GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER NOW?
PERSPECTIVES ON INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS

by

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ABSTRACT

Ethnomethodological studies have analyzed everyday activities with an intent to make those activities "visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes" (Garfinkel:1967). In that tradition, the current study offers an analysis of a seemingly unconventional pattern in mate selection that is based upon data collected through participant observation of, and unstructured interviews with interracial couples. The research suggests that greater frequency of contact between individuals of different racial backgrounds is likely to generate larger numbers of interracial relationships. This is in large part due to the fact that under such circumstances individuals become more aware of their similarities, and less conscious of the differences between them. The findings also suggest that the variables of age, geographic location of the couple, the relative socio-economic status of the couple and their family and friends, as well as the degree to which the individuals and their families have assimilated to Western traditions affect not only the success or failure of interracial relationships, but also the nature of the reactions that their relationship is likely to elicit. In the process of presenting and illuminating the findings the study incorporates discussion on the topics of mate selection options, actual choices, the couples' interactions interpersonally, as well as with family, friends and the larger community, and portraits of interracial couples in various forms of media. In addition, a series of appendices are provided, listing specific media portraits of these couples, existing support groups serving this community, and an account of the researcher's personal relationship to the field.

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The inspiration for this project came from the multitude of interracial couples I have encountered through the various stages of my life. Of those people are some with whom I maintain an ongoing relationship, while others remain nameless faces buried in the recesses of my memory. Regardless of the space they currently occupy in my life, I owe them all a debt of thanks for it is clear that in different ways they have all had an impact on this work.

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I also owe thanks to the couples who participated in interviews for this study. Many of them will recognize themselves and their stories, although I have done my best to protect their privacy and identity by using pseudonyms. It goes without saying that their stories are this project.

The guidance and support offered by my advisor, Dr. Kenneth Stoddart, has proved invaluable. His own work serves as a standard against which I only hope my own will someday measure up. For now, that work has been an example of the type of sociology that I remain most interested in pursuing, and I thank him for his comments, creativity and input, and for keeping qualitative sociology alive at U.B.C.

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INTRODUCTION

As Mildred and Richard Loving lay peacefully in their bed in Central Point, Virginia early one morning in July of 1958, they found their sleep unexpectedly interrupted. Three police officers stormed into their home, and under the penetrating glare of a flashlight demanded that Mr. Loving explain "What was he doing in bed with this lady?" Though Mr. Loving pointed to a marriage certificate which they had acquired in the District of Columbia and subsequently hung on their bedroom wall, the couple was arrested and held in the Bowling Green county jail. Mr. Loving was white and Mrs. Loving black, and the difference in their skin color rendered their marriage illegal in the state of Virginia where anti-miscegenation laws were recognized and enforced.

Eventually the couple appeared in court before Judge Leon M. Bazile who sentenced both man and wife to a year in prison after finding them guilty of the charge of unlawful cohabitation. He claimed, "Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, Malay and red and placed them on separate continents and but for the interference with this arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages" (Margolick, 6/12/92: B20). Judge Bazile offered to waive the prison sentence if Mr. and Mrs. Loving conceded to leave Virginia for the next 25 years.

Initially, the couple sought refuge in the place where they had been married but after a few unhappy years of living in Washington, D.C. they returned to Virginia to challenge the constitutionality of the 1924 law that made their marriage illegitimate. Their case was ultimately decided in the United States Supreme Court and a ruling was made in the Lovings' favor. As a result the law in Virginia, along with those in 15 other states, which prohibited marriages between individuals of different races was repealed.

June 12, 1992 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the legality of the Lovings' marriage. During those years the incidence of interracial marriage has steadily increased. A

1992 New York Times estimate placed the number of interracial couples in the United States at one million, and the U.S. Census Bureau report indicates an increase in black and white marriages from 1970 figures of 65,000 to the current 218,000 which means that four out of every thousand marriages in the U. S. involve a black and white partner. (Kroll, 6/10/91: 44). Additionally, an August 1993 newsletter published by Multi-Racial Americans of Southern California indicates that there are currently sixty support groups in the U.S. and Canada catering specifically to interracial couples and their problems (See Appendix 2 for listing).

While laws have been changed in response to social pressure and couples have apparently shown a greater willingness to legalize their relationships with individuals of other races, it is less certain that attitudes, tolerance and acceptance of these unions have kept pace with other changes. For instance, in 1983 a former black director of the National Urban League was shot because of , and while in the company of, a white female (Hernton, 1988:xi). In 1989 a young black teen, Yusuf Hawkins, whose story subsequently inspired Spike Lee's film on interracial love - 'Jungle Fever', was brutally beaten to death by a group of whites in Brooklyn's Bensonhurst for allegedly having a white girlfriend (Kroll, 6/10/91:45). John DeSantis, in an effort to unravel the truth about the murder in Bensonhurst, writes:

> There are still conflicting stories about why thirty to forty young
> men gathered in a Bensonhurst schoolyard on the night of August 23, 1989.
> But there can be little doubt that the act which led to the murder of an
> innocent and unassuming black teenager, the firing of four shots from a
> .32 caliber revolver, was motivated by the race of the victim (1991:ix).

and then goes on to reveal that:

> Based on initial accounts from Gina Feliciano, her mother, and other
> witnesses, police investigators believed that they were dealing with a
> jealous lover, Keith Mondello, who was angry because his girlfriend
> Gina Feliciano was seeing a black man, who may or may not have been
> the homicide victim (Ibid.:82).

These incidents, unlike most, creeped into news headlines. Calvin Hernton suggests that "the abusive insults and violent acts committed against interracial couples in our daily lives are seldom brought to public attention. One learns of such happenings by word of mouth, from friends and acquaintances or by chance, from being on the scene when they are perpetrated" (1988:xi). In an attempt to substantiate his claim, Hernton recounts three tales involving interracial couples and some level of harrassment, and goes on to state that "repulsive feelings and acts of violence against interracial couples in public are not "isolated incidents. Such feelings and acts of hatred stem from a larger cancer in our lives. The cancer of which I speak is racism" (1988:xii).

In a 1992 book entitled "Crossings: A White Man's Journey into Black America", Walt Harrington discovered the veracity of Hernton's claims. During interviews he conducted with people throughout the United States on issues of race and racism, he found out that many accounts of racism, or intolerance, live only in the experiences of the victim. In recounting an interview done with a biracial teen in Pulaski, Tennessee, Harrington writes:

> "You're the color of my son," I tell Laronda. "You're obviously a mixed-race girl."
> "My mother was white," she says confidently.
> "Well," I say "what's life like for young blacks in Pulaski?"
> "Ain't nothing changed," says Ms. Cheatham, sounding alot like Mr. Brown. She hesitates. "It's gotten a little better."
> "Do the younger people get along?" I ask the girls. Ms. Cheatham didn't raise any shy offspring, and they all talk at once. I can't keep track of who's saying what so I give up and listen.
> "If I walked around downtown with a white guy, everybody in Pulaski would know, like I committed a crime. Most people figure blacks should date blacks and whites should date whites."
> I ask "Is dating common between blacks and whites?"
> "No, but a lot keep it a secret."
> I ask, "Is race always in the air?"
> "Mostly."
> "How?"
> "'Nigger', for one thing."
> "You still hear that?"
> "Oh, Yeah!"

"That word is everywhere."
"What are you doin' with that nigger?"
"Nigger!"
"Look at that nigger!"
"Me and you walkin' down the street: 'What is that white man doin' with
that nigger?' You hear it. They say it loud!"
I ask "Only if you're with a white man?"
"No, sometimes just walkin' down the street."
"We have seen people ridin' down the road sayin' 'Nigger! Nigger! Nigger!' "
"I was goin' into my apartment one day and this girl opened her door and
said, 'Nigger!' and closed it."

It is the link to which Hernton refers, and Harrington alludes to that I am interested in pursuing within the context of this study. In particular, I seek to address issues concerning the stress, adjustments and attitudes related to interracial marriages, in the North American context. (It bears noting that choices to enter into, and reactions toward, interracial relationships may vary depending upon the geographic location in which the actors and reactors reside. As a result, this study is concerned exclusively with the context of relationships within North America.) More specifically, the concerns can be articulated as: Do interracial couples face a unique set of obstacles in their daily lives as a consequence of the potential social disapproval that their union elicits, and the conceivable cultural differences that exist between them? For instance, are they subjected to verbal or violent abuse as a result of their different racial backgrounds and does this manifest itself in conflict within the marriage, and between the partners? Is the type of stress they encounter uniquely the result of their interracial coupling or is it conceivable that other atypical couplings, such as inter-generational couples, would be subjected to the same reactions? What adjustment problems, other than those typically anticipated in marriages do participants in interracial marriages experience? Typical adjustment problems might be characterized as realizing the honeymoon is over and making the transition from dating someone to living with them, coping with raising a family, and financial or occupational pressures. Atypical adjustments on the other hand might include, for instance, sacrifice of familial and social capital that may have been available to them if they had opted for

a more conventional choice of mate, or ostracism by family and friends for violating normative mate selection standards. If the couple has confronted these types of situations, what repercussions have they suffered as a result? Finally, aside from interpersonal experience, what sorts of attitudes do interracial couples encounter given their visibly different racial backgrounds?

From a theoretical standpoint, studies done in the area of mate selection and race relations have been key in informing the approaches taken within those studies pertaining specifically to interracial marriage.

From the field of race relations, what is most relevant is that the term race has undergone transformation in both its meaning and useage. Banton has suggested that "the changes in the way the word race has been used reflect changes in the popular understanding of the causes of physical and cultural differences." (In Cashmore, 1988:235). While this may be true, what is of equal importance is that a continued challenge questioning the legitimacy of a system which classifies human beings according to phenotypical distinctions has been mounted, and hence those markers which have typically been used for 'race' have been unveiled as social constructs that have a broad range of consequences. Although systems of classifying individuals according to race is in many respects inherently unnatural, the unnatural divisions, which in everyday useage are referred to as races or ethnic groups, have retained their currency into the present. The diminution of the concept's usefulness that might have been expected in the face of increased theoretical and scientific knowledge, which clearly undermines its validity, has not materialized. Instead, as Kay Anderson indicates, the concept of race has retained its usefulness in a variety of social and political milieus. Anderson makes this claim patently clear in writing:

> ...the concept of race, though for many decades being seen as problematic
> by population geneticists, continues to be used and propounded by many
> lay people, policy makers, and journalists as a concept with scientific
> value. Belief in the natural existence of race is something they share with
> nineteenth-century British, American and western European biologists

who assumed the world's races were for all intents and purposes immutable and that each had unique biological and cultural characteristics. Such biologists never fully agreed on the criteria for classifying the world's populations into races or on the number of races that existed. It was clear from their hopelessly large number of typologies that features such as skin colour, facial angle, cranial shape, and hair texture did not co-vary in any systematic or consistent way. But such nagging problems did not prompt them to question the assumptions behind their classification systems, so powerful was their will to establish naturally occurring regularities behind human variation. (1991:10-11).

The relevance of Anderson's insights are that they reveal what lies at the heart of what can be identified as racism. The most obvious fact that emerges from the concept of race as she describes it is that there continues to be a drive toward distinguishing populations from one another according to their physical traits. While it may seem rather innocuous on the surface to engage in the process, it is commonly understood and accepted that the purpose behind attempting to identify or creating distinctions that result in racial categories do not cease with mere classification. The classifications themselves become important in a variety of contexts, and most important to this discussion is that those categories enable individuals and groups to make distinctions between themselves and those who are unlike themselves, develop common-sense knowledge about what qualifies as membership within a racial group, and subsequently make judgements on the basis of that knowledge.

Studies emerging out of the field of marriage and the family focus on patterns of mate selection and attempt to account for the low incidence of interracial marriage. The research, for instance has examined patterns of mate selection by accounting for the range of systems, from arranged marriages to "free choice" based on romantic love, then evaluated the degree of social control that the respective systems exert upon prospective choices that individuals make with reference to mates, with an eye to explaining the patterns that are identifiable within those systems. There is general concurrence that endogamy or homogamy remains the norm for most individuals (Ramu, 1992). Endogamy very simply refers to a process of marrying within one's

own group, and the characteristics which define 'group' could range from or include: race, religion, age, ethnic origin, social, occupational and/or educational status and residential propinquity. Homogamy similarly refers to the tendency of choosing an individual like oneself (along social, psychological and demographic lines) or the theory that like attracts like (Kephart and Jedlicka, 1991). Though there has been evidence to suggest that interracial marriages, particularly within the United States, and to a lesser extent within Canada (Ward, 1990), have been occurring in varying degrees throughout the 1900's (Heer, 1968; Monahan, 1973; 1976; 1977) there is a general consensus that the relative rates of interracial marriage to overall marriage rates remains relatively low, which in turn suggests that there is a low proclivity among marriageable individuals to cross racial lines when selecting a mate (Kephart and Jedlicka, 1991).

One factor which has been used to explain the salience of race in limiting one's prospective marriage pool is the link between race and socio-economic status. Race, as a socially constructed category, has been highly instrumental in determining one's socio-economic status, because the range of educational and occupational opportunities that may or may not be available are directly contingent upon one's racial background (Miles, 1989; Rex and Mason, 1986; and Ringer and Lawless, 1989) and this has affected the tendencies of individuals to marry across racial lines. The contention according to homogamy is that individuals will seek out those who are similar according to social, occupational or educational levels, and race creates significant discrepancies between the races along these lines, and therefore inhibits marriage between the races (Ramu, 1992).

In a 1968 study examining patterns of intermarriage across racial lines, specifically between whites and blacks in the Unites States, David Heer used a theory of homogamy to account for the relatively low instances of interracial marriage. His proposition was that differences in

racial background would reduce the likelihood and occurrence of marriage between the races, and he suggests that the tendency to prefer racial homogamy is largely the result of social and political control that has been exerted over marriages. He contends that the United States' history of segregation which has been both legally entrenched as well as self-imposed, has not only created rare or infrequent opportunities for individuals of different racial stock to socialize, but also to mate. His conclusion is that this emphasis on race is simply another means to reinforce social inequality based on race, since there is social unacceptability attached to marrying outside of one's group.

In a 1973 study which examined patterns of marriage across racial lines in Indiana, Thomas Monahan indicates that:

> the question of amalgamation of the races, within or without the law, was openly debated in the 1800's. Some of the anti-slavery groups supported the idea of freedom to intermarry; others opposed it. The argument of the anti-slavery group was that miscegenation was occurring outside of the law because of slavery, with white men exploiting the Negro women, and hence the abolition of slavery would stop such interbreeding. There was, they commonly asserted, little desire on the part of members of either race to intermarry (1973: 632).

The supposition that there was little desire to marry outside of one's race was apparently ill-founded. Heer's study reveals that in the State of New York intermarriage rates in the 1920's were higher than those occurring in Michigan and California in the 1960's. He further states that the 1960 rate of intermarriage in Hawaii was higher than any previously recorded data in the United States, however figures compiled for Boston during the years between 1900 and 1904 come closest to those in Hawaii. He notes that "for Boston during this period the proportion of Negro grooms marrying white brides was 13.7 per cent as compared with 14.7 per cent in Hawaii in 1960..." (1968: 432).

What is significant with respect to Heer's data is that Boston was an area in which anti-

slavery sympathies were high (1968) and tolerance of the black presence and correlatively, interracial marriages was greater than it was in a number of other regions. In the case of Hawaii, no particular racial group was the most dominant among its population given the multiplicity of its ethnic groups, nor were its marriage laws restricted by statutes regarding anti-miscegenation (Kitano, Yeung, Chai and Hatanaka, 1984). Until 1967, 16 states maintained laws prohibiting interracial marriage on their books, at which time they were forced to repeal them given the landmark *Loving versus Virginia* decision.

By relying on statistics that have been published by particular states, and on data available through early marriage records, Thomas Monahan has attempted to compile data through a series of studies (1973; 1976; 1977) to indicate the pervasiveness of interracial marriages in different regions throughout the United States, the personal and social profiles of those engaging in interracial marriages, and the changes in the nature and extent of interracial marriage that have occurred over time.

With respect to the last variable Monahan's research indicates that repeal of anti-miscegenation laws did have a noticeable, albeit relatively small, impact on the extent of interracial marriage. His data reveals that there has been a steady increase in the number of marriages occurring across racial lines, most significantly in the East South Central and South Atlantic regions of the United States. The highest proportion of interracial marriages were continually occurring in Northern and Pacific States. The implications of Monahan's research is siginificant in that it demonstrates that removal of the legal restrictions throughout the United States allowed individuals, at the very least, the legal opportunity to exercise greater freedom in mate selection, and this manifested itself in recorded data on interracial marriages within the Southern states where opposition was strongest to intermarriage. When the legal system was forced to acknowledge the inherent racism entrenched in its laws, it also had to confront the

social implications those laws had on race relations.

What is also of note through Monahan's studies is that as a result of striking anti-miscegenation laws from the books, combined with the impact of the burgeoning civil rights movement in the 1960's, racial identifiers were removed from marriage records within a number of states, which made the process of recording the level of interracial marriage actually occurring exceedingly difficult. For instance, Colorado removed this data in 1959, California and New Jersey in 1961, New York in 1965, Michigan in 1966, Maryland in 1970, Massachusetts in 1971, and the District of Columbia in 1975.

A 1990 study published by Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan also suggests that accuracy of interracial marriage rates is difficult to generate given the inaccuracies in record keeping and the elimination of racial identifiers on marriage applications. Recent studies have depended upon data available through census reports (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan, 1990) or by examining marriage records and determining the racial composition of the marriage partners on the basis of surnames (Kitano, Yeung, Chai and Hatanaka, 1984). These methods however present difficulties since individuals may choose not to racially identify themselves in census reports, and there is a degree of error involved in the latter procedure. What is important however, is that the refusal that some demonstrate in identifying their racial background in census reports can be linked to the status of race relations within the country.

It has been asserted through both journalistic and academic reports on interracial marriage that merely lifting the legal prohibition against interracial marriage does not necessarily eliminate the social taboo that is associated with such unions. Hernton, in his study of "Sex and Racism in America" has suggested that while more than a quarter of a century has passed since the statutes were overturned, "the unwritten taboo ("You aren't supposed to do it!") against racial "intermingling" has not changed one iota" (1988: xi). A 1973 study by Kikimura and

Kitano also concedes that there is an overwhelming preference toward endogamy and that this has been "...couched sometimes in mild terms such as "like should marry like" and often stronger terms such as "don't mix oil and water" ..." (1973: 67), which has reinforced the social taboo against race mixing. Additionally, one finds through a series of stories on racism, prejudice and/or interracial marriage (Ebony 9/91; Randolph 3/89; Munroe 9/92, Kroll 6/91) the view reported in a March 1992 article appearing in the Vancouver Sun. Marlene Habib noted that on-going research on attitudes toward interracial marriage being conducted by Tom Smith of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago reveals that attitudes have not changed dramatically since the 1960's. In fact Smith's 1991 study indicated that one in five Americans (out of the 1500 sampled) believed that interracial marriage should be illegal whereas a 1972 survey asking the same question yielded two believers out of every five. The implications of Smith's work is that individuals' and society's attitudes have in fact changed to a very insignificant degree, even though their willingness to express their oppositions may have become less blatant.

Recent studies on the resurgence of radical racism within Canada seem to contradict the notion that people are reluctant to express their disapproval of interracial marriage. Stanley Barrett's 1989 report along with that of Julian Sher's (1983) on the Right Wing and Ku Klux Klan in Canada clearly indicate that Canadians are demonstrating an increased tendency to express antipathy toward race mixing. Their work also suggests that the increased hostility of members within these groups toward interracial marriage can be linked to higher immigration rates and the implied threat to racial homogeneity that those figures represent.

