out". As Kelly said, "It kinda makes you never want to leave him."

Coping Strategies

Colour Evasiveness

A consistent theme found in the interviews was the research participant's assertion that they did not "see" the colour of their partner's skin. The majority of the women emphasized that their partner's Blackness had no appeal, whether positively or negatively. I asked myself how could they not "see" the colour of their partner's skin? Is it not obvious? And if it was not obvious to them, would not society make it obvious to them? What did they really mean when they said they did not see his colour? I grappled with what I considered a contradiction. The contradiction lay between their words and their lived reality. Their lived reality included being denied housing, being physically assaulted, being called "nigger lover" and yet their words were telling me that they did not "see" the colour of his skin. I thought maybe I was missing something or possibly I was complicating things too much. Maybe these women were, in fact, colour blind. Or possibly, in being preoccupied with living life, they were not given to reflect on their experiences. Given the stereotypical representation of the Black men in popular culture, how could their partner's skin colour not have a positive or negative representation in their mind? I thought maybe these women did not know or understand how their partner's were raced. However upon analyzing their narratives I found that these women did understand, on some level, how their partners were marked by social constructions of blackness. Many articulated how their partners, as Black men, were constructed as either rapists, criminals, gang members, drug dealers or as morally and intellectually inferior.

Kelly identified one of the primary representations of Paul they consistently encountered. She mentioned that Paul was/is continually approached for drugs. She stated, “all the time people see Paul on the street, someone would ask Paul where they can get drugs...everyone is always asking him for drugs no matter where we go.” Barbara commented on White men’s fears around interracial dating: “It is all part of the whole Black men are animals, they are rapists--the sexuality things, its gotta be about that--it scares the daylight out of these men.” Donna also comments on how Black men are seen: “Black men are forbidden. They are supposed to be dangerous. They are supposed to be big and bad and cool and hip and all that.” All of the women articulated a knowledge of how Black men were negatively socially constructed. Yet they maintained that those representations were never a part of how they initially perceived or loved their partners. All of the women except for Donna maintain that their partner’s “blackness” meant nothing to them. But how could his blackness mean nothing in light of its significance in their lives? I tried wording the questions differently, giving my own personal examples to help clarify what it was I was asking. Regardless of how I framed the question, most women maintained that their attraction to their partners was not about colour but about his “essence”. His colour and “essence” were separate issues. In a myriad of different ways they continually told me: “I love him for who he is, not his colour”. There was never a question of whether they loved their partners. What was it that I was not getting? Was I projecting my own biases on the research participants? Where were we misunderstanding each other? I was not asking if they love him because he is Black. I asked if his colour represented something to them whether in a positive or negative way. The continual

emphasis on loving everything but his “blackness” made me question what were they really saying.

Linda commented on the stares she receives when she is with her fiancée, “Let them look and see that we are getting along nice and maybe we will change another person’s view.” For Linda being in an interracial relationship is to model anti-racism. In Linda’s mind, her relationship with a Black man signals a colour blindness (see Frankenburg, 1993) to which she hopes other people will aspire. Linda feels very strongly that choosing a partner because of his skin colour is wrong. She commented, “As long as they’re not in it for the colour, I don’t have a problem with it” which implies, of course, that she is not in it for the colour. Similarly, Kelly asserts that she did not notice the difference in colour:

I didn’t even see the difference until I was about 16, 17 when people were telling me [to] think about this...Then my mom said ‘well some people look at it like they don’t agree with the relationship [because] they just see the different colours’.

Marina stated that it didn’t matter what colour they were as long as they treated her well. “It depends on how I get along with them and how they treat me--black, white, red, green, I don’t care...” Barbara stated, “I don’t think a person being Black was an issue for me. Its more the intellectual aspect of it...in my mind, you don’t go seeking a person of another race deliberately. At least I don’t.” In their minds to *see* colour is to be a *racist*.

If these women allowed themselves to *see* their partners’ colour then this very recognition may be understood as racist. It was only the absence of seeing their partners’ colour that marked them as anti-racist. If they see his colour then they would see

“difference” which would signal racism. Not admitting to seeing difference, or seeing colour, or seeing their partner’s “blackness” is a sign of the liberal humanitarianism (belief in having political and social views that favour progress and the promotion of the welfare of all humankind) which they aspire to and which made their interracial relationship possible. White men see colour as they yell “nigger lover” or “white slut” out their car windows. The research participants on the other hand don’t see colour because they are not racist. Their narratives illustrate how not seeing colour is supposed to be a model of their anti-racism.

There were two exceptions. Donna and Tammy did not display the same colour evasive strategy. Tammy admits that she has always been attracted to dark skinned men.

Tammy states:

I have never been attracted to waspy White men, blond hair, blue eyed--never was an interest to me. I’ve dated Black guys for a long time. Even back to grad 7. Like I’ve always had an attraction and not necessarily for Black men, any dark skin [man] in general. I love my Puerto Ricans...I just like the dark skin and I’ll be honest.

Although Tammy admits that she prefers dark skinned men she too does not explain why she prefers them. Donna states “I dated more Black men than I did White men. Overall I found black men more appealing”. However, unlike the other women, Donna connects her partner’s colour to the reasons for her attraction. When asked if her partners

“blackness” was an issue whether positively or negatively she responds:

It is kind of hard to express it because I have to look back and reflect on something that back then I was not even conscious of, you know? But in looking back I think what my partner’s being Black meant to me was that I saw him as forbidden of course and there was an appeal in that. But also I saw him as oppressed...and I was so attracted to that image.

In closing, four out of the six participants spoke about not seeing their partners' "blackness" but rather his humanity. They spoke eagerly about being attracted to his charm, humour, personhood, but never to his blackness. As noted earlier Donna was the exception. She captures why some White women in interracial relationships inadvertently feel a strong impulse to be colour evasive:

There is a part of me that believes in this notion that I will rise above all this crap [racism]--I will be better than them. I also had a sense that I wasn't doing anything wrong, like in a moral and ethical sense and so I could not stop being with him because he was black. What they wanted me to do was not see beyond the colour. They wanted me to see his colour, as it was defined by them, by society and not respond to his humanity and on some level back then I knew that that was wrong.

As Donna articulates, what society and family members were asking her to do was "see" the "blackness" of her partner's skin and consequently eliminate him as a choice. In response to the negative messages from their family members and/or society these women developed a colour evasive strategy. In their minds this colour evasion allows for the possibility of their interracial relationship. If they did as society, family and friends asked them to do, to "see" the blackness of their partners' skin, they would not be in the relationship today. This is not to say that they are correct. Seeing colour may not necessarily be racist, but given the "saturated field of racial (and sexual) visibility" (Butler, 1993:15) these women reacted in opposition to the very narrow parameters of White supremacy by defying and denying colour. Although Donna was an exception, she only connected the representation of his colour to her attraction in hindsight. She admitted that she was connecting the dots after the picture was drawn. In the initial stages of her

relationship she did not have the consciousness she has now. She too was colour evasive. She needed to be colour evasive to allow for the possibility of an interracial relationship. In this sense, colour evasion can be seen as a strategy that opens a space for these women to become involved and maintain a relationship with a “forbidden” male.

In addition, colour evasiveness can also be seen as a strategy in which these women engage to construct themselves as not having “Jungle Fever”. The premise of “Jungle Fever” is as follows: He/she is overcome by the desire to travel outside her/his own ethnicity or race to sexually sample the delights of the unknown or the exotic. Once the unknown becomes known it soon ceases to be appealing therefore it is not an authentic, deep or normal sexual attraction but rather one marked with curiosity, shallowness and at times, perversity. The movie *Jungle Fever* by Spike Lee gave a popularity to that image. The movie, embodying all the stereotypes and misconceptions of interracial couples, constructs the two main characters, an African American male and an Italian American female, as willing to risk “everything” to travel outside the boundaries of whiteness and blackness in American society. Tammy and Barbara specifically referred to “Jungle Fever” in their narratives. Tammy spoke about being sung “Jungle Fever” by Black people when she was walking with a Black male friend on an American campus. She told me “If I would have heard the song “Jungle Fever” one more time I would have screamed”. Tammy found it extremely irritating to be constructed as having “Jungle Fever”. Barbara, as noted in the colour evasion theme, mentioned that she did not seek out a Black man deliberately. To intentionally seek out a Black man would be an indication of having “Jungle Fever” which is something Barbara did not want to be defined as “afflicted” with.