It should be noted that with the exception of a 1991 study done by Madeline Richard on "Ethnic Groups and Marital Choices", little has been done in Canada on the subject of interracial marriage. Richard's research is in fact the first detailed study analyzing marriage across ethnic

and religious, though not racial, lines. Within texts dealing with the subjects of marriage and the family, cursory notes that rely on American data are included to reinforce the theory of endogamy (Ramu, 1992; Kephart and Jedlicka, 1991).

The dearth of relevant Canadian studies is conceivably understood as a result of two factors. First, Canada did not ever impose the legal restrictions of the kind that were erased from American lawbooks in 1967, and second, as Habib (1992) reveals, polling firms such as Gallup and Decima Research have not tracked Canadian attitudes toward interracial marriage in Canada as they have in the United States, and Statistics Canada does not carry figures which document the instances of interracial marriage in the country. The first factor is significant because the repeal of anti-miscegenation laws triggered renewed interest in the United States in tracking, explaining and understanding interracial marriage in the academic arena. Researchers were interested in determining if significant changes would occur as a result of legal changes. Canada cannot refer to a parallel turning point in its history which may have reduced the interest in doing historical comparative analysis on the subject. With respect to the second factor, one can only speculate that rates of intermarriage were so significantly low that they did not merit tracking, and that Canada's historical tendency toward preserving ethnic homogeneity (Ward, 1990) limited the necessity of gauging attitudes toward intermarriage, as once again it was occurring on a nominal scale. It would seem, based upon recent trends in racism and immigration that there is just cause to re-evaluate the necessity of determining Canadian's attitudes on these issues.

Accounts such as those appearing in the Vancouver Sun, and a 1992 article by Kate Fillion in Chatelaine magazine reinforce this perception. Habib reported that the greater influx of immigrants from different racial backgrounds has resulted in a greater propensity to marry across racial lines within Canada, and that the visible differences between couples has forced

them to confront the prejudices that many individuals maintain toward these unions.

The current study attempts to pull together the various threads referred to, by linking up the theoretical elements with interviews and media representations of the interracial marriage phenomenon with personal observations about the subject. This will be done with an eye to generating a clearer understanding of what affects the tendency to become involved in interracial marriage and how the public responds to these unions. Due to the unavailability of comprehensive data regarding interracial marriage rates, and the apparent neglect in systematically tracking attitudes about intermarriage within Canada, the study cannot attempt to be representative in any significant respect of the status of interracial marriage within the United States or Canada. However, the descriptive and theoretical approach can certainly contribute to our current understanding of the topic by providing detailed accounts of what couples deal with in the contemporary era.

Towards these ends, the study is organized as follows. In the subsequent chapter, an outline of the techniques used to compile and analyse data for the study are presented. Within this discussion, the efforts to overcome the constraints presented by existing research, as well as methods used to interpret the available data will be identified. Chapter Two focuses on the ways in which couples met, how they felt upon meeting and the reasons why they remain together. In Chapter Three, the discussion incorporates the attitudes and reactions that couples met up with when they revealed the interracial aspect of their involvement to family and friends, while Chapter Four examines experiences of interracial couples in the public sphere. The specific intent of this aspect of the discussion is to determine whether the "common-sense" characterizations offered by family and friends to account for their reactions also explains how strangers respond to the presence of an interracial couple. In the fifth chapter, the analysis is extended to media portraits of interracial couples. A comparison of two films focussing on

interracial love, namely, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner' and 'Jungle Fever', is presented along with briefer analyses of portraits of interracial couples and attitudes toward them, on television and in novels. Following Chapter Six, in which a brief conclusion is provided, are a series of Appendices, the first of which is a "Confessional Tale", followed by a list of support groups serving the interests of interracial couples, and the final one listing media sources containing depictions of interracial relationships.

CHAPTER 1 - DATA

At the outset of this undertaking, it was understood that there were several obstacles to be overcome. The most obvious perhaps, as indicated in the preceding chapter, is that previous research was scant. The vast majority of studies done in the field dated back to the late 1960's and early 70's when changes in American laws propelled an interest to study the subject within the U.S. However, with changes in Census data and the difficulties those changes created in tracking marriage rates across racial lines, interest in the subject waned. Canadian interest in the subject has been restricted to an examination of ethnic groups and marital choices (Richards, 1991), and brief comments about marginal rates of interracial marriage within texts on mate selection. Recent trends in research conducted in the U.S. reflect an interest in examining rates of interracial marriage and the social attitudes toward them.

The current study, by relying predominantly on human accounts of the lived experiences of those involved in interracial relationships, attempts to broaden our understanding of why individuals from different and frequently antagonistic worlds defy what are often portrayed as formidable cultural prejudices and taboos to unite their lives in friendship and marriage (Mathabane and Mathabane, 1992: xi). Additionally, it intends to deepen the scope and insight that we have of interracial marriage by linking the personal interviews with contemporary theories on mate selection and the Sociology of Knowledge. Given the motivation behind this study, and the constraints as outlined above, in terms of tracing both experiences of interracial couples and explanations for the increase in marriage rates between individuals of different races, it was apparent that available research on the subject had to supplemented by other forms of data.

Jarmila Horna states that

> some norms or rules governing who can marry whom or who has the
> final decision-making power in choosing a mate are cultural universals.

> Likewise, the criteria of desireability and eligibility in any marriage market or system, as well as the rules which circumscribe the field of eligible mates in terms of preferences and prohibitions are found in every society. (1992: 181)

Within the context of this study, particularly given the multiplicity of ethnic and racial groups comprising North America's populace and the varying degrees of assimilation evidenced amongst them, a detailed review of theories of mate selection was considered crucial. Without understanding the criteria that figure prominently, from a normative standpoint, in selecting a mate, there is difficulty not only in understanding why individuals opt to cross racial lines in choosing a mate, but as importantly, why particular attitudes about interracial marriage are maintained. For instance, if the prevailing theories are based on homogamy and free choice based on love, one might potentially explain an interracial union by underscoring the love between the couple. At the same time, the salience of race in differentiating one person from another in Western society could potentially account for the disapproval that might be voiced against intermarriage. Given the latter possibility, another angle on the process of mate selection can be accessed by determining the reasons why some individuals choose to reject a prospective mate, or elect to terminate a relationship with a person from a different racial background. Given these barriers to understanding, the next step following a detailed review of existing research on the subject of interracial relationships entailed a comprehensive overview of theories on mate selection.

The third step in the process was to develop an understanding of how individuals make sense of theoretical concepts in their daily lives, and how in particular, theory translates into action. This conceptual link was developed by turning to work done in the sociology of knowledge. Berger and Luckmann note that:

> ...every institution has a body of transmitted recipe knowledge, that is, knowledge that supplies the institutionally appropriate rules of conduct. Such knowledge constitutes the motivating dynamics of institutionalized conduct. It defines the institutionalized areas of conduct and designates all

situations falling within them. It defines and constructs the roles to be
played in the context of the institutions in question. *Ipso facto,* it controls
and predicts all such conduct. Since this knowledge is socially objectivated
as knowledge, that is, a body of generally valid truths about reality, any
radical deviance from the institutional order appears as a departure from
reality. Such deviance may be designated as moral depravity, mental disease,
or just plain ignorance...This is the knowledge that is learned in the course
of socialization and that mediates the internalization within individual
consciousness of the objectivated structures of the social world (1966: 83).

The force of observations emerging from the sociology of knowledge on the present study are two

fold. First, they not only bridge the chasm between theory and personal practice, but second,

they potentially explain the basis of social interaction. Through an understanding of how and

why individuals think, act and react as they do, the foundation of "common-sense" beliefs and

their pervasiveness becomes clearer. As a result, a review of work in this area was undertaken,

with an eye to isolating how our language and socialization influences us, our choices and our

perceptions of the world around us.

Based upon the preceding literature review, the most practical method of expressing beliefs

with respect to mate selection seemed to be to present them as propositions. Garfinkel (1967)

has referred to this process as "anthropological paraphrasing" which essentially is the

production of a list of properties relating to a particular subject based on members beliefs, and

"these properties are to be read with the invariable prefix, "From the standpoint of an adult

member of our society..." (1967: 122). These "common sense characterizations" of what is

important in mate selection, how it is to be done, and what one's perceptions of interracial

marriage are, especially when analyzed against the theories on mate selection were

instrumental in assessing if the theories adequately explain the ways in which we practically go

about choosing a mate. This method, as a result, was incorporated into the analysis of social

reactions to interracial couples.

The next step involved interviewing interracial couples. The interviews were structured

with an end to eliciting information about their personal (one to one), familial (extended kin

group), and social (general public) experiences during the course of their association. In particular, information regarding reactions to their marriage, reasons for choosing to solidify their committment through marriage, obstacles, adjustments and pressures that they have endured was sought. A series of general questions were incorporated to generate profiles of the individuals within the couple in an attempt to determine if homogamy, with the exception of the variable of race, maintains with respect to mate selection between these persons. Within mate selection theory, similarity on the following characteristics is taken to be indicative of a degree of homogamy: age, religion, residential propinquity, educational status, occupational status, and social class prior to marriage. A total of 15 couples, participated in approximately hour long taped interviews, (with follow-ups for clarification where necessary).

With respect to acquiring participants, the snowball sampling technique was utilized. Since I am acquainted with a number of couples who are interracially married, and "...snowball sampling depends on the sampled cases being knowledgeable of other relevant cases, [and] the technique is especially useful for sampling subcultures where the members routinely interract with one another." (Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong, 1986: 129) it proved to be the most efficient and reliable means of securing prospective participants.

Initial interviews were conducted with couples with whom I have a personal association. All interviews were conducted in the couple's residence. It bears noting that most couples shared a residence even in those cases where they had not gone through the legal process of marriage.

The decision to hold interviews in the couple's home was two-fold. First, I believed that rapport would be established more easily if we spoke in an environment in which the pair was already comfortable. Second, potentially, I had the ability to glean cues from the couple's environment that might otherwise be unavailable to me. Information regarding interpersonal couple dynamics, such as how they responded to one another on the homefront, or in instances

where children from a previous relationship lived with the couple, how the non-biological parent interacted with the children, was accessible under these circumstances.

During the interview process, the first thing done was to reiterate information that I had given them over the phone when arranging the interview, namely, my personal background, the nature of my interest, the purposes for which the information they shared would be used and to assure them confidentiality. In every instance, I walked into the interviews armed with a series of questions that focused on the issues that had been identified as central to the study. I did not, however, feel a strong desire or need to rigidly adhere to the sequence or wording of the questions. Instead, I hoped that the couple would feel sufficiently comfortable in recounting experiences, and that the questions would be answered as a natural result of the exchange. Even in those instances where one or both members of the couple seemed reluctant in the beginning, it was not long before both individuals began to speak very openly about personal issues, and leading the interview on their own.

On several occasions, even when I had not been acquainted with the couple prior to the interview, the couples expressed great satisfaction in having engaged in the interview, stating that it was personally enlightening in that it made them more aware of things between them to which they had otherwise been oblivious. Additionally, some of the same couples expressed a desire to meet again under social circumstances because they enjoyed themselves so much, and were interested to know if other people went through what they did. As a result of these encounters, I felt sufficiently assured that I had successfully developed rapport with my informants.

Before concluding the interviews and thanking the couple for their participation, I asked them if they knew of any other people who might be willing to participate in the process. While a few stated that they could not think of anyone off-hand, most were willing, not only to provide

me with names and numbers of prospective candidates, but also offered to preface my call with one of their own. In the final result, most interviews came through the process of referral.

Based on my personal contacts alone, it was possible to identify 15 couples to participate in the study. However, in the interests of maintaining objectivity, as few of the couples with whom I have associations as possible were solicited for structured interviews. I wanted to limit the tendency to use personal information I had about couples to draw out reactions and answers that I was interested in hearing, and more concerned in allowing the couples to tell their "stories" their own way. By meeting with people that I knew virtually nothing about, I was in a better position to maintain that objective stance. Further, the information I acquired through interviews with couples I had not previously met, could be supplemented by participant observation that was based on my personal relationships with interracial couples. There was virtually no difficulty in securing the sample however. In fact, based upon referrals, I did not even come close to exhausting my sources.

When I left the interview, I immediately returned home, played back the tape, and began to isolate themes or recurrent experiences revealed by different couples. I kept notes, which ultimately simplified the transcription of the interviews.

Without exception, the most consistent revelation offered by interracial couples in retelling their tales of meeting and mating was that they had little choice but to stay together - because they fell in love. As a researcher, however, the plausibility of love being the sole basis for the formation and maintenance of relationships, was somewhat problematic given the very real and conveivable possibility that individuals were remembering their past not necessarily as it occurred, but in a way that made sense to them in the present. Berger and Luckmann note:

> ...*in toto* there must be particular reinterpretations of past events and
> with past significance...What is necessary, then, is a radical reinter-
> pretation of the meaning of these past events or persons in one's
> biography. Since it is relatively easier to invent things that never happened

than to forget those that actually did, the individual may fabricate and insert events wherever they are needed to harmonize the remembered with the reinterpreted past. Since it is the new reality rather than the old that now appears dominatingly plausible to him, he may be perfectly 'sincere' in such a procedure - subjectively, he is not telling lies about the past but bringing it in line with *the* truth that, necessarily, embraces both the present and the past...Persons, too, particularly significant others, are reinterpreted in this fashion (1966: 180).

In light of this difficulty, and given that the concept of love raised as many questions as it answered, some means of making sense of the couple's account was necessary. This was accomplished first off by accepting that as a researcher, while I had a responsibility to recognize this obstacle, I was not there to challenge the truth of what informants claimed to be their feelings, but to accurately report their stories as they were told to me. The second factor which endowed the concept of love with some practical substance, came by way of theories of love. Borrowing on research done by Hochschild (1983; 1979; 1975), Albas and Albas contend that

It is not merely a matter of personal whim that we label feelings of physical arousal as love. On the contrary, love labels are structured by the micro context within which they occur as well as the larger social and cultural worlds. Every society has a general set of "feeling rules" and more specific "love rules" which define an acceptable "field of eligibles". In Western culture the "field of eligibles" consists of partners who are similar in age...Love must also be managed; that is, would be lovers must engage in "feeling work" to bring their emotions in line with "feeling rules"...Consistent with the feeling work hypothesis, females focused on what work they might do to make their feelings consistent with cultural dictates. For example, one respondent notes: "If a boy had all the qualities I desired, and I was not in love with him - well, I think I could talk myself into falling in love (1992: 131-132).

Whether it is a notion of love in the classic sense of *Eros,* which is a form of 'love at first sight', or a derivative form of love, such as *Pragma*, which is defined as "love with a shopping list, [in that] the person is very much aware of his or her market value and searches for someone who is compatible and a "good deal" (Albas and Albas; 1992: 132) that is a more accurate account of what transpired between the couple, what is clear is that efforts to

reinterpret the past may be a result of "feeling work" that is going on between the two, and that this is what got labelled as "love" in the process of relaying their stories to me.

Finally, from conception of the research topic through the final stages of writing, efforts were continually made to isolate and examine portraits of interracial couples in magazines, newspapers, in books (fiction and non-fiction), in film, as well as on television. As a data base, they were treated as supplemental sources. In certain instances, these accounts, depending upon their context have found themselves interspersed throughout various chapters, but for the most part they have been treated separately in the penultimate chapter of this thesis work.

CHAPTER 2 - THE COUPLE: MEETING AND MATING, OR WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

> From the minute he walked in the door we have been inseparable. It
> was like meeting another part of myself. It was strange, it really was.

Within this chapter, accounts of how certain interracial couples met, and subsequently decided to enter into a relationship are presented. These accounts are treated as "knowledge", acquired through experience and whose presentation relies upon the participants' recollections of the circumstances that led to their meeting and mating. While some attempts are made to analyze the conditions of the process of meeting and mating within the context of mate selection theories, what follows is by and large a description of an aspect of the couples' histories. Hence, no substantive attempts to assess the validity or accuracy of these accounts vis-a-vis more conventional patterns of mate selection are made. In the tradition of Stoddart (1974), the participants' "corpus of knowledge is not regarded as correct or incorrect, complete or incomplete" (p. 180), but instead is offered primarily as personal knowledge "subscribed to and endorsed as factual" (Ibid.) by the parties in question in their attempts to relay an aspect of their life as a couple.

GETTING TOGETHER

Carolyn met Mac after he walked through a door. Ten years after their initial meeting, they remain happily married. End of story? Hardly. From a sociological standpoint, it cannot accurately be characterized as a beginning.

Lorne Tepperman and Angela Djao (1990) have suggested that "[p]eople's lives are intertwined with and limited by ... social structure. Our life choices are shaped and limited by the choices and actions of people around us..." (vii).

The implication of Tepperman and Djao's insight on the meeting of Mac and Carolyn that eventually led to their being Mr. and Mrs. McDonald is first, that the social structure, even

prior to their having met, in some respect, was limiting and enabling; and second, the meeting and the events which ensued from it were shaped and limited by the choices and actions of the people around Carolyn and Mac at that point in their lives. That is, society, in either loosely or strictly regulated form has established patterns which govern and guide the process of mate selection (Ramu:1992). Carolyn and Mac as members of society would have unwittingly taken this criteria into that first meeting and ultimately, used that same criteria in determining one another's suitability as marital partners. This knowledge pre-existed their meeting, though the meeting was not dependent upon it. The meeting itself was the result of certain conditions being satisfied, and those conditions were met in part because of the choices and actions of people other than Mac and Carolyn themselves.

It has been implied that people in the throes of trying to meet, or already having met someone, often fail to acknowledge that meeting and marriage is a kind of selection process (Tepperman and Djao: 1990). "This selection process is patterned by the emphasis that a society places on individual freedom, romantic love, maintenance of kinship and or group identity among other considerations" (Ramu, 1992:165). The differences in emphasis that is placed upon these factors generates strict or loosely regulated control over the partner choices that individuals make. Regardless of the degree of control that exists however, two basic guidelines which define the prospective field of eligibles from which mates can be selected are observed, namely, endogamy and exogamy.

According to Norman Goodman (1993) exogamy signifies the group of people with whom individuals are prohibited from establishing sexual and marital relations. Generally speaking, exogamy is translated into an incest taboo in most societies, and it is tacitly understood that sexual relations between members of the same family will incite social disapprobation at the very minimum. Endogamy, on the other hand, specifies that group from which an individual is

encouraged to select a partner. While it is conceivable that endogamy could denote all those who do not comprise membership in one's own family, the term has a narrower field of application indicating particular social preferences. Ramu (1992) states that "[t]he term endogamy refers to conformity to the rule that a person marry someone with similar salient social characteristics which depending on specific situations, might include race, religion, ethnicity, and social class" (166).

In addition to the more general rules of endogamy and exogamy, homogamy and heterogamy have bearing on the mate selection process. Essentially, these terms refer more specifically to personal attributes. Homogamous mates are those who have similar levels of education and intelligence, are relatively the same age and share common interests, ideals and values (Goodman, 1993). "The term heterogamy refers to marriage outside one's racial, ethnic, or religious group" (Ramu, 1992:167), and is in some instances referred to as the theory of complementary needs (Horna, 1992). In other words, a relationship that might be characterized as heterogamous may well be understood as a union of two people whose personalities complement one another in that what one individual lacks in personality attributes, the other brings into the relationship.

Thus far, in a very general sense, an attempt has been made to outline how social structure could have shaped or limited Carolyn and Mac's union. In order to understand more specifically if and how their pairing was affected, we need to go back and learn more about the particulars of their situation.

Carolyn and Mac met for the first time when they were both 39 years old, and it was not at a family reunion. On sight, Carolyn and Mac could be fairly certain that if they were related, that it was very distantly. - Hence, they observed the rule of exogamy.

Carolyn worked as a ward clerk at Johns Hopkins University Hospital, was in the process of

acquiring a college degree when she met Mac, and was raised a Christian. Mac, like Carolyn, had a Christian upbringing, held a college degree and worked as a financial analyst. - Hence, endogamy exerted very loose control of the mate selection process between Mac and Carolyn. They were unrelated, of the same social class and shared religious backgrounds.

BUT - Carolyn is Black and Mac is White - and in that regard they defied the endogamous race consideration.

Interracial coupling is often cited as an example of an heterogamous relationship (Goodman, 1993; Ramu, 1992), however, Carolyn's and Mac's experiences and backgrounds, excepting the factor of race, suggest that they are homogamous.

At the time of their meeting, as noted, both Carolyn and Mac were 39 years old. Each of them had been through a marriage which resulted in divorce. Both bore the responsibilities of single parenting with Carolyn raising four children to Mac's two. They were both living in the city of Baltimore, and as has been established, had attained comparable educational and socio-economic status. In the course of being interviewed, Carolyn revealed, "it was amazing how much we had in common: music, food, games, and we both loved the outdoors."

The particular factors which led to Carolyn and Mac selecting each other as mates hint at the degree of social and personal emphasis that is placed in this instance on factors such as freedom of choice, romantic love or maintenance of kinship ties among others. Before this issue is examined to any greater extent however, it is worth exploring the second implication of Tepperman and Djao's observation on Mac and Carolyn's case.

From Tepperman and Djao's perspective, individual choices are shaped and limited by the actions and choices of the people around the individuals. Carolyn and Mac met at the wedding reception of a mutual friend. In its very simplest sense, the friend's acts of getting married, having a reception and inviting them both to the reception were instrumental to their meeting.

But as is the case with most things in life, meeting was far more complex, and dependent upon a series of actions, some of which neither Carolyn nor Mac were responsible for initiating. Carolyn informed me

> What's so incredible is that the wedding reception that we were at, I'd known the woman for 10 years, she'd known Mac for 10 years, as a matter of fact, they dated. She'd never told me about him. She always talked about the other men in her life, but not once did she mention him. I had come downstairs and he came through the front door, and I looked at him and I said Now I wonder who he is ... He was talking to this other woman, who was a guest, in the kitchen and he walked her to the door when she had to leave. On his way back he took my hand and we started dancing, and I'm looking at one of the other bridesmaids and I'm pointing to her to cut in. I didn't know this man. I didn't know his name ...So finally we were introduced.

Carolyn's rendition of an event that had taken place nearly ten years earlier is a pretty straightforward account of the facts that took place before they met, but more importantly, it provides cues to the actions of others that shaped their lives.

The woman whose reception they both attended, as stated, was a person they had both known for ten years, and yet this friend (whom I"ll refer to as Rolanda) had never made mention of one friend to the other. More importantly, Mac was a man that Rolanda once dated. This a vital factor in this particular equation, because it is conceivable that Rolanda and Mac could have terminated their friendship when they ceased dating, in which case, he would not have been at the reception, and there would not have been a 'Carolyn and Mac' that met that night. But Rolanda and Mac had remained friends, and close enough that Mac was invited to, and attended Rolanda's reception. Rolanda also opted, consciously or sub-consciously, to keep Carolyn and Mac apart until the evening of her reception. (Carolyn, in retrospect, was surprised by Rolanda's failure to mention Mac at any time prior to their meeting, particularly given the fact that they were so compatible.) But let's assume that Rolanda had told Carolyn about Mac while she was dating him, and made Carolyn privy to the details of her relationship with Mac, up to and including the

decision to remain friends. Would this not have changed Carolyn's perception of Mac and the possibilities that they could entertain where the other was concerned? It amounts to speculation, but it is entirely conceivable that the outcome could have been very different. The fact is that by the time Carolyn and Mac did meet, Rolanda was marrying someone else, effectively taking herself out of the dating/mating pool. With Rolanda happily married to someone else, Carolyn and Mac were free to explore the full extent of their relationship and feelings for each other, without the risk of alienating Rolanda. The possibility that Rolanda still had deeper feelings for Mac or vice versa did not complicate the picture between Mac and Carolyn by the time that they met, as it may have had Rolanda still been single. So much for Rolanda's part in getting Mac and Carolyn together.

We have also learned that Mac took Carolyn out to the dance floor once another female guest left the reception. Had she chosen to stay, would that have altered what transpired or would it have merely postponed what in fact ensued? Finally, what would have happened if the bridesmaid, that Carolyn had been motioning to, had responded to the cue to cut in? Would Carolyn and Mac have left the party without being introduced, or again, would another opportunity that led to their talking, and leaving together, have arisen later in the evening?

These hypothetical questions will remain just that, since there is no definitive method to gauge what might have been. The bottom line is not so much how events might have changed had people acted differently, but that what happened is the result of individuals acting the way that they did. Carolyn's and Mac's choices and actions were clearly interdependent upon those of the people surrounding them. Getting together was as much the result of their own decisions at that moment in time, as it was of decisions made by them and others, before and up to then.

While the initial act of getting together was a culmination of forces beyond the express control of Carolyn and Mac, choosing to explore the possibilities of a relationship was clearly

another matter. I asked Carolyn and Mac to tell me what happened once they met, and how they

got to be a couple. In an effort to respond, they went back to the night of the reception.

> Carolyn: So finally we we're introduced, and he said "How about dinner
> at the Golden Arches?" This is how naive I am - I didn't know that he
> meant McDonald's.

> Mac: I was joking.

> Carolyn: I thought it was a fancy restaurant or something like that, and
> he said "Saturday?", so I said "fine". Now the next day, I was taking her
> [Rolanda's] place on her unit while she was on her honeymoon. So anyway,
> I'm sitting there and the phone rings and he [Mac] said "Uh, listen uh, I
> can't wait until Saturday, what time do you get off?" I said "3:30". He
> said "I'll be there", and I couldn't remember if I could recognize his car or
> not.

> Mac: What it was is that all of us white folks look alike.

> Carolyn: It was remarkable how we hit it off...We started seeing each other,
> moved in together almost immediately - about two months after we met -
> and we got married December 18, 1987.

Throughout the course of our conversations, both Carolyn and Mac indicated that they were

overwhelmed by how much they had in common. In fact they were so astounded, that they

wondered between themselves if Rolanda, knowing how compatible they would be, hadn't

purposely avoided introducing them. They had common interests, experiences, and aspirations,

and they enjoyed doing the same things with their time - together. They spent their evenings

playing chess with one another, eating dinners that Mac had prepared for Carolyn, talking with

each other, spending time with their children or with friends, dancing, dining or any number of

other things that qualified as going out. Carolyn found Mac " spoiling her rotten", and Mac found

in Carolyn, a woman "more intelligent, caring, beautiful, and special than any other" he'd met

in his life.

STAYING TOGETHER

By the time they decided to get married, Carolyn and Mac had been living together for three

years. Carolyn and her youngest son Chris, moved into Mac's home, where he lived with his youngest son Scott. Carolyn claimed that she was very happy with the way things were, and getting married was never really an issue with her, or with Mac. But the fact remained that they did get married. When asked why, they commented

>Carolyn: Four months after we met I got very ill.
>
>Mac: Carolyn has COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), and during the first two years together we almost lost her five times. She'd end up in intensive care for two weeks, and doctors didn't expect her to pull out of it. When she'd gone into remission, the doctors told me that the climate in Baltimore wasn't helping her condition, so we came out here [Las Vegas] to check things out.
>
>Carolyn: Mac was taking excellent care of me.
>
>Mac: Before we came out here, I asked her to marry me. I thought it was important because she was sick and we'd be coming alone. I guess the security was an issue.
>
>Carolyn: I thought he was joking. I said "Why would you want to marry me? Look at me. I'm not even healthy." And then he said "Are you going to marry me or not?", and that's when I knew he meant it. He told a lot of his friends, "I've gone through alot of women before I found her and I don't intend to let her go". We loved each other and we decided to go ahead with it.

Ah! That magic word - Love.

Given the nature of North American society, chances were better than not that love would creep into the scenario at some point. Ramu, (1992) in following William Goode's (1959) lead, states that

>...in Western societies, love is actually encouraged and is a commonly expected element in mate choice. In these societies, the cultural imperative is that one is free to fall in love with a person of his/her choice, and it is a widely held belief that it is "...mildly shameful to marry without being in love with one's spouse." (167)

Albas and Albas (1992) contend that no existing definition is entirely satisfactory in its capacity to explain the symbolic construction of love. As a result, they rely on the definition which enjoys the greatest currency, and is provided by Goode. According to Albas and Albas,

"Goode (1959:49) defines love as a strong emotional attachment, a cathexis, between adolescents or adults of opposite sexes, with at least the components of sex desire and tenderness." (1992:125) Within their discussion of love and marriage, Albas and Albas also point out that Goode's primary definition is expanded upon by Rubin (1973) who proposes that love can be distinguished from its companion concept -liking-by three of its characteristics, namely, attachment, caring and intimacy. In delineating the features of these characteristics they state

> Attachment has a strong sexual component, and it consists of a strong desire to be in the presence of the other person. It corresponds "to what the Greeks called Eros" (Rubin, 1973:213). Caring is really the other side of attachment. In caring, the emphasis is not so much in meeting one's own personal needs for closeness, sexual union, and so on, as it is on giving to the other person. "Love as giving corresponds to what the Greeks called Agape...and is emphasized in the New Testament, epitomized by St. John's declaration 'God is love'" (Rubin, 1973:213). Intimacy is derived from the combination of attachment (need-fulfillment) and caring and is essentially a relation of rapport and self-disclosure. While attachment and caring are individual characteristics, intimacy is the bond between the couple. It is interactional and transcends them (1992:131).

The history and current status of Mac and Carolyn's relationship reveals that at its foundation are the features which are used to define the concept of love. Carolyn currently ingests thirty-two different prescription medicines per day, and is pretty much confined to her bed. It is rare that she leaves her room, let alone the house. She is limited in her capacity to entertain visitors in her home, often finding herself exhausted after an hour of her company's arrival. In the years since she and Mac have been married, her physical appearance has changed dramatically. Early photographs of Carolyn are difficult to link with the woman laying in bed bearing the same name, unless one is told that they are one and the same person. Mac's bed is about eighteen inches away from Carolyn's, and when he is at home, he generally occupies the same physical space as her. As she sits in bed drawing, writing poetry, crocheting, or pursuing any one of a number of hobbies, he is in his recliner reading, watching television, doing

paperwork or simply keeping her company. They eat their meals in their room, and Mac often comes home for lunch. Though Carolyn feels that she is far from the woman he married, Mac seems as much in love as a man might be. He stated

> In ten years, Carolyn and I have lived a lifetime together. Because of her sickness we've been through as much emotionally and mentally as some couples do in forty or fifty years...It's pulled us closer together because of the extra stress and strain. It's different when you lose someone in a car accident, there's the shock because it's so quick, but on the other hand, in two to four weeks, you start to mend, and you move on, but it's not like this...When you are dealing with a sick loved one on a drawn out affair, especially when you know what the result is going to be, and its just a question of when it creates lots of stress...You watch someone change physically and lose control over things that they could do easily. But Carolyn is very special, and I know that I'll never meet anyone else like her in my life. I know I'm going to lose her and I don't know when and I'll hold on to the time I have with her.

Carolyn's declarations of love toward Mac are not only filled with gratitude for his patience in dealing with her condition, but indicative of the bond and rapport that they have forged since they got together. Her physical dependence on Mac is overwhelmed by the emotional connection she has developed with this man over the last ten years. She commented

> I'm fine as long as he's here. If he's near, I can sense it, and if he goes on one of his trips, he can sense if I'm in trouble. He'll call and ask "Are you okay?", and I'll say "Well, I've had a little crisis but I'm alright now". He'll say, "I thought so", and he can almost tell you exactly at what time I have had an attack. That's how close we are. We can't even lie to each other. He sees through my little attempts at lying as though he's reading it on a piece of paper. And the same thing with him. It's wierd.

Through Carolyn and Mac's case it is not only clear that "...to the degree that unmarried people of the opposite sex are free to interact with each other, love is a potential outcome" (Albas and Albas, 1992:134), but that freedom to interact across racial lines can also result in the same.

MORE OF THE SAME - OTHER INTERRACIAL COUPLES

Ramu (1992) suggests that "...the process of selection is not as random as it appears,

because the "universe" from which the partners are drawn is generally limited with respect to small clusters of people in school, work, or neighborhood" (167). Citing William Goode (1982), he goes on to note that

> Since the marriageable population in the United States (and increasingly as well in other countries) is gradually segregated into pools of eligibles with similar social class backgrounds, even a free dating pattern with some encouragement to fall in love does not threaten the stratification system. That is, people fall in love with the "right" kind of people (167).

If by "right", Goode intends to include the stipulation of race, then there is room to mount a challenge to his claim. While the numbers do not indicate that interracial marriages are threatening to exceed the number of same race marriages, their numbers are clearly on the rise. "Various forces, including individualism, secularism, and geographic mobility, have contributed to the tendency among some individuals to marry outside the group" (Ramu, 1992:167). While Carolyn and Mac's case may be extraordinary in its details, little is unique with respect to its overall dynamics. Without exception, as will soon become evident, the couples interviewed during the course of this study cited love as the primary, solidifying factor in the continuation of their relationship. Undoubtedly, changes in the social structure which have resulted in increased interaction between individuals of different races has enabled these couples to discover their love, and it is love, not necessarily between the "right kind" of people, but instead, between the "right people".

For some of the couples, the mutual sense that they had found the "right person" was a relatively rapid discovery, while for others, it was a feeling that evolved over time.

Rick, who is Black, and Layla, who is East Indian, met a little over two and a half years ago at a popular nightspot in Seattle. Layla, who is from Vancouver, decided on a whim to accompany some friends on a trip they had planned to Seattle for the weekend. Rick, on the other hand, was in the city on business and was spending the weekend with friends before he left to go back home.

It so happened that they both found themselves at a bar that neither had ever been to before but would always remember as the place where they met.

During the course of the evening when they first met, Rick and Layla danced, talked over drinks, and introduced their respective friends to one another. Before the night was through, Layla and Rick exchanged telephone numbers, along with some bits of their individual histories, and contemplated the possibility of staying in touch. Rick's friend's birthday was coming up the following month and there was a big celebration planned that Rick had decided to attend. He invited Layla to come down for the weekend, and she left that evening telling him that she would think about it. Though she led Rick to believe that she would give some serious thought to his request, Layla admitted that at the time, she figured it would all be forgotten within a week. She said

> It was a fun night. He and I talked, and we told each other about ourselves and I realized by the time that we both left the place with our friends and went our separate ways, that we'd spent most of the evening together. His friends came looking for him when they got ready to leave, and I actually went next door to the place where my friends had gone to. It was a nice time and all, but I've been through enough experiences of having met someone under similar circumstances to have learned that you have to take everything people say with a grain of salt. Quite honestly, with him and I being from different cities, I didn't really expect to hear from him again, much less see him. Boy, was I wrong!

Rick promised that he would call her the following Monday, and Layla found herself shocked when he followed through. That call led to a series of others, during which plans evolved to meet again while Rick was in town for his friend's birthday.

In describing how they felt coming into their next meeting, both revealed a sense of reluctance and nervousness.

> Rick: I asked myself repeatedly what I was doing. I didn't seriously consider going back to Seattle until I met Layla, and even when we discussed the possibility of getting together, I wasn't really sure until I actually bought the plane ticket, and made the other arrangements for the weekend.

Layla: I was feeling really ambivalent. I had a picture that we had taken together the night that we met, but I didn't even feel like I'd recognize him when I saw him again. He'd offered to fly me down to Seattle, but I talked my sister and cousin into driving me down. I guess they were supposed to be my buffer. He seemed really nice on the phone, and I felt like I knew him because we had talked for hours, but seeing him again - that was a different story. I think he must have felt it too because those first moments when we saw each other again were really tentative. That pretty much disappeared as soon as we started talking though.

For Layla and Rick, it took less than the weekend together to confirm that there was something special about their relationship. As Rick put it

By the end of the weekend, I knew I was done. I fell in love, and I told her that there were a couple of women I'd been dating casually back home, but that as soon as I got back, I'd have a couple of bombs to drop. I told her that I wanted an exclusive relationship and that I didn't want to share her.

Layla, for her part, indicates that she got alot more than she bargained for.

I figured that it might be a fun weekend, and that's about it. I was really looking at it as a diversion and little else. I didn't anticipate that I would be back in Vancouver thinking of virtually nothing other than when I would see him again. He just had so many of the qualities that I really desired in a man, and he seemed to genuinely enjoy himself, just as much as I did. What's more is that we discovered so many similarities between us, in terms of our personalities, families, upbringing, and what we wanted out of life that it felt uncanny. We talked more than I can ever remember talking to anyone, and it just seemed like things came pouring out once we started. I found it really hard to say goodbye when he left Vancouver to go back to Seattle, and tried desperately to deny that I felt strongly about him.

They both admit that it is difficult to sustain a relationship with 1500 miles between them, but they manage to spend what amounts to half their time together by scheduling frequent and lengthy visits with one another. They cope with the periods of separation by calling on the telephone, immersing themselves in other aspects of their lives such as work, friends or family, and by reminding themselves that in one another, not only have they found love, but a love that is worth working for.

Keith and Gina's (Keith is Black, while Gina is White) path to experiencing their interracial love was far more circuitous than the one that Rick and Layla travelled. As Keith put it

> We're back together now after a long change and a long haul of different
> little problems here and there. But now its even. Now I love her just as
> much as she loves me.

From Keith and Gina's perspective, love came easy for Gina, but was something she had to struggle to get Keith to acknowledge. When their paths first crossed, Keith was playing in a band at the hotel where Gina worked. One night, Gina saw Keith standing in the hotel talking with someone, and figuring that he was an entertainer because of the way he was dressed, she asked a female co-worker to try and find him. The woman tracked Keith down, and let him know that there was someone who was interested in meeting him. As an entertainer, Keith finds himself approached frequently, so while he conceded to meeting Gina, he indicated that he initially treated the situation as one in which there was a woman who was just interested in meeting a musician, and not necessarily as something personal. But then he met her, and he said that "I was stunned".

Being overwhelmed by Gina's appearance was, it seems, the least of Keith's problems however. When they initially met, Keith was involved with another woman who was the mother of his two children, and while Keith socialized with female patrons in the course of his work, he made it a practice not to extend himself beyond the bounds of friendship. He commented

> It was hard because I had these feelings for Gina and I didn't really want
> to reveal them because I was still living with my ex - Maureen, and she
> was someone I loved. But you know we were having problems, it was a
> big fight that was turning into a war, and I had this inside of me.

As a result of the circumstances, Gina and Keith started off as friends. They apparently just 'hung out' together, and Keith found Gina just being there and being someone he could talk to. Eventually, the stresses at home "got way out of hand" for Keith, and got to the point where he grabbed all of his things and moved out to avoid greater confrontation.

When he left, Gina offered him a place to stay, and as a consequence, they became more involved in one another's lives. Gina spent alot of time at Keith's rehearsals, or watching him

play when she wasn't at work herself. She also began to develop connections with his friends and co-workers, and began to feel freer to express how she felt about Keith.