As a testament to her “anti-jungle fever” stance she told me “I have dated both Black and white [men]. I think its hard enough to find a decent guy let alone they have to be this or that race--my god!”.

In closing, it would be safe to assume that these women are trying to reject the stereotypes about White women in interracial relationship, that is, they are not rebelling against their families, that they didn’t deliberately choose their partner because he was Black and that their relationship is really normal and meaningful like everyone else.

Not So Ordinary

Although these relationships may be as “normal” and meaningful as any other, the narratives suggest that they face unique hardships. Their relationships are “not so ordinary”. So how do these women cope with the hardships of being in a “not so ordinary” relationship? Some of the women pretend it is ordinary. Some turn a blind eye to anti-interracial sentiment and some pretend not to care. These coping mechanisms or stigma management techniques are consistent throughout the women’s narratives.

Barbara, on several occasions, mentioned that her marriage was “kinda like a *normal* relationship”. Barbara emphasized that being with David was about having “a lot of things in common. We both did political work--tend to be on the leftist side. We had a lot of things to talk about--knew a lot of the same people”. She had on many occasions spoke about how she was constructed as anything but “normal”. Society, friends and acquaintances at work constructed her as particularly oversexed or sexually immoral or extraordinarily interesting. Barbara comments:

The natural association is that you are supposed to be with a White person. It is kind of an odd thing. You become a novelty. I am a bit of a novelty at work-- 'oh, Barbara has a Black husband, isn't that interesting' Oh ya! It's all so interesting to them...It is a point of conversation 'What do you eat? Do you eat the same things?'

Considering that interracial couples are not seen as "normal", Sheila's narratives can be seen as one of the coping strategies women such as herself engage in to deal with the unique pressures of interracial unionship. This strategy to normalize their relationship can also be called "deviance disavowal" (Davis, 1961). "Deviance disavowal" is characterized by the desire to redefine or recast their "transgression" in a positive light. In this context, Barbara's desire to construct her "not so ordinary" relationship as normal and ordinary is a coping response in reaction to society's attempt to construct it as deviant.

Kelly also had a similar coping strategy. Although she never spoke about being or looking normal, her narrative embodied the sentiment. Much of her narrative focused on her relationship being stress free and happy. Throughout the interview Kelly repeated how wonderfully happy she and her finance were. She told me that she feels "totally happy...we're just so... in love". Although I do not wish to suggest that her relationship is unhappy or stressful, her narratives indicate that her relationship is riddled with some societal imposed hardships. However it was only with some prodding that she recalled some of the stresses of being in an interracial relationship. Even though there are some external stresses impinging on her life, she chooses to view her relationship as problem free and gloriously happy, suggesting that it may be a stigma management technique.

Linda, Marina and Donna did not have the luxury of perceiving their relationships were "normal", "ordinary" and totally happy. Their parents and relatives clearly defined

for them that they were acting abnormally and impinged on their lives in such a way that it was difficult to feel unencumbered and carefree.

Linda coped by denying the extent to which she was constructed as deviant. Linda admitted that she has the tendency to turn a blind eye to the negative experiences around her interracial relationship. She told me, “I guess I choose to ignore it because I don’t want it to bother me.” Also, as noted in the colour evasiveness theme, she tried to view her relationship as a model for anti-racism.

In Marina’s case it is difficult to determine how she coped. Her experiences were particularly traumatic. She explained:

I have experienced a lot. Its been tough for me and then starting from the bottom. I could not get anything from [my parents house]. The clothes on my back is what I walked out with. So I have had to work my way up [from nothing].

At the time of the interview, she was still in the middle of hardships. It appeared for the other research participants the most traumatic and difficult periods were behind them. Marina did not have that “luxury”. The traumas were still fresh and burdensome for Marina. As noted earlier, she had tried to commit suicide. It could be said that she was learning how to cope daily with the many stresses that interracial unions brought.

Tammy portrayed herself as a tough-spirited and independent woman. In many ways her narratives suggest that she appeared not to care what society said about her. She said, “I never cared. I don’t care what people think--screw you. In general I live life for me.” Donna was different from the other participants in that her coping mechanism was to

develop a highly politicized awareness of racism. In this sense, she would not be defenseless when anti-interracial sentiments came her way. Donna explained:

You can't just walk into [the relationship] and expect things to fall into place. I think for both parties but especially for White women, I think they have to understand the history that follows Black men because that history will impinge on the relationship at all points. Whether they chose to ignore it or not, it will and I think especially if you are going to raise children in an interracial relationship.