Keith, in the meantime, was feeling pressure to become more involved and did not feel as though he could reciprocate Gina's feelings to the same extent that she desired, particularly given the recency of his break-up with Maureen. In a response to the pressure, he moved out of Gina's place. He revealed

> We ended up splitting up for a little time because I still never had that chance to break-out and have my time and really get to heal myself from my past relationship. I was in that for about nine and a half years. The thing about it is that after being with someone for so many years they start telling you "I never liked this, or I never liked that, and this is why we're splitting up". You find that you need to start thinking about these things. But being with Gina, I never had a chance to think about these things, so I told her I needed some time, but she just crowded my space. So I had to get out, and I got me an apartment.

While they were separated, two things happened. Keith started dating other women, and Gina discovered that she was pregnant. Since Keith already had children, and had no desire to be pushed into another committment, he was not thrilled with the news that he was an expectant father. This period marked the first stage in their relationship where they began to argue bitterly with one another. At this point they felt like sworn enemies, but underneath all of the tension, they still sensed that there were positive feelings, feelings of love, for one another.

The love enabled Gina and Keith to work through all of their difficulties. When the baby finally arrived, Keith started picking the baby up every night after work to look after him while Gina was at work. Gina and Keith found themselves spending more time talking with one another, often while waiting for the babysitter to arrive with the baby so that Keith could take him home. They began to discuss their feelings for one another, and Gina told Keith

> I've always loved you and I know that you have always loved me. You just won't admit it.

Keith acknowledged

> Gina's love and dedication was stronger than anything I've ever seen
> in my life. But I was still unsure for other reasons, so it kept me from
> getting closer.

By the time that Keith and Gina reached the point where they were mutually willing and able to commit to their relationship, two and half years had passed since they first met. Keith had also lived with someone else for a short period of time, hoping to convince himself and Gina that it was over, and partly as a reaction to Gina's continued attempts to extract a committment from him. The turning point for Keith and Gina came when Gina told him why she loved him. It's understood best in their own words.

> Keith: Up until we got involved, Gina has always tried to protect her
> heart and not really tell a guy how she feels. Now most of her girlfriends
> would know, and they'd come up to me and say "that girl really loves you,
> that girl really loves you", but no one could really explain it to me in the
> way that she could. And one night I was sitting and she was kneeling on the
> floor, and she finally told me the reason why she loved me.

> Keith to Gina: And baby, if you could say it again, I'd love you twice as hard.

> Gina: I would never repeat that.

> Keith: Well, she has this, she kind of reads these...

> Gina: I read these romance novels, and it's like he stepped out of a romance
> novel you know. He's macho, but sensitive, and you never really see him
> make mistakes, he's just very you know [long pause] perfect.

> Keith: When she actually explained this to me, my heart just kinda fell out
> of its pocket...I used to refuse to tell her that I loved her, and I'd say you're just
> my pal, or we're just friends...There's things that I wouldn't have done in the
> past that I do now and it's because I love her, and I'm willing to do everything
> on this earth to keep this woman happy, and then some.

Barring any unforeseen circumstances, Gina and Keith will be married within the year, as a matter of fact, the day that we sat together to discuss their relationship, they had chosen and paid for an engagement ring.

The important, but as yet unreferenced, issue is that none of the individuals involved would attempt to suggest that they are not aware of their racial differences. Many of the couples

claimed that race has never clouded their judgements about people, or their decisions to become involved with them. Further, they would contend that if it were an issue at the outset, that their love has empowered them to overlook this difference and the potential problems that it can create. Unfortunately, for many, their families' love was not strong enough to disregard this difference. It is toward relations with families, and the reactions and problems that interracial couples have encountered with them, that the discussion now turns.

CHAPTER 3 - INTERRACIAL COUPLES AND THEIR FAMILIES

EDITOR:

I am a 15 year old White girl and I am currently dating a Black guy. People outside of ourselves have made what would otherwise be a wonderful time in my life a living hell.

My mother, who claims she's not prejudice [sic], feels Blacks and Whites should not "mix". In the beginning of our relationship she constantly referred to my boyfriend as a "nigger" and me a "nigger-lover". She has also suggested that I am too pretty to be with a Black man. She has even threatened to press charges against my boyfriend who is 18 years old and send me to a foster home. I ended up in counseling.

I will be 16 years old soon and feel I am old enough to make my own decision. I love my boyfriend very much and wouldn't dream of giving him up even if it meant losing my family. My family should love me for who I am and not who I date.

- CHERYL WACHT

LINCOLN PARK, NEW JERSEY

BELIEFS ABOUT INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Cheryl Wacht's letter, which appeared in the September/October 1993 issue of 'Interrace' magazine, is a vivid description of the reactions and consequences endured by many of those involved in interracial relationships.

Running through Cheryl's letter is an undercurrent of anxiety that suggests that she was unprepared for the negative reactions she has incurred since she broached the subject of her boyfriend's race with her mother. Though it is unclear whether Cheryl expected her mother to offer reassurance that race was an unimportant issue, or if she thought her mother would welcome her boyfriend with open arms, what is certain is that she did not expect to become the object of racist slurs or be subjected to threats. In the final analysis, Cheryl emerges as a discouraged young woman who, even after undergoing counseling, questions the quality of love her family feels toward her and is totally willing to sever contact with her family in order to maintain her relationship with her boyfriend.

In rather stark contrast to Cheryl's apparent shock and dismay over her mother's reaction to her interracial relationship, others seem fairly capable of predicting how their parents might react under similar circumstances. In an introductory sociology course being taught at university, a professor put the following question to his students: "What legal action could you perform that would cause your parents to reject you?" Included among the written responses were a number that indicated that a marriage between themselves and a member of a particular racial or religious group would elicit rejection from their parents. Specifically, some students indicated that "marrying an Afro-American" would generate the given response, while others wrote that "marrying a Caucasian", and another group that "marrying a Muslim" would result in the same.

Embedded within Cheryl's letter and the responses proffered by the students are additional cues regarding mate selection processes. In the previous chapter, consideration was given to the theory of endogamy, with an emphasis on homogamy, and it was suggested that patterns of mate selection would vary depending upon the degree of emphasis that a society placed on factors such as individual freedom, romantic love, or maintenance of kinship and/or group identity among other factors (Ramu, 1992). North American society places a premium upon individual freedom and romantic love (Goodman, 1993; Ramu, 1992; Kephart and Jedlicka, 1991), but not to the extent that conformity to some rules is virtually unobserved. Certainly "...romantic love, numerous personal considerations such as companionship, communication, sexual adjustment, common values, and aspirations determine the choice of one's mate" (Ramu, 1992:167), but

> in most cases, individuals are not aware of the constraints that
> influence their choice....Although mate selection in North
> America is formally free, it is affected by impersonal forces,
> and this is evident from the general tendency toward endogamy
> (Ramu, 1992:168).

Included amongst these impersonal forces are parental expectations and involvement. Ramu notes that

> ...although the general perception is that North Americans freely choose their own marriage partners, in reality such a freedom is restricted, because there is an indirect sorting of individuals according to their social class, race, ethnicity, religion, residence and other such attributes. There are...ways in which free choice is moderated...an individual is socialized into a family culture that influences preferences for the kind of person who is likely to be viewed as a desireable and compatible mate (1992:173).

The strength and impact of socialization into the family culture is fairly obvious in the cases of the students in the sociology class. Regardless of whether their parents expectations and reactions will deter them from making a choice contrary to their parents' wishes, they remain clear about what the consequences would be if they opted to mate with certain types of people.

Ramu's observation alludes to potential sources of conflict between parents and their children in the process of mate selection. In the context of this discussion, the key point of consideration is that of race.

Based on a variety of accounts, which include those of informants, journalists and academicians, the evidence suggests that discussions of racial differences revolve around the consequences that might ensue as a result of race mixing. Parents, in dealing with children who are contemplating or engaged in interracial relationships demonstrate a tendency to rationalize their objections in terms of obstacles, difficulties or problems that their children will have to overcome if the relationship is consummated in marriage. By couching their objections in these terms, parents attempt to avoid being personally labelled as racist in their beliefs, and effectively appear as though they have their children's best interests at heart.

Before demonstrating the nature of the exchanges that typically occur between parents and their children, and discussing the mechanisms children use to cope with parental opposition predicated on racial differences, it is worthwhile to consider various anthropological

paraphrasings of beliefs about interracial relationships and their conceivable ramifications.

(i) From the point of view of a competent member of our society, marriage (or a committed relationship) should involve partners of the same racial or ethnic background. This is a variation on the "blacks and whites should not mix" theme expressed by Cheryl's mother. It is a belief echoed both in discussions between parents and their children, and in the form of advice that is intended to dissuade individuals from pursuing their relationship further. It is also reiterated in informants' accounts of the objections they anticipated and encountered in raising the subject of their interracial relationships with family and friends, as one of Terkel's interviewees indicates: "It was painful for me when I was told marrying a white woman was a betrayal of the race, that it was a sign of disrespect for the black woman" (1992: 324).

(ii) From the point of view of a competent member of our society, interracial couples experience adjustment problems that intraracial couples avoid. This belief is expressed in various forms, encompassing a broad range of situations. At the root of these beliefs is the perception that the couple will have trouble fitting into one another's families, and the larger community. It is asserted that these experiences will create tension within the marriage because the couple is expected among other things, to have difficulty finding/keeping jobs, finding a suitable place to live, or making friends. A variation of this theme is reflected in the comment made to Terkel by a black woman named Anita Hill in which she stated: "I don't think the average black female wants to be married to a white man. You have to deal with your parents, with your siblings, with your peers, with your job. It's really no big deal until you realize how the total world is viewing you" (Ibid.,: 50).

(iii) From the point of view of a competent member of our society, interracial marriages are more likely to result in divorce than marriages between people of the same ethnic or racial background. These assessments are presented as matters of fact as opposed to personal belief.

Expressions of this view permit parents to separate themselves from the sensitive aspects of the race issue, by suggesting that divorce is an inevitable outcome of interracial marriage, and additionally serves as a means to convince their children that the conflict is a result of concern about their welfare, and ultimately that parents know best. A minister, counselling a black man that he believed was interracially involved articulated this viewpoint in his comment: "I had a good friend once, a black man like yourself...He wanted to marry a white woman. Oh, I assure you I warned him against it. But no, he wouldn't listen to me. He went ahead and married her. And you know what happened? They're divorced now. I knew it would happen all along" (Mathabane, 1992:46).

(iv) From the point of view of a competent member of our society, if an interracial couple chooses to get married, then they ought to avoid having children. Informants' accounts reveal that parents' beliefs about the suffering that interracial couples are likely to endure, become even more pronounced in the instances of their unborn grandchildren. This argument is often rendered as a last ditch effort to talk their children out of making 'a big mistake'. In discussing the kind of problems that mixed children can expect to face, parents often speak as though they have intimate knowledge and experience of the ordeal. Moreover, responsibility for the prospective treatment is placed upon society and other people, rather than themselves. The persistence of this belief is revealed in an opinion voiced by one of Terkel's informants who states: "With interracial marriage, it's the practical problem. The kids are really behind the eight-ball as they're growing up. The adults I'm not so concerned about. When I see an interracial couple, I wonder how the kids are doing. It's society in general that bothers me on it" (Terkel, 1992:123).

FAMILY REACTIONS AND COPING MECHANISMS

The preceding anthropological paraphrasing of beliefs contain what parents generally regard

as good reasons for denying their consent to interracial relationships. While some informants revealed that they encountered no significant objections from their parents, others suggested that opposition ranged from disapproval, to denial of consent or refusal to associate with the couple, to ostracism.

In some instances, the risk of familial/parental censure is so great, that interracial couples avoid the consequence by keeping their relationship a secret from their families. In a 1993 article for 'Interrace' magazine, Raymond Normandeau compiled "...the personal experiences of a variety of interracial couples and how interactions with their friends, parents, etc. were affected" (9/10/93:21). Included amongst the revelations was the following:

> I'VE BEEN DATING AN ASIAN INDIAN (SIKH) GIRL FOR OVER 5 YEARS. This year we have plans on getting married since I will be done with my education. The only people who know about us, on her side of the family, is her sister and a cousin in California. Telling a Sikh girl's parents that the person she's going to marry is an American is a death wish, for all involved. I'm not sure her parents are all under-standing, for if they were we would have told them by now. What bothers me most is that her parents have decided to come to America over 15 years ago and though they do not hold strongly to their religious beliefs, they have very strong feelings on who their daughter will marry... (Ibid.,:23).

For couples like the one portrayed here, concealing their relationship or the identity of their partner offers the path of least resistance. This account suggests that the couple fully expected the female member's family to vehemently object to the relationship, and as a result, they opted to carry on their relationship in the absence of parental scrutiny and condemnation. In so doing, not only were they able to decide if they were compatible and if they wanted to pursue their relationship, free from pressure, but in some sense, they prolonged the inevitable. Given that the couple has decided to legitimate their relationship, they will confront the "death wish" they have avoided for the past five years.

The reaction that this couple anticipated from the woman's family is not atypical, though

informants' experiences suggest that their method of coping is not the norm. Consider the following:

> Rick and I have been involved with one another for about two and a half years. Because of the distance separating us, and the frequency of our visits, concealing the relationship or his identity from my family has really been out of the question. Regardless of this issue, I don't think I would have chosen to keep our relationship a secret, particularly when I think about how I feel about him and the fact that he's someone I'm proud of...
>
> For a lot of different reasons it's worked out that I've gone to see him instead of him coming to see me, so my mom has never met him. My sisters, some cousins and my nephew have met him and they all like him alot, but even if given the chance, I know my mom doesn't look forward to the prospect. It's like she'll have to admit that there is a black man on earth who is worthy of her daughter.
>
> Periodically, she and I get into arguments about my relationship, where she implores me to reconsider the viability of being with Rick. Invariably her objective is to get me to say "Okay! You're right, I'll break it off." But I take a defensive posture, justifying Rick's presence in my life and my feelings for him, insisting that she would like him if she gave him a chance, and trying to get her to see that it's unreasonable for her to judge a person purely on the basis of race, especially when she's never met him. She always ends the conversation with the same kind of thing, saying something like "I'm not saying he's a bad person, but don't my feelings matter to you - what will people think, I didn't raise you to give you up to the black man."

Practically speaking, Layla feels that she could not hide her relationship with Rick, even though she knew that it would be a continuing source of conflict between her and her mother. Rather than avoid the conflict, Layla has elected to deal with it, and in so doing she meets the challenge of overcoming objections based on the beliefs that marriage should take place between same race partners, and that interracial couples - and by association, their families - face adjustments that same race couples do not. Layla's mother is as concerned about what other people/society will think of her, as well as her daughter, because of Layla's association with a black man.

Layla admits that contending with her mother's reactions is often emotionally exhausting, and that it is difficult to maintain her position while she's "drowning in a pool of tears". Though there have been extended periods of time that she and her mother have gone without speaking to

each other, Layla has not considered terminating her relationship with Rick, or for that matter with her mother, because of it.

Layla is fortunate. Although her mother has immense difficulty acknowledging and accepting her daughter's interracial relationship, she does maintain a relationship with her. Other couples have experienced complete rejection, and in those cases where parents do come around, it is a crisis or the birth of a grandchild that produces the change.

In their book, 'Love in Black and White', Mark and Gail Mathabane recount the experiences of several interracial couples including their own. About one such couple, they write:

> When our friends Madelyn and Richard Ashley decided to marry,
> Madelyn had to sacrifice her good relationship with her father.
> For years after the wedding, Madelyn's father refused to meet
> Richard...Though they [Madelyn's parents] raised Madelyn to
> believe in racial equality, they oppose interracial marriage...
> Richard was forbidden to set foot in his father-in-law's home.
> It was not until Madelyn's mother had a heart attack that her
> parents had a change of heart (1992:236).

Connie and James, another interracial couple, shared the following with the Mathabanes:

> It took nine years for Connie...to win back the affection of her
> father after she started dating James..."My parents hated me when
> they found out", Connie said. "Daddy used to say he was going to shoot
> him. He said 'I'll shoot the nigger'. I just sat there and gaped...After
> Dylan was born my relationship with my father started to improve,"
> Connie said. "I mean, you can't refuse a child, not a baby, mixed or not
> mixed" (Ibid.,:237-241)

Finally, the Mathabanes relate the story of one couple who has never been able to salvage the relationship that 'Sarah' once had with her family. They write:

> Sarah...was disowned by her parents when, at age seventeen, she fell
> in love with Amil, a nineteen-year old black student at Wesleyan
> University who had grown up in the South. Twenty-two years and
> three children later, she and her parents are still estranged (Ibid.,:241).

Sarah's description of the exchanges between herself and her parents that led her to leave their home and sever all future contact with them reveal bitterness and despair. She told Gail and

Mark:

> [My] parents told [me], "You'll end up in the gutter. You'll be on welfare.
> You'll have lots of children. No one will accept your children. All blacks
> are in the gutter. Are you going to pull this whole family down in the
> gutter with you, after we've worked so hard?"..."I wanted to stick with
> Catholicism, but it became impossible,"..."Priests who counseled me
> after I moved out always said the same thing: Honor thy mother and
> father" (Ibid.,:243).

The noticeable feature about these three accounts is that in one form or another, a variation of one or more of the anthropological paraphrases can be uncovered. In the case of Richard and Madelyn, Madelyn's father maintained a steadfast conviction, as did Connie's, that individuals of different races should not marry. Sarah's parents, in addition to holding the belief that interracial marriage is inherently wrong, contend that interracial couples and their families suffer from problems that are not commonly associated with same race couples. In each instance, the couples coped with family reaction in the same way, which was to nurture their love relationship at the expense or loss of that with their family.

Parents are not alone in drawing on these beliefs in order to justify terminating their relationships with their children. It appears that children are as capable of rationalizing their behaviour or reactions to their parents by drawing on the same views. This is especially true in the case of Pat and Kelly Conner.

Pat, who is a fifty-one-year old white male, met his current wife Kelly, a thirty-three-year old black woman, at work. Within a year of meeting, they decided to get married. Each of them had children from previous relationships. Kelly's son lives with Pat and Kelly, but Pat has been estranged from his daughters, aged thirty and ten, for the past two years. In speaking with Pat and Kelly about familial reactions to their decision to marry they revealed the following:

> Pat: Neither of [my daughters] are too thrilled about the situation. I
> think that my oldest has had an influence over the younger one in that
> respect. But I explained to them going in what the situation was and
> there was no reason for them to feel any animosity, anger or whatever

> because the only difference between [Kelly] and anybody else they know might be the color of her skin, and that's not a reason to automatically preclude somebody from your life.
>
> Kelly: They still don't like it. They cut off all ties to him.
> [To Pat]: Tell the truth.
> They don't talk to him, and they don't want to talk to him and that's the way it seems. And sometimes I hurt for him 'cause you know [long pause] those are his daughters...
>
> Pat: The oldest one I really haven't spoken to in two years I guess. And the youngest one is the old saw of, she doesn't think that's it's right for a white person and a black person to live together. Now that's not the, in my mind and this is really going back to when she's eight years old, not the type of thing an eight year old determines on their own. That's outside influence, that's an older influence. Her [maternal] grandfather is very racial in his thought...and you know it's, I don't know who specifically to lay the blame on and it's just as well. But between him and my oldest daughter, if not directly, indirectly influence is put to her.

The bitter irony of the situation, from Pat's perspective, is that the girls are themselves a product of an inter-ethnic union with their mother being Mexican and their father English. In retrospect, Kelly and Pat were least prepared to deal with antipathy from their children. In fact, until Pat's youngest daughter's hostility became manifest through her refusal to see her father, or even talk to him on the phone, there was no indication of any resentment. During the first year of their relationship, she often spent time with Pat and Kelly and Kelly's children. All concerned felt that there weren't any significant adjustment problems being experienced. As for Pat's oldest daughter, little more than a second thought was given to how she might feel, given her age and independence, and that she had never taken the time out to meet Kelly.