In closing, the narratives suggest that the majority of the women engaged in some form of “deviance disavowal”. The degree and extent to which the women tried to redefine or normalize their “transgressions” varied. While Linda willingly turned a blind eye to her stigma, Barbara and Kelly to some extent redefined their stigma. Tammy refused to acknowledge herself as stigmatized while Donna learned to understand the nature of her stigmatization in order to manage it. Out of all the women, possibly Marina “wore” the stigma. Her attempted suicide might be seen as an indication of the extent to which she internalized her “transgression”. Regardless of what strategies these women employ, their narratives are a testament to the resilience and strength these women acquire in order to survive the stigmatization.

Conclusion

Chapter four explored the various dimensions of coping with their spoiled identities. Many of the women, although seeing their interracial relationships as more difficult and perhaps different, did not define their relationships in these terms. They viewed their relationships as “normal” as everyone else's. Although different in nature, many of their responses to the social constructions of their union were similar in their defiance to being

constructed as “abnormal” or deviant or as having “Jungle Fever”. Chapter five deals with the tensions around normality, desire and sexuality and their location around reproductive control. Following from there this chapter concludes by outlining some of the significant themes from the narratives and their implications for understanding the social milieux of Canadian society.

Chapter 5

Whose Womb Is It Anyway?

Conclusion

In the literature review I suggested that White women's lives in interracial relationships with Black men are not solely theirs to live. This research has illustrated that their social and cultural inheritance, as reproducers of whiteness and commodities to White men, grants society and family members permission to impinge on and interfere in their lives. Living within systems of ideology, their bodies, as raced and sexed subjects, are interwoven and constitutive of systems of meaning, representation and signification. And living within systems of ideology their bodies are ideological representations that are meant to signify differences in human value and character. The value and worth of White femininity is generally positive and affirming, while the value and worth of Black masculinity is negative and pejorative. The signification's of White femininity and Black masculinity are at times so powerful as to evoke violent responses from family and strangers. Indeed, as representations with hegemonic force at many levels they determine the life experiences of these women.

The notion that White women must be loyal to whiteness and White men is a key variable in the discourse against interracial unions. It is perceived by society and family members that they have transgressed the appropriate White feminine behaviour to remain "inhouse". The psychological, physical and psychic injury experienced by these women related to their being considered race traitors. Their intimate association with Black men is

perceived as an act of closing off their wombs to White reproduction and therefore must be punished and denigrated. Although the research indicated that not all of the women experienced physical injury, they all live with the threat of it, especially those women that are considered young and stereotypically attractive by North American and Eurocentric standards of beauty.

Their narratives illustrate that many of the experiences of these women revolve around the experience of *stigma transference*: the experience of having one's social identity "spoiled" or lowered by the intimate involvement with a stigmatized individual. As illustrated in Chapter three, the phenomena of *stigma transference* revolves around the primary axis of race and gender because the stigmatization resides in how the Black partners *particularize* their White female partners. The blackness of their partners brings the women's whiteness into distinction. In the absence of their partners their whiteness is non-particular. However as pointed out in Chapter three the *stigma transference* is not a permanent stigma. If they were to cut off their intimate involvement with their partners they may lose their discredited status.

It is also the Black man's presence in relation to the White woman that triggers the rage and violent response to surface. The reason for this lies with how his social identity is constructed. It was noted in the literature review that his "blackness" and "maleness" are interwoven in such a way that makes him not just a man who happens to be Black but a Black person who happens to be a man. His essence is defined by his Blackness which is seen as embodying all that is negative and deplorable. This connection is important to comprehend because it allows for an understanding of the exaggerated responses to the

bodies of Black men and consequently to the White women who are intimately involved with them.

To reiterate, the key issue here is the Black man's blackness and sexuality. Blackness, as the antithesis to whiteness conveys an image in White supremacist society of evil, disease, filth, sexuality and inferiority. Jessie Daniels in White Lies (1997:81) comments on this point:

The portrait painted of Black men is, almost without exception, that of the Black man as 'threat'. Black men are seen as threats to the White social order in a series of arenas: as criminals, as economic and political threats and in terms of their sexuality.

How the bodies of White women are socially constructed also plays a pivotal role in the responses and experiences of these women. As White women they either guarantee or threaten the perpetuation of White supremacy. That is a lot of power that must be controlled and subdued for White male interests. It is their whiteness and consequently race loyalty that comes into question when they are with a Black man. When their whiteness comes into question so too does their femininity. As White women their femininity is symbiotically tied to their whiteness. So, when they transgresses the colour line they become sexually immoral race traitors that are to be punished. Their social and cultural inheritance as reproducers of whiteness and commodities to White men grant society and family members permission to impose punishment on them. Part of the punishment lays in the social stigmatization that they suffer, as well as the loss of material and emotional privilege. This *stigma transference* is also what causes the potentially dangerous or intimidating situations from male family members, White male strangers and

Black women. It is also the primary reason that some of these women may experience a diminished quality of life.

The experiences of social stigmatization and the loss of material and emotional privilege was not experienced uniformly by all the women, nor were the strategies employed to manage those experiences. While some women employed the strategy of “deviance disavowal”, others simply refused to be categorized as deviant. It also appears that age, ethnicity, class and approximation to stereotypical notions of physical beauty play a mediating role in how they experience their interracial relationships. The narratives suggested that youth and “beauty” played a defining role in the extent to which the women would experience overt anti-interracial sentiments and violent responses from society. The younger (and more “fertile”) and more stereotypically attractive women appeared to receive more hostile responses. As noted by the older participants, they received less hostile responses as they aged. It was also suggested that less animosity would be directed at obese and lower class White women because they could be considered expendable commodities.

Ethnicity appeared to play a role as well. The women that were of Czechoslovakian, Ukrainian and Italian background experienced more violent opposition from family members. One of the research participants suggested that the reasons may have something to do with how these ethnic groups organize their families along patriarchal lines and how they, as former immigrants, experience and guard their whiteness. It would be very interesting to see if ethnicity as a variable would be a factor in a larger research sample.

Class also may have played a small role in how these women could potentially be treated by society. It was suggested that one's class location could act as a buffer to overt anti-interracial sentiment. One of the research participants commented that as she went up the socioeconomic ladder the nature of people's response altered. The response became more of curiosity and fascination rather than of repulsion. However, it was difficult to isolate to what degree class played a role in these women's experiences. Most of the women were working class. Only one research participant fell in the middle class bracket and she identified the changes in societal response as she travelled up the socioeconomic ladder. The other research participant who was in a transitional class bracket, as she was completing her Ph.D., believed that the *stigma transference* she experienced would remain consistent regardless of her class status. It was also suggested in Chapter three that the poorest working class women could be considered expendable commodities therefore they would not receive hostile reactions. To what degree class mediates their experiences could not be effectively isolated in this research and would be interesting to study in a larger research sample.

In closing, this research attempts to speak to the lives of these six women in interracial relationship with Black men. But what does it say about the larger society we live in? I think this research can shed some light on the existence and intensity of racial, ethnic and sexual hierarchies in Canada. Can these six women share similar experiences of *stigma transference* without it being endemic to the larger society? It seems unlikely so. For these six women to experience the psychic injury and the threat of physical violence because they are involved with Black men suggests that prevailing notions of gender, race

and white supremacy exist and act as “relations of ruling” in southern Ontario specifically, and in Canada more generally. I believe that the phenomena of *stigma transference* suggests the quality of spiritual, emotional and consequently material life for Black men specifically, and Black peoples generally, is questionable. I also believe that the experience of *stigma transference* suggests that White privilege comes at the expense of Black peoples and all people of colour. And if there are prevailing notions of race and white supremacy that act as “relations of ruling”, are they obscured and undetectable to White eyes until the right conditions bring it to the surface? And what would those right conditions be? The research has indicated one of those “right” conditions is an interracial relationship between a young (fertile) White woman and a young virile Black man. I think there are some serious issues raised by this research that needs to be addressed. The quality of life for one group should come at the expense of another.