If anything, Kelly and Pat thought that the biggest hurdle they would have to overcome besides convincing Kelly herself that there was nothing 'wrong' with their relationship, was to get Kelly's family to accept Pat. Prior to meeting her husband, Kelly had never been involved with a man who wasn't black. For Kelly, the decision to date and involve herself exclusively with black men had been a conscious one. She was raised to believe that white men might be

"interested in getting a piece of black ass", but that they'd never be inclined to marry a black woman. Consequently, she was reluctant to date Pat, let alone take him seriously.

Kelly freely admits that her attitudes were influenced by her family and society, rather than being borne of first-hand experiences. When Kelly dealt with, and overcame her own ambivalence, she began to consider how her parents would respond to the news. In addition to Pat being white, he is almost twenty years older than Kelly, and Kelly thought that the combination might be more than her parents could accept. Kelly's parents pleasantly surprised her. She said:

> When I told my father he accepted it and he cautioned me. He said "Do
> you know what society is gonna be like, and do you know what you're
> gonna have to go through?' He gave me, you know, the little lecture,
> but in the end, he told me "whatever makes you happy baby."
> My mom accepted him and never said anything negative about him,
> nothing. A couple of months later when I told her 'Mom, Pat asked me
> to marry him', she said "Hurry up before he changes his mind."

In Pat and Kelly's experience, it was the children that they already had that created problems for them in their relationship. For many, as a contributor to Normandeau's feature in 'Interrace' reveals, it is not the children they have, but those that they may have, that become the focus of concern and conflict. He writes:

> One thing does bother me, however. I've heard the following several
> times (on several TV talk shows on the topic of interracial relationships):
> "I don't have a problem with people dating, having sex, marrying if
> they are of different races, but I don't think they should have children."
> ...I (we) just don't buy the argument that it is unfair to the child, for
> reasons such as:
> - the child will be teased at school because of it...
> - the child will not have an understanding of his roots...
> - the child will not know what he is... (9/10/93:25)

Vera and Leo King, a couple interviewed by Studs Terkel for his book 'Race: How Black and Whites Think and Feel About The American Obsession', confronted this objection from Vera's white mother when they decided to get married back in 1952. Vera indicated:

> My mother and some dear friends were afraid this might harm my career.
> [Vera is a medical doctor]. They were particularly afraid that if we had

children, it would be hard on them. That was a common attitude among
many liberal people at the time (1992:394).

This attitude is expressed in contemporary contexts as straightforwardly as it was with Vera
and Leo, and in other instances, individuals have to piece together the concerns that parents have
about their grandchildren.

For Dave and Deborah, an East Indian-Chinese couple, the impending birth of a child
prompted Dave's mother to speculate extensively about what her grandchild would look like.
Dave said that it finally got to the point that he was so offended by his mother's remarks that his
child would look like a 'Chink" or be born with 'slant-eyes' that he told his mother that if she
continued making racist comments, he would not permit her to see the child.

In Monica and Rajan Patel's experience, Monica gradually detected her mother's
reservations. For the longest time, Monica never suspected that her Italian mother had any
problems with her East Indian husband. It wasn't until Rajan told Monica's mother that he had
been born in Africa, and Monica's mother started thinking that he had 'negro' blood in him, that
Rajan's dark complexion started to bother Monica's mom. Monica informed me:

> You could see the change. All of a sudden she was worried about him
> being from Africa.

The deeper anxiety about her husband's complexion and race surfaced when Monica told her
mother that she was pregnant. In relating how she broke the news to her mother, and describing
her mother's reaction, she offered the following:

> I said 'Mom, guess what, we're going to have a baby', and she said "Oh,
> how nice", and it was like, I could tell, -'Is this baby going to come out
> black?'...and in the recovery room, Rajan said "Look mom, come and see
> Monica", and my mother came in and I knew she was excited, but it was
> like, you know, 'what color is it going to be.'

Monica's mother's concern paled in comparison to that of Rajan's parents. Not only did
Rajan's parents harbor a hope that their son and his white wife would never have children, they
also looked forward to the day when their son's marriage would end in divorce.

When Rajan left Monica behind in England while he went back to Africa to tell his parents that he was getting married, he expected to encounter resistance from his mother. As a result, he was not surprised when his mother feigned a heart attack when he told her about Monica, nor was he shocked to hear her say that she would kill herself if he married her. He did not expect his father to echo his mother's opposition, and to couple them with threats. At one point Rajan's father, upon learning that Monica was considering a trip to Africa, let it be known that he would personally ensure that she found it impossible to secure accomodations in the city where they lived, and further stated that he would prohibit Rajan from returning to England. Rajan's father revealed that he was prepared to take his son's passport and ticket and hide them, so that he would be unable to leave Africa. After a series of protracted arguments with his parents, Rajan became convinced by his mother's belief that a marriage between an Indian and non-Indian was destined for divorce, and he called Monica, while he was still in Africa, to terminate their relationship.

Once Rajan returned to England however, he resumed the relationship with Monica, only to find his mother's family bombarding him with the same type of comments his mother had made. Monica stated:

> Of course as all of this is going on with us getting engaged, Rajan's aunt
> [his mother's sister] said "You'll never be happy with this girl, listen
> to your mother. I know she's probably no good, I don't care what you say -
> it will never last." She just went on and on, and kept rubbing it in and
> making life more miserable.

The physical distance between Rajan and his parents enabled him to overlook their objections, but from time to time it seemed as though Rajan was about to cave in and give up on the relationship. The turning point came when Monica, faced with the pending expiration of her visa, told Rajan that she would have to return to America for a brief period in order to have her status reinstated. Rajan believed that if she left, it would put a definite end to their relationship.

With Monica out of the picture even for a short while, Rajan did not believe that he would have the strength to stand up to his family, so Rajan and Monica went to a local registry and got married.

For four years, Rajan's family, including his brother who lived in England, refused to associate with Monica and Rajan. His side of the family, they learned, first gave the marriage two years before it ended in divorce. After two years went by, they gave them five years. When they made it through five years of marriage, they claimed divorce was inevitable after seven years. Sixteen years have passed since they married, and while his parents have reestablished a relationship with the couple since the birth of their grandchildren, Monica indicates that her mother-in-law has a tendency to make her feel like an outsider. She said:

> She's civil and all, but it's like she takes a knife and puts it in your back
> and turns it every chance she gets.

From Monica's point of view, her mother-in-law will never think that she's good enough for Rajan, and will always resent Monica believing that she is the reason why Rajan renegged on his agreement to an arranged marriage with an Indian girl.

Like many others in their situation, Monica and Rajan have learned to live with the antipathy that their family feels toward them. They are able to cope with the situation by reminding themselves that they love each other and are happy in their marriage. Not unlike other couples, they see the hostility and frustration they have encountered as 'someone else's problem' not their own, that is, if Rajan's parents have a problem with Monica and Rajan's interracial marriage, then Rajan's parents have the responsibility to resolve that problem, not Monica and Rajan.

It seems for the most part, that conflict with family is managed in one of two ways: 1/. either the couple has to dissociate themselves from the family, and hence avoid the conflict, or 2/. they can attempt to engage in dialogue with an end to settling the conflict. While it is conceivable that

over time the friction would diminish, it is just as probable that couples run the risk of destroying their relationship by subjecting themselves to the external pressures and tensions that result from the latter option.

In reviewing various accounts of the success and failure of interracial relationships, including the perceptions of informants, it becomes increasingly clear that individuals who are older, have more experience in life and intimate relationships, and are financially, as well as emotionally independent of their parents, are in a better position to withstand and overcome parental opposition.

Cheryl Wacht's letter, which opened this chapter, highlights the different problems faced by younger and older people. At fifteen, Cheryl's experience in life, let alone love, is very limited. There is little doubt that Cheryl is dependent on her family for her daily needs, just as it is doubtful that Cheryl has the resources to manage on her own if forced to do so. While Cheryl indicates that she is willing to forsake her family, and by extension their financial and moral support, because she loves a boy they cannot accept, reality may force Cheryl to reevaluate her decision.

Bonnie Fuller, who is editor-in-chief of 'YM' magazine, responded to a letter from another fifteen year old who voiced concerns that are remarkably similar to those expressed by Cheryl. After conferring with Ruth Peters, a clinical psychologist, Fuller offered the following advice:

> ...while your mother may seem like a racist, she could be acting this way
> because she's worried about your well-being. The fact that she isn't
> allowing you to see your boyfriend doesn't mean she doesn't love you; she
> may just be trying to protect you from the problems - others' unkindness
> and even hatred - that being in an interracial relationship often brings...
> The pressure can be enormous...
> Of course, while changing your mother's mind set is worth a try, prepare
> yourself: She may not budge, in which case...the best thing to do is comply
> with her wishes and break off the relationship. I'm not defending her
> position, but unfortunately, while you're living in your mother's house,
> you have to play by her rules....
> If you feel like this guy really is the love of your life, stay friends

and keep in touch with him, and when the two of you are older and on your own, you can get back together - whether or not your mother approves (10/93:37).

Bonnie Fuller's counsel underscores the limitations that younger individuals face in surmounting the opposition to interracial relationships. She does not suggest that the fifteen year old consider sacrificing her familial resources and the social capital that accompanies it, in order to deal with her mother. Leaving home is not offered as a practical solution, simply because at fifteen it is not. Instead, Fuller suggests that it may be an option for the teen in the future, conceivably when she is capable of asserting and establishing her independence.

Tyler, a black man in his mid-twenties, who is currently involved with Stacy, a white woman, stated that he is better equipped to deal with other people's intolerance of his choices now that he has completed college and matured emotionally, than he was during his teens. After a series of unsuccessful interracial liasons during his teen-age years, he felt disillusioned and decided against dating non-black women. Of his early experiences, he said:

> [Lori's] father was like a modern day Klansman. If it was Thursday her dad would be like 'Oh, did the niggers come and pick up the trash today?', talking about garbage and garbage-men...I've had a couple of relationships where I've had to deal with racism and sometimes the parents would say they didn't mind us being friends, but they didn't want us going out...After a while, I just got fed up and figured I wasn't gonna mess with any more white girls, and I'd just stick to my own kind for a while.

Tyler revealed that he had different kinds of problems in his relationships with black women, and he eventually got to the point where he was secure enough in his own identity and his expectations of a relationship, that color was no longer an issue. He said:

> I hear what other people have to say, and I understand it. But I don't live my life according to them or for them, I make up my own mind.

For the majority of couples, particularly those interviewed for this study, Tyler's words are an accurate reflection of their sentiments. Most individuals involved in the interracial relationships in question, were in their late twenties to early forties when they elected to

become interracially involved. Many had gone through a failed marriage or committed relationship, and several had children from previous relationships. While all of these individuals remain someone's children, they have been parents and self sufficient adults who have had considerable experience making their own decisions and living with the repercussions of those decisions. As a result, while most choose to share the identity of their partners with their families, they do not allow their families' disapproval, where they encounter it, to dissuade them from acting on their own volition.

Though there is a tendency toward hyperbole, as the anthropological paraphrases and the exchanges provided herein indicate, the harsh reality for some interracial couples is that there is some semblance of truth to the beliefs expressed by their parents. The issue of race and racism is often invoked to undermine the legitimacy of parental reactions to interracial relationships, but they are predicated upon a variety of factors which might range from a preference for one's own kind, to concern that their children be fully aware of the hurdles they will face as a result of their choices. The fact is that some couples, in subtle or blatant forms, have experienced precisely the kinds of problems of which their parents forewarned them. The children of interracial couples can become the objects of racial taunting, employment situations can be made more uncomfortable for a racially mixed couple, and everyday life, be it enjoying a meal in a restaurant, grocery shopping, or being out in any public venue together, can be made more difficult as a result of others' intolerance. Public reactions of these kind, particularly those elicited from strangers or acquaintances, are almost exclusively manifestations of racism. The following chapter will examine in greater depth the nature of these exchanges and the sources from which they spring.

CHAPTER 4 - PUBLIC REACTIONS TO PRIVATE LIVES

EDITOR:

My boyfriend is Black. I am White...Both my boyfriend and I live in Philadelphia (he is from Williamsport, I am from Harrisburg) and we both went to college in Pittsburgh. Neither of us have ever received any negative attention because of our relationship while living and dating in Philadelphia.

Virginia, however, is a different story.

I had thought Virginia would be like Pennsylvania but better. Many cities and suburbs in Pennsylvania are segregated but in Virginia Blacks and Whites are neighbors so for my college internship I decided to work and relocate to Williamsburg. My boyfriend came with me and from day one we lived the worst nightmare of our lives.

People (especially Blacks) were so hateful towards us. We were screamed at, stared at, and followed. People would literally stop in their tracks at the sight of us, put their hands on their hips and stare at us as we walked down the street. We have never been treated like this - EVER! This hatred was apparently not only in Williamsburg but Richmond, Virginia Beach, Norfolk and Newport News (Va.) We spent many a night crying, fighting, and deciding whether to break-up or not. Up until this time all we used to talk about was getting married. We decided not to go out unless someone else was with us, that way it wouldn't be so obvious that we were a couple. We eventually stop [sic] going out period! We were afraid for our lives. Luckily, we only signed a six month's lease on our apartment. We sprinted back to Philadelphia!!! It's so good to be home, back in PA. where no one stares or comments on us.

KAK
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
-Interrace Magazine
9-10/93; p.9

COMMON-SENSE KNOWLEDGE: WHAT IT IS AND WHERE IT COMES FROM

The focus in the preceding chapter was on the reactions that friends and family had toward interracial couples. It was suggested that many of the attitudes that family members held, which subsequently manifested themselves in actions and reactions, emerged from anthropological paraphrases of what they considered to be justifiable beliefs about appropriate and

inappropriate choices in the context of intimate relationships.

Within this chapter the focus shifts marginally and is extended to cover the reactions that couples have dealt with in public spheres, while coming into contact with acquaintances and complete strangers.

Before examining specific circumstances or experiences that couples report having incurred during the course of their relationships, it is worth outlining how and why members of society not only think and respond in the ways they do, but also the basis upon which they tacitly justify their thoughts and actions. It bears noting that the justification must be tacit and somehow deep-rooted, because the situations to which they are reacting are often momentary or short-lived and do not beg a profound, but rather spontaneous reaction - one which seems natural and normal under the circumstances.

With respect to understanding this process, that is what people know in society and how they come to know it, and how that social knowledge informs behaviour and interaction within society, Berger and Luckmann suggest that

> ...theoretical formulations of reality, whether they be scientific or philosophical or even mythological, do not exhaust what is 'real' for members of a society. Since this is so, the sociology of knowledge must first of all concern itself with what people 'know' as 'reality' in their everyday, or non-or pre-theoretical lives. In other words, common-sense 'knowledge' rather than 'ideas' must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge. It is precisely this 'knowledge' that constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist (1966:27).

In the context of this discussion, Berger and Luckmann's observations imply that individual members of society can and do assimilate theories or knowledge about marriage and mate selection which were discussed in chapter three, as part of their common-sense knowledge, and accept many of those tenets as 'real' forces, which should and do motivate them to act and make the choices they do. This assertion is made reasonable by virtue of the fact that most individuals

conform to the principles of homogamy and endogamy, not only in their personal processes of mate selection, but also in evaluating the choices that those around them make.

What is equally important, is not so much how individuals are personally motivated to act in the face of their common-sense knowledge, but how those individuals feel justified to respond to situations in which the knowledge that has been transmitted to and assimilated by them has been ignored by other members of society.

Berger and Luckmann contend that language is key in constructing both symbols and signs which subsequently designate actions. The signs and symbols, which are at the root of common-sense knowledge reinforce one's sense of what is 'real' and hence legitimate behaviour. They write:

> Language builds up semantic fields or zones of meaning that are linguistically circumscribed. Vocabulary, grammar and syntax are geared to the organization of these semantic fields. Thus language builds up classification schemes to differentiate objects by 'gender' ... or by number; forms to make statements of action as against statements of being; modes of indicating degrees of social intimacy, and so on...Within semantic fields thus built up it is possible for both biographical and historical experience to be objectified, retained and accumulated. The accumulation, of course is selective, within semantic fields determining what will be retained and what 'forgotten' of the total experience of both the individual and the society. By virtue of this accumulation a social stock of knowledge is constituted, which is transmitted from generation to generation and which is available to the individual in everyday life. I live in the common-sense world of everyday life equipped with specific bodies of knowledge. What is more, I know that others share at least part of this knowledge, and they know that I know this. My interaction with others in everyday life is, therefore, constantly affected by our common participation in the available stock of knowledge.
>
> The social stock of knowledge includes knowledge of my situation and its limits. For instance, I know that I am poor and that, therefore, I cannot expect to live in a fashionable suburb. This knowledge is, of course, shared by both those who are poor themselves and those who are in a more priveleged situation. Participation in the social stock of knowledge thus permits the 'location' of individuals in society and the 'handling' of them in the appropriate manner (Ibid.: 55-56).

Berger and Luckmann's observations vis-a-vis the instrumentality of language in constructing common-sense knowledge, and more critically a social stock of knowledge, illuminate the

analysis of public reactions to interracial relationships in two key ways.

First, by suggesting that participation in the social stock of knowledge enables individuals to locate one another in society and thereby handle one another in the appropriate manner, Berger and Luckmann provide tangible cues to why actors are inclined to act as they do. Experience, historical and biographical, some of which is passed down from generation to generation, and that which is accumulated in the course of everyday life, equips individuals with the capacity to respond in ways that others would regard as appropriate to the circumstances. Their example of the poor person who is aware that his poverty limits his ability to reside in a fashionable suburb can be modified to explain how and why individuals react as they do to interracial relationships. For instance, if I am a member of a community or society in which racial homogamy is both the general preference and rule, that awareness may not only incline me and others to observe the rule, but also to react negatively to those who violate the rule. Part of my awareness includes understanding that personal violation of that rule is likely to elicit social disapprobation.

This brings us to the second aspect in which Berger and Luckmann's comments are useful in the analysis. They provide potential explanations of the responses that audiences may have to another actor's action. Berger and Luckmann suggest that, in the process of handling an individual in the appropriate manner, an individual behaves in a certain way, and that the behaviour (which may or may not be accompanied by a verbal expression of language) contains signs. Those signs can be interpreted by other individuals who also participate in the social stock of knowledge for their appropriateness or inappropriateness. It is conceivable that an individual interpreting the sign may regard the behaviour as unacceptable, and yet appropriate, given their understanding of what the social stock of knowledge is. That is, they may be fully capable of understanding why the person reacted as they did under the circumstances, realize

that most others might be inclined to react in precisely the same ways, simply because the social stock of knowledge prepares one to react in this predictable way. In this respect, one's knowledge can prepare one to anticipate certain types of reactions to specific circumstances. One becomes prepared as a result of one's understanding or awareness of what is generally regarded as acceptable or unacceptable within society. Further, one can be especially prepared to anticipate, and attempt to overcome the reactions if they somehow violate the standards of what is expected and considered appropriate for them in their own situation.

The thrust of the latter point is made more explicit by returning to the experiences that KAK (whom I'll refer to as Karin, for the sake of clarity) recorded in the letter which opened this chapter.

Karin reveals that both she and her boyfriend grew up in Pennsylvania, a state in which neighborhoods continue to be segregated along racial lines. While living in Pennsylvania, the relationship she shared with her boyfriend did not garner her and/or her mate any negative attention. When it came time to decide where she should complete her college internship, she chose to do it in Virginia. Karin's situation is: that she is a college graduate, who is expected to engage in an internship, and she is involved in an interracial relationship. Karin might feel personally limited in pursuing an internship in a community where her interracial relationship would elicit negative reaction from other members of society. Karin's letter suggests that this factor was weighed in her decision to make the move to Virginia, particularly in the comment that she thought "Virginia would be like Pennsylvania but better." Her experience and her accumulated social stock of knowledge inclined her to believe that segregation of neighborhoods along racial lines potentially indicated a lower level of tolerance for race mixing. On the basis of that assumption, coupled with the fact that she did not encounter negative reactions in a racially segregated community, and that Blacks and Whites live side by

side in Virginia, she and her boyfriend relocated to Virginia, fully anticipating that Virginians would be as, if not more accepting of her relationship than Pennsylvanians were. Clearly, she took racial integration of neighborhoods to be a sign of racial tolerance. Presumably, Karin might have been better prepared for the hostility that her relationship evoked among Virginians if, either residential racial integration were not so commonplace, or if she and her boyfriend had actually been to Virginia, moved within the community and observed the reactions to them prior to their move. It also seems safe to suggest that Karin would have been less surprised by intolerance in Pennsylvania, since the signs there outwardly suggested to her that intolerance existed. Karin's accumulated social stock of knowledge, acquired in Pennsylvania, was instrumental in enabling her both to recognize and interpret the signs that revealed the hostility and antipathy that her relationship engendered amongst Virginians. Karin was able to see that screams, stares and being followed reflected an inability on some individuals' parts to accept the relationship, and more significantly, that it was an expression of hatred. Her ability to do so is suggestive of another element that is a part of her social stock of knowledge, which very simply is an awareness that many individuals within society maintain negative attitudes toward interracial relationships, bolstering them with a steadfast conviction that marriage or committment should occur between individuals of the same race.

Karin's knowledge, which might broadly be defined as an understanding about the existence and perpetuation of racist or ethnocentric beliefs, has been transmitted from generation to generation, and modified as a result of her experiences. Karin's understanding was acquired through participation in the social stock of knowledge, and that understanding is shared by others who also participate in the same social stock of knowledge. As a result of this accumulated common-sense knowledge, most, including those who are personally involved in interracial relationships, are prepared to concede that, while the social barriers to engaging in and

maintaining an interracial relationship are slowly crumbling, negative attitudes persist.

THE SAME OLD SONG, WITH A DIFFERENT BEAT

Various actions can and have been taken to be signs that there remain members within society who are unwilling or unable to accept interracial relationships. A June 1990 article by Renee Turner in Ebony magazine makes this patently clear. It reveals that

> ...intolerance persists. Some blacks and whites report that they have been mysteriously fired after employers discovered their marital status. And an interracial couple, according to the Center for Democratic Renewal, need only go two miles outside Atlanta to be the victim of attack. Elmo Seay and his white wife, Susan, for example fled from a suburban Atlanta subdivision after their home was vandalized and firebombed. Another interracial couple, Susan Hill, 29, and her black husband, John, 36, got so frustrated with the ostracism and rejection by friends, family, landlords and employers that they left Bolivar, Tenn., temporarily and settled in Jackson, Tenn., until the commotion died down. (41-2).

Both the article in Ebony and Karin's letter point to one of the most difficult decisions that interracial couples face, namely, deciding where to live. For some couples, a change in geography can mean the difference between being stared at perpetually or living in the absence of such behaviour, or eliminating the discomfort that they experience while in the presence of those who are clearly incapable of accepting their relationship, versus being targets of public derision. In other cases it may translate into a freedom from being harrassed by intolerant outsiders. Sylvester Munroe, in a feature written for Elle magazine in April of 1992, underscored the pervasiveness of this problem among interracial couples. He indicates that

> Regardless of their status, for many interracial couples choosing where to live may be the most important decision they can make. Most choose integrated neighborhoods where, presumably, educated liberal neighbors will be more accepting. College and university towns are popular. But some cities known for their live-and-let-live attitudes are especially attractive to interracial couples. A 1989 UCLA study of marital attitudes among Southern Californians...found that in cities with high rates of interracial marriages such as San Francisco, Seattle, Denver, Minneapolis and Los Angeles, most interracial couples are from somewhere else. (4/92:100).

It doesn't necessarily take an incident of the same gravity that Elmo Seay and his wife Susan endured, or having to cope with dead rodents and feces being left on the doorstep as one couple in Valdosta, Georgia did (Interrace, 9/10/93:8), to trigger an interracial couple's consideration of available geographic locations. The knowledge that their choices render them potential victims of hostility or harrassment, or knowing that the prospect for violence or hatred is greater in one locale than in another, is reason enough to weigh the options. Brenda Marshall, who is herself involved in an interracial relationship, revealed to Munroe the impact that one's social stock of knowledge can have on assessing the potential personal ramifications of being interracially involved. She remarked "[t]here are places we won't consider moving, and that's just one of the compromises that you make. Intolerant people are everywhere, and if you can live in a place that accepts and loves you, then why go and look for a place that won't?" (Munroe, 4/92:100).

Accounts provided by informants for this study, along with those provided in journalistic reports on interracial couples tend to support the view that interracial couples, knowing first, that they are involved in relationships which are not totally sanctioned socially, and second, that they will inevitably be forced to contend with greater social pressures than same race couples do, attempt to avoid potential conflict by taking a somewhat defensive posture and modifying their own behaviour to circumvent the anticipated result.

Tyler, one of the informants interviewed for this study, openly revealed that there are certain places that he really enjoys going, to which he simply will not consider taking his white girlfriend Stacy. He stated that the combination of comments that he has heard over the years regarding his decision to date white women from both friends and acquaintances, coupled with his personal perception of how other patrons in the establishments in question would treat Stacy, have resulted in his decision. When asked how his girlfriend feels about it, he stated:

> She's not happy about it, and there's been times where she's accused me of not taking her out with me because I'm ashamed of her. But it's not about that. I just know what we'll have to deal with. Instead of feeling like I'm gonna have to get in someone's face because they say something to my woman, it's just easier for me to go to these places with a bunch of my buddies and just hang out.

Keith and Gina have pretty much arrived at the same conclusion that Tyler came to, although in their case experience played a direct role in the decision. There was a time early on in their relationship when Gina and Keith didn't think about Gina's presence at the spot where Keith was performing. Since they were both working in the same hotel, Gina would often stop by and hear one set before going home. On these occasions, Gina's behaviour rarely caused a problem for Keith or Gina, because most observers were oblivious to the relationship between the two. When their relationship became more serious, and Keith joined a group performing at an upper-scale venue, Gina's planned outings to see Keith perform became a source of conflict - for the couple personally, and for Keith professionally.

Up until recently, Gina never thought about how other people might react to her relationship with Keith, largely because she had never been exposed to the open hostility that some individuals have expressed as of late. The hostility, according to Keith and Gina, comes primarily from two sources: white men and black women. As Keith put it

> White guys kind of look at me thinking, he's got one of our women, you know that kind of vibe. Sometimes the white guys do not realize that she is Mexican, they can't tell that, they can just tell by the color of her complexion that she's a white woman and I'm with her....When I'm on the stage and she's off the stage we can have eye contact, but there's another thing when I come and sit down beside her, you can feel the tension in the room. Especially some of the young black ladies that would come in. They mostly like A.J. or whatever, and the only reason why they have a liking for me is that at one point in time I must have sang Happy Birthday to them...and they might expect me to come over and say Hi, which sometimes I do...they still don't like the idea that I'd go and sit with this lady and when it comes time to leave, I wouldn't leave with anyone but her.

Some women have been so abrasive toward Gina, asking her when she's going to leave the venue,

and implying that she isn't welcome around them. Initially, she attempted to ignore it, then she felt hurt because of the frequency with which it occurred, and finally, she decided that it would be easier not to intrude on Keith's workplace.

This final decision, by the couple's own account, came after some heated arguments and soul searching between the two. When Keith made the choice to join the group he currently performs with, his career got the boost he'd long been hoping for. In fact, he has been approached by agents and management groups who are interested in both the group, and in Keith's solo career. He has been informed by some of the prospective representatives that his personal relationship could be perceived as a career liability. Keith believes that the fact that Gina is not black, in part explains this perception, but he also believes that any relationship might be construed as a setback, since his managers are interested in creating an image of him that builds on his single status. As a result, Gina has curtailed her visits to Keith's performances, and they have also delayed plans to get married for at least a year.

The open abuse experienced by Gina has been echoed in other couple's accounts of everyday experiences. Rick and Layla recall coming out of movie theaters to hear teen-agers yelling "Oooh!, he's got jungle fever!". In another instance, they were walking into a nightclub patronized by a predominantly black clientele, and a black woman screamed, "What are you doing walking in here with a white woman?" at Rick. Layla can also recall several different occasions, where black women, after seeing who she walked in with, had physically threatened her if she didn't break up with her boyfriend. Of one such instance, she said

> I was in the bathroom of this club, and apparently the group of women who were already in there, knew that Rick was my boyfriend. They told me in no uncertain terms, that if I knew what was good for me, not only would I leave the bathroom immediately, but that I'd stay away from Rick, and any of their other men in the future. Needless to say, I felt pretty frightened confronting a group of five or six angry black women, and got out of there fast.

For Rick's part, he has had Iranian men who have mistaken Layla for being Persian ask him what he was doing with one of their women, and he has stared down East Indian men who were obviously disturbed by the couple's unity. Rick indicated that in a lot of situations people don't openly say anything, but that you sense them looking, and then feel that their gaze is becoming more penetrating, and then notice that it starts to contain a threatening quality. At that point you become aware of their disapproval. He also stated that sometimes "you ignore it, because you figure it might be an idle curiosity about something different, but there are other instances in which you know that with one wrong move, there might be a blow-up."

In John and Ann's case, the taunts hurled at them by a group of white men in a parking lot did erupt into physical violence. John in recalling the incident, and his feelings at the time, stated:

> Here we were minding our own business, going to a place we often go to,
> to have a drink and listen to some jazz. We're walking through the parking
> lot, and there's this group of guys standing near a car, laughing and whispering
> to each other. We pretty much ignored them until they kept calling me a
> 'nigger-lover'. I started out cussing at them, thinking that might shut them
> up. But then one of them came up behind me and grabbed my collar, yelling
> "Prove how much of a nigger-lover you are white boy!" The next thing I
> knew, I let go of Ann's hand and threw a right that hit him in the stomach...
> If the doormen didn't know me and Ann, and hadn't overheard the whole
> thing, it could have got a lot more brutal.

At that time, John felt 'fed up' with what he saw as other people's ignorance. He acknowledged that a lot of the frustration and anger that he'd kept pent up from previous interactions with people who would stare at them, or make snide comments when they'd go out with their daughter, was packed into that punch. John explained that in most situations you really don't have an opportunity to react to other people's behaviour. Reiterating the observation made by Rick, he claimed that the intolerance was expressed, largely in subtle ways:

> It's a look or an action, you can feel the tension, and know they're trying
> to make you uncomfortable, but you can't really say or do anything,
> because, technically, they haven't said or done anything to you.

John and Rick's perceptions of how public disapproval is expressed toward an interracial

couple was shared by Toronto writer Wodek Szemberg and his black wife, Leila Heath, who is a

broadcast reporter and producer. On the basis of an interview they gave to Kate Fillion of

Chatelaine magazine, Fillion revealed:

> After moving in together in 1988, there were several incidents of
> "momentary awkwardness" shopping in a predominantly black area
> of Toronto. When the two visited a black nightclub in Montreal, Wodek
> was aware of her discomfort. "Nobody said 'Whitey, go home!' but she
> has a sense that there are certain places that blacks perceive as theirs,"
> he says. "They won't throw whites out but they don't encourage them
> to come either." (5/92:54).

The discomfort interracial couples often feel as a result of these exchanges comes not only

from the sense that outsiders disapprove of their relationship, but also that "...people often see

them as something other than people who love each other" (Munroe, 4/92:102). Nancy Brown,

co-founder and President of Multi-Racial Americans of Southern California (M.A.S.C., one of

approximately sixty support groups for interracial couples in the United States) characterized

the situation as follows:

> Most of the problems tend to come from outside [the relationships].
> Other people's perceptions are that these types of relationships are
> negative and cannot succeed. Black people see them as a betrayal of
> one's people - if a person of color is dating or marrying someone who
> is Caucasian, they're doing it to raise their status. For whites, the
> stereotype is that 'she or he wasn't good enough for anyone in his or
> her race' (Ibid.,: 102).

What also becomes clear through reports of experiences that interracial couples have had in

public mileus, is that the frustration and anger over the level of intolerance is exacerbated

when the couple have children, and are accompanied by them.

Puzzlement is perhaps the most apt characterization of the reactions that outsiders have to

biracial children. As John described it

> Sometimes they're like human windshield wipers, going back and forth
> between you and the kid. You know that they're confused.

He went on to say

> I've had people come up to me when I've been out alone with [my daughter] Michelle, and tell me how beautiful she is and say something like "Her parents must be gorgeous". When I let them know that I'm her father, it's like the cat got their tongue, they don't say anything and have a confused look on their face, or they start stuttering - making no sense whatsoever.

Raymond Archer, a participant in a round-table discussion about the film 'Jungle Fever', which culminated in a Newsweek article, offered the following comments about stranger's reactions to the children that he and his white wife, Jennifer, have had during their seventeen-year marriage.

> Both of our daughters look Caucasian. If I'm with them and one of them says "Dad", people drop bags, and they bump into things - no, really, it's true. (Kroll, 6/10/91:49).

Fred Goldberg, another contributor to the discussion noted that:

> You're stared at. People look at you and then at the kids and then look at you and try to figure out how all this happened. (Ibid.,:48).

On the surface, most reactions that biracial children elicit when they are in the company of their parents, particularly when with the parent that they least resemble, seem fairly innocuous. For the most part, people respond as they do when they see an interracial couple - they stare, they fidget, but most move on without making offensive comments, and yet couples report that they feel most offended by the glares they endure when they are with their kids. Munroe, in documenting the attitudes of parents on the issue of biracial children, noted:

> Kids, in fact, are a major concern in interracial marriages. Karen Alexander [a black woman married to a white man] says "I want [my daughter] Ella to be really aware that black isn't negative and white isn't either. But how she turns out is our job. I'm not going to put that on society."
> For Bill Sims, who has two children from a previous relationship, the situation has become even more critical now that his eldest daughter with Wilson [his white wife] has reached the dating age. "It's a tough situation they are in," Sims says. "They come from two different cultures and the world sees them as black. Dating gets awkward because they don't see themselves as black or white." (4/92:101-102).

What Sim's and Alexander's comments do not openly convey, but allude to is their

understanding of, and participation in the social stock of knowledge. The difference in the degree of frustration or anxiety that being with their children, versus being alone with their mate provokes, is better explained not by the qualitative difference in outsider's reactions, but the deeper concerns based on the social stock of knowledge that those stares engender. Parents of biracial children are keenly aware that their children may confront pressures that other children avoid, as Sim's and Alexander's comments reveal. They are not oblivious to the racism that their children might become targets of, and the potential identity problems that their children might suffer from. What's more, is that reactions elicited from family, friends and strangers not only serve as reminders of these beliefs, but also as a reinforcement of them, which no doubt heightens their concerns.

COPING MECHANISMS

It bears noting that there are surprising numbers of couples who claim that their experiences are no different than those of same race couples. Approximately 25% of the participants in this study expressed difficulty in pinpointing negative reactions that were triggered exclusively by the interracial aspect of their involvement. Fillion, in the course of conducting her research, revealed

> More than half of the 38 couples contacted for this article declined to
> be interviewed, with comments ranging from "No one has ever made
> us feel the slightest bit uncomfortable" to "I'm offended by the request -
> we're not different from any other couple." (5/92:54).

Not surprisingly, for couples such as those described, there is nothing to cope with, at least nothing that is out of the ordinary, which of course means that they go through their existence without feeling as though they have any extraordinary obstacles to overcome.

There is another group among interracial couples which acknowledge that there are individuals within society who disapprove of their choices, but that the disapproval has no significant impact upon them and their lives. Fillion noted

> One white woman engaged to a black man blithely assured me, "Race
> isn't an issue at all. Sure some people call me a 'nigger-lover', but
> who cares?" (Ibid.)

For this woman, and others like her, social disapprobation or racist invectives are not worthy

of emotional responses. Basically, the orientation among this group is that, there is a problem

with racism and/or prejudice, but it's not their problem. They see it as the problem of those

harboring those presentiments. Fundamentally, they believe that nothing they could say or do

would change how others perceived the world, or felt about people that are different from

themselves, so they can't be bothered to think about or react to people suffering from those

problems. As Mac McDonald put it

> Sure there are people who are racist, but I don't associate with them.
> If I find out someone's racist, I won't have anything to do with them.
> Their intolerance is because of their ignorance and lack of education
> and we're fortunate not to be around those people. But that ignorance
> isn't my problem, it's theirs. I don't have to overcome it, they do.

Pat Conner shared Mac's orientation to the so-called problem that outsider's attitudes create

for interracial couples. Not only does he regard negative or racist beliefs as someone else's

problem, but he has to some extent trained himself to be oblivious to its existence and

expression. His wife Kelly said

> We get into arguments. I see something and I get angry or hurt because of
> the way people are looking at us. But he doesn't see it...when he got fired
> from his job after we got married, I was convinced it was because he
> married me, and that I was black. He refused to think about it, but before
> I brought it up, the thought never crossed his mind.

Whereas Mac and Pat represent individuals who choose to ignore sources of conflict, Kelly's

tendency is to acknowledge the narrow-mindedness of others, and at times attribute all

problems to this factor. In some cases acknowledging means confronting the behaviour by

reacting, in others, it means recognizing that a reaction might make matters worse, and walking

away. In either case, the admission induces an emotional reaction. Layla, whose attitude is much

the same as Kelly's, revealed

> Sometimes I get so mad and frustrated that I have to control my desire
> to vent those feeling physically, but then there are other times that I
> feel really helpless, knowing that I can't expect to solve all the problems
> everywhere by having a great comeback. And then again, there are times
> that the comeback is so satisfying because you know that you might have
> gotten in as cheap a shot as they did.

For couples, or individuals described thus far, coping with social pressure has been an expression not only of how they see the problem, that is as their own or someone else's, but also tied into the emotional investment they are willing to attach to other people's reactions to their lives. Essentially, these individuals are able to respond in these ways because the kinds of reactions they encounter are, for the most part, non-threatening.

These experiences obscure the more dramatic and very real ones reported by some interracial couples. For example, Kelly Stupple, whose boyfriend Michael Cooper is white, explained

> My situation has been that the black community reaction was very violent,
> sometimes throwing stuff at us, trying to beat him up, that kind of thing.
> In New York, in Detroit, whatever. One time we were in the subway in
> New York and one guy came down and he stared at him, called him white
> boy, kicked him in the chest. (Kroll, 6/10/91:48).

Then again, there is the experience of Yusef Hawkins "...a young Black man who was fatally beaten in Brooklyn's Benshonhurst area by a group of Whites who thought he was dating a White woman in the neighborhood." (Ebony, 9/91:78).

Yusef, unfortunately, lacks a choice about how to deal with social pressure. Kelly and Michael, undoubtedly, will carefully weigh where they will live, giving serious consideration to areas that have a history of higher tolerance. They may opt to seek out, as many other couples do, not merely a city where the percentage of interracial couples is high, but one in which there is a formal network established to offer support to interracial couples.

Support groups, as their numbers suggest, function as a viable mechanism for coping with

social pressures associated with interracial coupling. The common foundation and experiences often diminish the frustration and helplessness that couples often feel in isolation.