In closing, there is a price to pay for living as an interracial couple: social stigmatization, threat of injury, loss of social standing and family members, ostracization, verbal harassment, discrimination and possibly a diminished quality of life. However, I do not want to end this research on a note of pessimism. Couples *are* staying together and other couples are finding each other regardless of the price they are made to pay. There must be a reason for the persistence of these unions other than the Harlequin version of “love will conquer all”. Although this research did not set out to answer this question, it is worth posing. In my interview with Donna we grappled with the same question. She responded:

Here are two people that society doesn't want together that are coming together on a daily basis, whether they are conscious of it or not they have to fight to stay together and then they have to endure all the ridicule and looks of disgust. And there must be something unusual about two people that come together under those circumstances and I don't mean unusual necessarily in a bad sense.

We never did resolve the question. But Donna did suggest that she may have remained in her relationship because of the personal growth she experienced. She commented:

I think because of the challenges we have faced both in the relationship as well as outside the relationship I have been forced to grow up, forced to be more introspective, a better person, a more thoughtful person, a more liberal minded human being--in an authentic way not just giving lip service to liberal notions of living. It is really hard to pinpoint. I just know that being with him helps me to be the best that I can be.

Maybe the answer is that there is not one definitive answer. Possibly there are many reasons for the persistence of these unions. Maybe, as Donna suggests, what these couples gain from their relationships outweigh the risks and negative consequences.

Most of the women identify their relationships as deep, fulfilling relationships which suggests life for these White women is not marked solely by emotional and physical violence. Nor is all societal response negative or intrusive. There is some space for their love to flourish. And in that space maybe something very profound and meaningful develops.

The earlier questions that motivated my interest in this research now have some answers. In these women sharing their lives I have seen that my experiences are not solely mine. Aspects of my interracial relationship are shared by the other women. There are common threads of experience in each of our lives. As I connected the threads I began to see that many of these experiences are shared. If my research can contribute to at least one

person knowing that they are not alone in their experiences, that the lives of White women in interracial relationships with Black men are interconnected, then my research was successful.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Age

Ethnicity

Country of Origin

Career/Work

Children? If yes, how many?

How long have you been in the relationship/marriage?

Where and how did you meet your partner?

What did you initially “see” in your partner/husband that attracted him to you?

Was his “blackness” an issue for you whether positively or negatively?

How do you feel about your relationship as of today?

How do you feel about interracial relationships in general?

Did you always feel that way or has that developed over time?

If separated: What was the reason/s for the separation?

Did his “race”/“blackness” a factor?

Would you date another black man?

Prior to interracial contact what kinds of messages did you receive about interracial relationships 1) family and friends 2) media 3) society in general?

Did you see interracial couples or interracial socializing as you were growing up?

How did you feel about those relationships?

Did you have any experiences that made you believe an interracial relationship was an option for you (e.g. a relative who was in an interracial relationship, parents who were liberal-minded?)

Have you lost any friends due to your interracial relationship?

Have you lost any family members due to your interracial relationship?

Is your partner the first interracial relationship you have had?

If no, would you say the response from society, family and friends has been the same for each one? If not, how has it been different?

Specifically have you had any disruptive or disturbing reactions to your relationship from 1) family and friends 2) society?

If applicable, did your family and friends treat you differently when you had children?

Would you say there is any difference to the way you are treated when you are by yourself in public and when you are with your partner and/or children?

How do you think society views your interracial child/children?

Do you think your life would be different if your partner was a white man?

If yes, how?

If no, why not?

Do you feel interracial relationships are more stressful and pressure-filled than most relationships?

If yes, why?

If no, why?

Would you say your life has changed since being with your partner. If yes, how so?

How do you think society views your relationship with your partner/husband?

Do you think society views you as “stepping down”, as choosing below your station in life by being with a black man

What do you think or feel about the images the media (newspapers/magazines/television) portrays of the black man, particularly of the young black man?

What kinds of images do you think the media portrays of the white woman, particularly the young white woman?

What kind of white women do you think society images dates a black man?

How did you perceive yourself in terms of your ethnic identity before you became involved with your partner? (trying to get at if she sees herself as "white")

Has this perception of yourself changed since being involved with your partner? If yes how?

Do you feel we live in a world that has a racial hierarchy?

Could you explain that racial hierarchy?

Why did you choose to be with a man who is considered low on the racial/social hierarchy?

How do you think society views interracial couples?

Do you think there is a difference with how your interracial union is perceived and how other interracial couples are perceived? (couples such as Chinese and European, Native and European, Indian and African etc.,)