Finally, there are individuals who are willing and able to cut themselves off from a better part of the social pressure that their situation might educe. Couples who are capable of taking advantage of this particular option are generally among those enjoying a higher socio-economic status. Celebrity interracial couples are able to use their wealth and status to ward off the conflict that others are likely to endure. As Munroe notes

> In interracial relationships money pays for the option to relocate and to choose the most comfortable neighborhood to live in. And it helps couples shield themselves from the resentment and hostility of the disapproving. "We lead a very sheltered life," Adam Kidron [a television producer] says of his marriage to Karen Alexander [a model]. "Where we live in Los Angeles is very sheltered, and we don't take public transportation. We don't really interact with the world. There's a point at which you can escape a lot of racism, and privilege helps. It doesn't make the world a better place, but it helps." (4/92:96).

CHAPTER 5 - LARGER THAN LIFE: PUBLIC PORTRAITS OF INTERRACIAL COUPLES

> We live in a society dominated by visual images (Berger, 1985; Goffman, 1979; Kuhn, 1985; Postman, 1987). From an early age, we are bombarded with magazines, newspapers, posters, electronic images, and advertising photography. These photographic images tell stories, much as written narratives do, and thus may be read just as written texts are. Photographs are so much a part of our daily lives that we rarely think about how they influence us and what that influence is. Yet photographs, like other mass media images, are politically motivated. Photography is a signifying system that works to legitimate interests of hegemonic groups. While those who produce photography (i.e.; photographers, photo editors) are often unaware of the ideological significations of photographs, photos nonetheless serve to shape consensus, that is, consent to existing social arrangements. Consensus is not static and monolithic, however, but something that must be continually achieved, something that changes and transforms itself as it incorporates new ideas and opinions (Emmison, 1986; Gramsci, 1971; Hall, 1982, 1985).
>
> -(Duncan, 1990: 22-23)

MEDIA AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS

In recent years, there has been a proportionately greater number of portraits of interracial couples that have emerged on film, television and in novels. While it is beyond the scope of this study to systematically track all existing portraits within these media, efforts to identify specific sources - excluding talk shows which have frequently featured interracial couples as their daily topic of discussion - reveals upwards of thirty-five specific sources (see Appendix 3) in which portrayals of interracial couples are contained. While this number may on the surface seem small, it bears noting that in certain cases, the films in question fared very well at the box-office (eg. Jungle Fever, Bodyguard, The Crying Game), indicating that large numbers of people saw the film, the novels are or were bestsellers (eg. Waiting to Exhale, Mama), again indicating large readership, and in the case of television, the programs in some instances feature interracial couples on an ongoing basis (eg. All My Children, General Hospital, A Different World), and in one particular instance, the show (Fox's True Colors) revolved around the interracial couple and its family. As a result, the viewership or readership is vastly

greater than these numbers might otherwise indicate.

In preceding chapters the focus has been upon couples' interaction with one another, their perceptions about their life and love, and the experiences they have encountered as a result of their choices. Further, there have been attempts to identify, not only familial reactions to their choice of partners, but also attitudes that friends and strangers have had to them. In revealing the predominant or prevailing attitudes that were encountered, anthropological paraphrases or common-sense beliefs were offered as a way of explaining how and why people reacted as they did to an interracial couple.

This particular chapter moves one step further, toward an analysis of interracial couples in the diffused media of television, film and literature, on the premise that media is significant not only in its ability to shape, but also reinforce dominant attitudes and perceptions of specific social circumstances.

In his work on the reproduction of racism in the Press, van Dijk (1991) makes theoretical observations that can be extrapolated and applied within this context. He offers two critical definitions which outline and underscore the power of media in controlling social practices, patterns and relationships, namely of reproduction and social cognition.

In defining reproduction, van Dijk asserts

> ...we mean the dialectical interaction of general principles and actual practices
> that underly the historical continuity of a social system. Reproduction may be
> analysed at the societal macro-level, at the micro-level and along the macro-
> micro dimension. At the macro-level, a system is historically reproduced when
> its general principles (processes, rules, laws, structures) remain more or
> less the same over time, as is the case for such different systems as the
> English language, racism, or the Press, despite possible changes or variations
> in the actual historical or contextual manifestations or realizations of the
> system.
> Continuity and change of social systems, however, depend on the relations
> between principles at the macro-level and practices at the micro-level
> (Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel, 1981; Alexander, Giesen, Munch and Smelser,
> 1987). Trivially, the English language continues to exist as long as there are
> language users who speak or read it...

The same is true for the reproduction of the societal system of racism, the continued existence of which also depends on repetitive practices of discrimination in everyday life (Essed, 1991). Under the influence of particular social, political or historical context factors the practices of these systems may vary, and if such variation becomes systematic, the system may also change. However, as long as the same basic principles are not changed, the overall system remains the same (1991:33-34).

Van Dijk goes on to state that members of society, by sharing sets of beliefs and knowledge, establish 'cultural and cognitive systems' and that the media's capacity for reproduction is largely ineffective in isolation of these cognitions. Essentially, without beliefs and common-sense knowledge, the bridge between the social system and the individuals comprising society, is non-existent. With a view to critically link cognitions to the reproduction of social systems, van Dijk contends that

In traditional sociological terminology, cognitions were usually referred to with the term 'consciousness', a notion which is vague and therefore theoretically not very useful. Thus we distinguish between personal knowledge and beliefs about unique situations, events, and experiences, represented as so-called 'models' in episodic memory, on the one hand, and systems of group knowledge, attitudes, norms and ideologies represented in 'semantic' or rather 'social' memory on the other hand (van Dijk, 1987a). These different cognitive systems have different representations, that is specific contents and structures, and also different cognitive and social uses or functions, requiring the application of different cognitive strategies.

From a societal point of view, general group knowledge, attitudes or ideologies may be characterized at the macro-level. In the same way as social processes at the macro-level may be reproduced by practices at the micro-level, these macro-level beliefs of a group may be confirmed or changed at the micro-level of individual beliefs, which in turn control personal practices and social interaction (Ibid.: 35).

Within the context of the discussion of interracial dating or marriage, van Dijk's observations are relevant at the two primary levels he identifies. At the macro-level, what is at stake are theories and ideologies of marriage. At the micro-level rest both personal practices of mate selection and the interactions between interracial couples and other members of society. Insofar as media has the capacity to represent, and thereby reproduce the social systems and practices of marriage, and similarly, prevailing beliefs and attitudes toward instances which

threaten or challenge the perpetuation of the systems, it also has the capacity to influence, if not modify, individuals' orientations to, and perceptions of the cases which stand as exceptions to the norm.

Van Dijk also indicates that the practices of social systems vary according to historical context, and further implies that reproductions of the systems within media reflect those changes. With reference to the current analysis, this raises a potentially interesting facet of media portraits of interracial couples. It has been noted that a little more than twenty-five years ago, almost one-third of the states in the United States treated interracial marriages as illegal. Prior to the U.S. Supreme Court decision few, if any, interracial relationships of an intimate nature were depicted in film.

In the wake of the Supreme Court decision to repeal anti-miscegenation laws, Stanley Kramer produced and released 'Guess Who's Coming To Dinner', a film whose plot centers around interracial love. The movie opens with an interracial couple's efforts to break the news of their love, and desire to get married, to the white woman's family. As the film progresses, Kramer treats the audience to reactions and attitudes that family and friends, and ultimately outsiders, have toward a racially mixed couple united in marriage.

Almost twenty-five years later, while some were preparing to acknowledge the silver anniversary of the landmark *Loving vs. Virginia* decision which enabled interracial couples the freedom to be married throughout the United States, blacks and whites alike were outraged at the murder of Yusuf Hawkins, in New York's Bensonhurst area. Blacks alleged that Yusuf became a victim of murder because a group of white teen-agers disapproved of a relationship that he had established with a white girl. In the aftermath of the Hawkins' affair, another, more contemporary portrait of interracial love found its way to the big screen - this time under Spike Lee's directorship, and under the title 'Jungle Fever'.

The historical contexts surrounding the production and release of the respective films, as outlined above, are dramatically different. In some instances, public reactions to the presence of interracial couples has tempered over time. In light of van Dijk's comment, an analysis of dialogue and content of these films will be engaged in, with a particular eye toward determining if social differences that have occurred through history are reflected in the portraits. For these purposes, 'Guess Who's Coming To Dinner' and 'Jungle Fever' form a unique combination for analysis.

Aside from the more detailed examination of the themes or attitudes reflected in these two films, other depictions of interracial couples from television and novels will be examined. It should be noted that the primary purpose in engaging in the analysis is that it potentially enhances our insight into reactions regarding interracial marriage. However, this analysis does not presume to be based on any systematic approach, for instance semiotics, but instead will rely upon isolating instances where the "common-sense characterizations" or anthropological paraphrases are represented, instances where stereotypes are the basis of the portrait, or what the general themes or reactions to the interracial associations within the context of the presentation are.

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER OR JUNGLE FEVER?

Both 'Guess Who's Coming To Dinner' and 'Jungle Fever' open with songs, songs which set the tone for the unfolding of the respective films' plot and action. The lyrics of Kramer's film, set to a soft-flowing melody go as follows:

> You've got to laugh a little,
> Cry a little, and let the clouds roll by a little.
> That's the story of, that's the glory of love.
> As long as there's the two of us
> We've got the whole world and its charms,
> and when the world is through with us
> We've got each other's arms.
> You've got to win a little,

lose a little, and always have the blues a little
That's the story of, that's the glory of love.

Stevie Wonder's funky, upbeat keyboards supply the backdrop to the following lyrics he sings as

the opening credits roll for 'Jungle Fever'.

Chorus:
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 thinkin' maybe
We're in love.
She's got jungle fever,
I've got jungle fever,
We've got jungle fever
We're in love.
I've gone white girl crazy,
She's gone black boy hazy,
We're each other's maybe
We're in love.

She can't love me,
I can't love her,
'Cause they say we're the wrong color.
Staring, gloating, laughing, looking,
Like we've done something wrong
Because we show love strong.
And you'll come on
Calling things too bad to mention,
But we pay them no attention,
For color blind in our feelings
If we feel happiness,
And know our love's the best
Forget their mess.

Repeat chorus.

'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner' is presented as a story of love, a love which is problematic

given that the man involved in the couple is black and the woman is white. The audience learns

very quickly that John Prentice and Joey Drayton met only ten days earlier in Hawaii, fell head

over heels in love and now want to spend the rest of their lives together. Before they are to get

married however, they feel a responsibility to break the news to Joey's parents, Matt and Christina Drayton. Joey is convinced throughout the film that informing her parents amounts to little more than a mere formality. She believes that her parents will be thrilled by the fact that she has met someone as wonderful as John, and like herself, disregard the fact that John is black. John, on the other hand, perhaps as a result of the fact that he is nearly fifteen years older than Joey, or for reasons that are never revealed to the audience, is far more ambivalent than his prospective wife. Although he concedes to meeting Joey's parents, and being with her while she appraises the Drayton's of her wishes, he not only intends to tell his parents of his marriage over the phone and inform them that his bride is white by letter, but also, unbeknownst to Joey, is unwilling to proceed with the marriage unless both of her parents approve wholeheartedly of the decision. While Joey tells her mother:

> Joey: He thinks the fact that he's a negro and I'm not, creates a serious problem. I've told him 97 times it makes no difference.

John later expresses the following to the Draytons in Joey's absence:

> John: Unless you two approve, and without any reservations, there won't be any marriage..It's not just that she thinks our color difference doesn't matter, she doesn't think there is any difference.

Unlike Joey, John is aware of the "problem" facing an interracial couple in love. However, his knowledge does not overwhelm him to the point of dissuading him from pursuing the relationship, or confronting the potential problems. Hence, he finds himself in San Francisco, in the Drayton's home, ready to meet his prospective in-laws.

The characterization of the difficulty that an interracial couple faces as a "problem" is Kramer's choice. Throughout the film, any discussion about black and white is referenced simply as that, a problem. While facial reactions convey shock, and vocal intonation is periodically indicative of anger, the dialogue of the film suggests that all concerned have a problem on their hands which must be addressed. Consider the following dialogue which occurs

between John Prentice and Matt Drayton:

> John: We have this problem. I fell in love with your daughter. As
> incredible as it may seem, she fell in love with me...
>
> Matt: The doctor says you have a problem. You certainly do.

The actual consequences of marriage are merely alluded to through cursory comments such as

the one made by John's father about any children they might have, and those made by John which

reveals that parental rejection is an obstacle they must contend with. It is not until the final

scenes of the film, particularly in the final speech delivered by Spencer Tracy, as Matt

Drayton, where he summarizes the day's events and his feelings about the situation that any

clear mention is made about the hostilities that John and Joey's union is likely to elicit. He

states:

> Matt: I have a few things to say, and you might just think they're important.
> This has been a very strange day, I don't think that's putting it too strongly,
> I might even say it's been an extraordinary day. I've been out there thinking
> about the day and the way it has gone, and it seems to me, that now I need to
> make a few personal statements, for a variety of reasons.
> The day began for me when I walked into this house and Tillie said to me...the
> minute I walked into this house this afternoon, Miss Binks said to me uh, "Well
> all hell done broke loose now". I asked her, naturally enough to what she
> referred and she said, "You'll see", and I did!
> Then after some preliminary guessing games at which I was never very good,
> it was explained to me by my daughter, that she intended to get married, and
> that her intended was a young man whom I had never met, who happened to be
> a negro. Well, I think it's fair to say that I responded to this news in the same
> manner that any normal father would respond to it, unless of course, his
> daughter happened to be a negro too. In a word, I was flabbergasted, and while
> I was still being flabbergasted, I was informed by my daughter - a very
> determined young woman, much like her mother - that the marriage was on,
> no matter what her mother and I might feel about it. Then the next rather
> startling development occurred when you [John] walked in and said that
> unless we, her mother and I, approved of the marriage, there would be no
> marriage...
> Now, it became clear that we had one single day in which to make up our minds
> as to how we felt about this situation. So what happened?
> My wife, typically enough, decided to simply ignore every practical aspect of
> the situation and was carried away in some kind of romantic haze which made
> her, in my view, totally inaccessible in the way of reason.
> Now, I have not as yet referred to his Reverence, who began by forcing his way

into the situation, and then insulting my intelligence by mouthing three hundred platitudes, and ending just a half hour ago by coming to my room and challenging me to a wrestling match.

Now, Mr. Prentice [Sr.], clearly a most reasonable man says he has no wish to offend me, but wants to know if I'm some kind of a nut, and Mrs. Prentice says, that like her husband, I'm a burnt-out, old shell of a man who cannot even remember what it's like to love a woman the way her son loves my daughter.

And strange as it seems, that's the first statement made to me all day with which I am prepared to take issue, 'cause I think you're wrong. You're as wrong as you can be. I admit that I hadn't considered it, hadn't even thought about it, but I know exactly how he feels about her and there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that your son feels for my daughter, that I didn't feel for Christina. Old? Yes. Burnt-out? Certainly. But I can tell you the memories are still there - clear, intact, indestructible, and they'll be there if I live to be a 110.

Where John made his mistake I think, was attaching so much importance to what her mother and I might think. Because in the final analysis, it doesn't matter a damn what we think. The only thing that matters is what they feel, and how much they feel for each other - and if it's half of what we felt - that's everything. As for you two and the problems you're going to have, they seem almost unimaginable, but you'll have no problem with me. And I think that when Christina and I and your mother have some time to work on him, you'll have no problem with your father John. But you do know, I'm sure you know, what you're up against. There will be a hundred million people right here in this country who will be shocked, offended and appalled at the two of you. And the two of you will just have to ride that out, maybe everyday for the rest of your lives. You can try to ignore those people or you can feel sorry for them and for their prejudices and their bigotry and their blind hatred and stupid fears - but where necessary, you'll just have to cling tight to each other and say "Screw all those people". Anybody could make a case, and a helluva good case, against your getting married. The arguments are so obvious that nobody has to make them. But you're two wonderful people, who happened to fall in love, and happen to have a pigmentation problem. And I think now, no matter what kind of a case some bastard could make against your getting married, there would only be one thing worse, and that would be knowing what you two are, knowing what you two have, and knowing what you two feel, you didn't get married.

Spike Lee's 'Jungle Fever' in contrast to Kramer's film, presents an interracial affair as lust motivated by curiosity of other races. From Wonder's song lyrics, to Flipper Purify's revelation to his friend Cyrus that he has cheated on his wife with a white woman, to the final scenes between Angela and Flipper, Flipper is portrayed as a happily married black man who has always been, as he puts it to Cyrus, "curious about Caucasian women."

At the time of Flipper and Angela's meeting, he is married to Drew, with whom he has a child, and Angela is involved in a relationship with fellow Italian named Paulie, whom she has been dating since high school. Angela comes to work as a temp secretary at the architectural firm where Flipper is employed, and after a series of nights working late, Flipper hoists Angela up onto a drafting table, succumbing to his lust for her. After their romantic interlude, Angela and Flipper are never seen again in a work environment. Instead they are seen in social situations, for instance walking through a fairground. It is here that Angela asks him for the first time what they are doing, a question to which she never receives a direct answer:

> Flipper: I honestly don't know.
>
> Angela: I guess I don't expect you to leave her.
>
> Flipper: Well, I'm not.
>
> Angela: So then what are we doin', cause I don't think we're just foolin' around. (The subject, at this juncture, conveniently turns toward a discussion of racial sterotypes concerning sex, and the question does not get answered).

By this point, both Angela and Flipper have told their friends about one another, and the fact that they have become sexually involved with someone who is not of their own race. Lee's presentation of their respective revelations occurs almost simultaneously. He introduces a scene between Flipper and Cyrus, and then cuts away to a scene where almost the same conversation is taking place between Angela and her friends, and then cuts back to the action between Flipper and Cyrus, at which time they conclude their conversation about Flipper's infidelity. During the conversation between Cyrus and Flipper, the following dialogue ensues:

> Cyrus: Why are we out here tonight Flipper?
>
> Flipper: Alright. You gotta promise me that you're not gonna tell anybody.
>
> Cyrus: Who am I gonna tell, I don't say nothin' to nobody, nobody.
>
> Flipper: I, I, I, nothin'. You gotta promise me. I know you Cyrus.

Cyrus: My lips are sealed. Come on what happened?

Flipper: I [long pause] I cheated on Drew for the first time.

Cyrus: You did that? When did this happen?

Flipper: The other day.

Cyrus: Yeah? I thought you were gonna drop a bomb.

Flipper: Huh! Well, uh, she's white.

Cyrus: White!?! Man are you a crack or something? You're crazy!

Flipper: She's Italian.

Cyrus: H-Bomb.

Flipper: From Bensonhurst.

Cyrus: Nuclear megaton bomb. [Very long pause].

Cyrus: I know you didn't bone her.

Flipper: Nah, nah, nah, nah. No, uh, uh.

Cyrus: I know you got better judgement than that.

Flipper: Right, I hear you, that's right, my man.

Cyrus: Good.

Flipper: That's right, nope, nope, nope.

Cyrus: You could have, but you didn't.

Flipper: No.

Cyrus: She put it in your face, but you refused.

Flipper: Cause you're strong.

Cyrus: A strong black man.

Flipper: Strong black man, who, I threw her on the table.

Cyrus: No you didn't. You boned her!

Flipper: Yeah. You promised. You promised.

Cyrus: Nuclear holocaust.

Flipper: Hey man, it just happened. I mean just...

Cyrus: I got a bad feeling about this one, a bad feeling...

While Cyrus is expressing his disbelief about the fact that Flipper has decided to cheat with a white woman, Angela and her friends, Denise and Louise, are carrying on the following conversation:

Denise: So what's so important? I'm supposed to go out with Vinny tonight. What you got us standing here for huh?

Louise: What's going on G? You finally gonna have a wedding or what?

Angela: No, me and Paulie, I don't know.

Denise: You're still wearin' that ring, now come on what?

Angela: This isn't about Paulie.

Denise: You're glowing.

Angela: No, I'm not glowing.

Denise: So what is this? What's going on?

Angela: Alright. But you gotta swear, and this is like swearin' on a stack of bibles, and swear on like a zillion rosary beads.

Denise: I swear on my great grandmother.

Louise: Okay already, we swear, we swear.

Angela: I'm seein' somebody.

Denise: Yeah? You two-timer, who you seein'?

Angela: Somebody from work.

Denise: That new job, that was quick.

Angela: Very fancy place.

Louise: So what's he look like? Who is this guy?

Denise: What's his name?

Angela: It's a wierd name.

Denise: Try me.

Angela: Flipper.

Louise: Flipper?

Denise: Flipper?!? What the fuck kinda name is Flipper?

Angela: I know, I told you, it's a wierd name. Don't laugh.

Denise: What is he, like blond, blue-eyed, surfer type?

Angela: He's black. What the matter, somethin' wrong with your face?

Denise: You did it with a black man?

Angela: Yeah.

Denise: If your father ever found out. I don't know.

Angela: Yeah, but he ain't gonna.

Denise: No, of course not.

Louise: No, not from us he won't. No.

Denise: I'm just sayin' keep it quiet you know. I mean look at Gina.

Angela: Gina who?

Denise: She brought that guy into the neighborhood, that black guy. Look what they did to him.

Louise: What the fuck are you talkin' about that Puerto Rican crackhead for? ·

Denise: Whatever. She brought him into the neighborhood, and they killed the guy. You got to be careful.

Louise: I don't think she's stupid enough to bring him into the neighborhood Denise.

Denise: Whatever, I'm just saying.

Louise: Personally, I think it's pretty disgusting.

Denise: Really?

Louise: Yeah, I think it's gross. Me, myself, I mean I could never...

Denise: Yeah, but you're not sleepin with this guy, so what do you care?

Louise: I just think she's a beautiful girl. She can have any guy she wants why does she have to go with a Moolie, I mean Jesus Christ, I mean...

Denise: Hey, look this is the 90's. there's nothin' wrong with it you know. You havin' a good time?

At this point, the scene shifts back to Cyrus and Flipper, who are continuing their earlier conversation about Flipper's infidelity:

Flipper: I have to admit, I've always been curious about Caucasian women. And it doesn't mean that white is right and that sisters aren't beautiful. Sisters are beautiful too. But hey, I was curious so...I jumped on it.

Cyrus: Literally.

Flipper: Yes, indeedy. Heh, heh, heh. That doesn't mean because a brother is with a white girl, that he's less down. I mean that's progressive. I'm still very pro-black. Yes, well my shit is correct. Very correct.

Cyrus: You got a big problem. Both you and her. Both youse got the fever.

Flipper: The what?

Cyrus: The fever. Both of you got jungle fever. Both of youse.

In either case, neither Flipper's nor Angela's friends are able to keep a secret, and as a result, Flipper returns home after being at the fairground to find his wife throwing his personal belongings into the street, while cursing Flipper for going off with a white bitch. Angela returns home one evening to have her father brutally attack her, physically and verbally.

After these developments the "outcasts", as Flipper labels themselves, begin to share an apartment. After a disastrous dinner with Flipper's parents, being harrassed by policemen after a playfight in the street, and Flipper reducing their liaison to curiosity, Angela and Flipper

split up, and the closing scenes suggest that Flipper and Drew are attempting to salvage their marriage.

As might already be clear, Kramer's and Lee's reproduction of interracial love emerge and evolve around vividly different perspectives about the nature and origins of interracial love. Kramer's depiction of the shock and moral discomfort that the presence of an interracial couple potentially evokes is lost in his sugar-coated dialogue, which skirts around the issues confronting an interracial couple. Lee's film, in contrast, meets the issues head-on, often very blatantly, by having the characters in his film discuss them in their neighborhood dialect. Where Kramer's film operates on the notion that the love between his 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner' couple is really no different from a same race couple, and thereby presenting the interracial aspect of the couple as incidental, Lee's viewpoint feeds off Hernton's (1965) theory that there has been a sexualization of the race problem, and that interracial love is a reflection of that sexualization. Of his film, Lee states:

> This film is about two people who are attracted to each other because of
> sexual mythology. She's attracted to him because she's been told that
> black men know how to f-k. He's attracted to her because all his life he's
> been bombarded with images of white women being the epitome of beauty
> and the standard that everything else must be measured against (Kroll,
> 6/10/91: 45).

Finally, where Kramer's film begins and ends on notes of tolerance and optimism, suggesting that love between two people, regardless of their racial or cultural differences, conquers all, Lee constantly challenges the fairy-tale happy ending by invoking undercurrents of racism and stereotypes into his portrait, suggesting that the social barriers to interracial love are, if not insurmountable, at least enormous. These divergent perspectives are perpetually reinforced within their films.

One of John and Joey's few forays into the public realm occurs during the opening scenes of the film. The couple has just landed in San Francisco, and are taking a cab ride to Joey's

mother's art gallery. Typical of a young couple, newly in love, they seize their few semi-private moments together to kiss in the back seat of the cab. The audience witnesses the kissing from the cab-driver's perspective through the rear-view mirror. While "That's the Glory of Love" echoes in the background, viewers see a white cab-driver smiling at the sight of the lovers he is transporting. At no time does the cab-driver's reaction betray a sense of uneasiness with what he sees.

The cab-driver's acceptance is echoed in another public situation that John and Joey find themselves in when they go to a bar to meet two of Joey's friends. The white couple with whom they share drinks do not seem to be surprised to discover that Joey's fiance is black, but rather seem delighted by the news that Joey is getting married. The only sense of shock that Joey's friends seem to experience is when they learn that Joey intends to follow John to Geneva, but a week after his departure. Joey's girlfriend suggests that Joey ought to change her plans and leave with John that evening, after all, as she puts it, "If you're going to be together, why wait?".

The intolerance, disbelief and disgust expressed by Flipper and Angela's friends is replaced by quiet approval in John and Joey's case, in the public and private realms. Joey's friends encourage John and Joey in their decision whereas Flipper and Angela's friends hear, but do not necessarily accept the unsettling revelations made to them. For Flipper and Angela, the resentment and antipathy they suffer at the hands of their friends, is exacerbated in the public sphere. They are not treated like any other normal couple would be when they go out to eat at a black restaurant in Harlem. Instead, the waitress ignores them for the first half hour after they have been seated. Frustrated by the waitress' treatment, Flipper finally confronts her:

Flipper: Excuse me Miss. Miss? May we order please?

Waitress: Yes. May I take your order.

Flipper: Is this your station?

Waitress: Yes, this is my station.

Flipper: Look you can take my order. As a matter of fact you could have taken my order thirty minutes ago when I sat my black ass down.

Waitress: [to Angela] Can I take your order?

Flipper: Excuse me, but do you have a problem?

Waitress: Yes, I do have a problem to be honest with you. Fake, tired brothers like you comin' in here. That's so typical. I can't even believe you brought her stringy ass hair up here to eat.

Flipper: Oh, let me tell you somethin'. First of all Miss Al Sharpton...

Waitress: Why don't you go and parade your white women around somewhere else?

Flipper: It's not your business who I bring in here. It's not your business. Your job is to wait.

Waitress: [to Angela] Today's specials are Maryland Crabcakes, Creole Shrimp, and Blackened Catfish. I suggest you have the Blackened Catfish.

Flipper: Well, I suggest you find the manager.

Waitress: Oh? You want my manager?

Flipper: I want your manager!

Waitress: Oh, it's like that, right?

Flipper: That's right.

Waitress: Fine, fine. I'll get my manager.

Flipper: You're fired

Waitress: You're tired!

Two black female patrons: She's white!

The obvious hostility the waitress feels and expresses over seeing a black man with a white woman manifests itself in the initial refusal to render them service. Her attempts to ignore

them signified both a lack of desire to acknowledge them and a belief that Flipper has somehow become less black because he chooses to be with a white woman. This is a reaction that Flipper, as his conversation with Cyrus revealed, in some respects has anticipated, though he is reluctant to fully accept it. Flipper wants to believe that being with a white woman in no way compromises his blackness, and that's why he says that "being with a white woman doesn't mean you're less down", and that he is still "very pro-black".

The women in 'Jungle Fever', while accepting that the black men are responsible for their own actions, in many ways hold white women more responsible for the fact that their black men are slipping away into the arms of white women. Jack Kroll notes the ambivalence in assigning guilt in a Newsweek article. About a pivotal scene in which Drew draws consolation and support from her friends over her husband's infidelity, he writes:

> "It's a committment" McKee's character declares in "Jungle Fever".
> "My man has gone, he's f-king some White bitch and I still believe
> there's good Black men out there", she proclaims in a scene that's a
> masterpeice of hilarious anger and profane candor. Drew's women
> friends have gathered in a "war council" to support her. A kaleido-
> scope of every hue in the black spectrum, they let loose on race and
> sex: "White bitches" who throw themselves at black men, working
> class black men who are snubbed by black women, self-hating black
> men who can't deal with black women - every permutation of color
> and caste is ridiculed in a cross-fire of dialogue (6/10/91: 46-47).

The underlying racist attitudes in scenes like that in the restaurant and in Drew's living room are not restricted to the females in the film. It's not merely that women are incensed that their black men are finding comfort in white women's arms, but white men who cannot fathom, and are disgusted by the prospect of the same thing. Paulie's regular patrons at his soda shop, partially to taunt him, but more for the purpose of expressing outrage at the fact that one of their neighborhood women has gone off with a black man, hurl racist comments and ask Paulie if he's "gonna give Angie a beating".

As the audience already knows, and Paulie reveals to his customers, Angie has already

incurred that fate. Her father, in learning of her affair, beats Angie during a flurry of racist dialogue. While punching, kicking, hitting and throwing Angie around, he yells:

> A nigger, a nigger, what the hell are you doin' with a nigger? You'd
> fuck a black nigger. I didn't raise you to be with no nigger. I'd rather
> you be a mass murder, or a child molester...goin' and fuckin' a black
> nigger...
> You're a disgrace, you're a disgrace. I raised you to be a good Catholic girl.
> You're a disgrace, you're a disgrace...I could see maybe a Jew or an Irishman
> but to pick a fuckin' nigger...I'd rather stab my heart with a knife than be
> the father of a nigger lover.

In Kramer's film, there are only indirect references, as cited earlier, to the racism that greets an interracial couple. Matt Drayton refers to it in his last speech, and a little earlier during an exchange with Monseigneur Ryan:

> Matt: They wouldn't have a dog's chance. Not in this country, not in this
> whole stinking world.
>
> Ryan: They are this world - they can change it.
>
> Matt: Fifty years, maybe a hundred years. But not in your lifetime, and
> maybe not in mine.

The other reference is made by John's father, but again, his words do not reflect personal antipathy so much as a concern about other people's sentiments and attitudes. He says:

> Prentice: You've never made a mistake like this before...have you thought
> about what people would say...in 15 or 16 states you'd be breaking the law,
> you'd be criminals...and even if they change the law, it don't change how
> people feel.

It is perhaps this comment, more than any other made in 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner' which foreshadows the maintenance and expression of the kind of attitudes reproduced in 'Jungle Fever'. The laws have changed, but in many respects people's feelings have not.

Like Louise, there continue to be people, as the real-life scenarios indicate, who believe that a girl is too beautiful to go off with someone not of her own race, or like Angela's father, that they didn't raise their daughters to go off with a black man. There are women who feel betrayed

when they see "their men" with women of another color (Paset and Taylor, 1991), and men who fail to understand what "their women" see in a man from another race. And like Flipper, who refuses to bring interracial children into the world because the world is already so crazy and mixed up without more interracial children, there are others who believe that the greatest harm comes to the children of an interracial couple (Motoyoshi, 1990).

The promise, hope and misty-eyed dreams that repealing anti-miscegenation laws harkened, have vanished in the very real world where racism continues to be felt and acted upon. While individuals might not be as prepared as the characters in Spike Lee's film to comment, there nevertheless remain individuals who in private and public express the hostility reproduced in the film. However, the freedom to pursue interracial relationships is no longer restricted by law or the fact that it is so extraordinarily exceptional. The fact that it has become more commonplace is also reflected in 'Jungle Fever'. Almost every major character in the film has an opinion on interracial love, in some cases good - such as Drew's black friend who concedes to dating any kind of man as long as he treats her good, in others bad - of which countless examples have already been provided, and others indifferent - such as Denise's response "that this is the 90's, so what", and Flipper's brother Gator's reaction that if he "were going to be with a white woman, he'd at least pick one with long money", but "that it's cool with him". These reactions cover the spectrum of common-sense beliefs that are maintained by those dealing with the reality of interracial couples in their daily lives.

In very different respects, each of the films reproduce accounts that reflect the historical context during which they emerged. Kramer's film was a by-product of the optimism and potential birth of a new era brought on by the Civil Rights movement in the United States, while Lee's film reflects the influences of the resurgent racism that has plagued the United States in recent years, and points to the frightening and potentially violent consequences that mixed race

couples are exposed to as a result of their choices. However, just as it is unlikely that many parents during the late 60's would have been as liberal and accepting as John and Joey's parent were of their children's news, much less be prepared to come to terms with their ambivalence in a matter of hours, not everyone choosing to be interracially involved confronts the obstacles that challenged Flipper and Angela. Nor is every couple destined to cave in under the pressure of hostility and resentment. To some extent, television, and print media have more realistically conveyed the broad spectrum of experiences that interracial couples have had.

TELEVISION AND NOVELS: REFLECTIONS OF?

As suggested earlier, television talk shows regularly depend on the subject on interracial relationships for their daily fodder. In many respects, however, their presentation of the experiences of individuals crossing the color line in their intimate relationships is a sensationalized, and one-sided account. As Munroe notes:

> On a recent episode of *Geraldo* devoted to the topic of interracial relationships, host Geraldo Rivera interviewed a mother and daughter who had not seen each other in three years because the daughter had been barred from her parents' home. At one point during the interview her stepfather, angered because the daughter had married a black man, was quoted by her mother as having said: "She should be grateful she isn't my real daughter because if she were, I would kill her!" (4/92: 92).

This type of exchange is rather typical of talk shows dealing with the topic. Given the motivation of wanting to incite audience reaction and response, extreme accounts of hostility and violence toward interracial couples is frequently depicted. All this is not to suggest that the portraits are fabricated or erroneous, but rather that they ill reflect the varied real-life experiences of mixed race couples. Hence, while every conceivable host from CNN's 'Sonya' to CTV's 'Shirley', and the myriad other hosts of national and local talk shows have broached the subject, they represent only half the story.

Television shows which have been more responsible and accurate in the reproduction of the

broader range of interracial experiences are dramatic serials, both during the day and evening. Shows such as 'All My Children' and 'Knot's Landing' have taken a fresh approach to presenting and dealing with an interracial relationship. While earlier vehicles, such as the 'Jeffersons' used their in-house interracial couple as foils for George's jokes, interracial couples in these shows are not brought into the picture to elicit a few laughs or spark a bit of controversy, but incorporated into a cast of characters who experience the ups and downs of life.

Tom and Livia, 'All My Children's' resident interracial couple, have gone through the gamut of emotions. Livia felt ambivalent about getting inolved with someone who is white. She overcame those feelings when Tom assured her that he loved her - not in spite of or because of her blackness -but because of the women she is. They had difficulty buying the home they wanted because of their interracial status, but their journalist friends went undercover and unveiled the racist sales tactics of the real estate agents, so they finally got their house. Neither their friends or family snubbed them because of their decision to become interracially involved, and rather than discouraging them from it, they were encouraged by most. The one individual who seemed to be having difficulty with Livia's decision was her son Terrence (from a previous relationship with a black man), but even he seems to have come around. In recent episodes he has himself been contemplating an interracial involvement.

In 'Knot's Landing', the interracial liaison occurred between a young black girl and a white boy who happened to be neighbors, attended the same high school, experienced some of the same emotional conflicts and adjustments, and had fathers who had opened a law practice together. In this show, the anxiety that parents often feel about the issue was expressed by having the girl's father not only get angry at his daughter, but go over to his neighbor's house and threaten the boy with physical harm if he ever came near his daughter again. The anger and frustration eventually subsided when the boy's guardian was able to convince his partner that they were two

innocent teen-agers who had done nothing wrong. The fact was that they simply liked each other.

Within these portraits is the underlying suggestion that the more frequently individuals of different races come into contact with one another, on common grounds of work, school or in social situations, and discover that they have mutual interests, shared experiences or backgrounds, there exists a very real possibility that they may take the relationship a step beyond what is socially authorized. The overt suggestions are that there are often problems accompanying the decision, but that these are problems that can be managed and resolved.

Since television producers and writers have a luxury that makers of films lack, specifically, a forum in which to introduce a story-line and develop it over time, they are in a unique position to provide more detailed and realistic reproductions of the everyday lives of interracial couples. They are capable of showing these couples at work, home, play, with their families and friends, and going through periodic phases of problems and enjoyment, in the more realistic way that other characters in television are sometimes portrayed.

What is more typical of a dramatic serial is often lost in a situation comedy however. While there are comedies such as 'A Different World' or 'True Colors' which have placed an interracial couple at front and center of the story-line on an on-going basis, other comedies such as 'The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air' focus on the issue during one episode and provide a "coles notes" version of confronting and overcoming familial shock to news that a family member has become interracially involved and is contemplating marriage. Although it may appear that reproductions of this nature are incapable of doing any justice to the true nature of lived experience, what must be conceded is that they at least reproduce an aspect of experience that is fairly common among interracial couples, specifically, resistance and disbelief among family to the choice of a mate. As noted in previous chapters, while many couples experience initial resistance from family because they have chosen someone not of their own race, most families

eventually comes to terms with the choice. This too is often reflected within situation comedies.

There may be some logic behind the reluctance to portray the experiences of interracial couples in greater depth, and this again may be directly linked to public perceptions and attitudes regarding relationships of this kind. Munroe reveals:

> Early in the first season of *True Colors*, the producers received a letter interpreted by the FBI as a death threat against cast members, prompting the producers to place the set under guard. While there have been no further threats, the negative mail has continued. "We still get mail saying that it's a disgusting thing to portray an interracial situation," says Michael Weithorn, executive producer and creator of the show. However, it's not only outright racists who are uncomfortable with the concept of black and white intimacy on television. "*True Colors* got on the air only because the Fox network was struggling to gain viewers and needed to be a bit experimental" says Weithorn (Ibid.).

Where television seems to be on the brink of providing more realistic portraits of interracial couples, literature, with the exception of biographies (eg. A Marriage of Inconvenience, Queen and Queenie), has a tendency to incorporate either stereotypical images about those who choose to become interracially involved, or reproduce an account which borrows on history in some way.

In 'Your Blues Ain't Like Mine', Bebe Moore Campbell weaves a tale that is reminiscent of Emmett Till's death back in 1955. Emmett was killed in Mississippi by two white men for whistling at a white woman. The all-white jury acquitted the accused within an hour and a half of beginning their deliberations (Terkel,1992). Till was fourteen at the time of his death. Armstrong Todd, the character from Campbell's book is fifteen, and like Till was murdered in Mississippi while on a visit from Chicago, in the 1950's, for speaking to a white woman. And like Till's murderers, Todd's are also set free.

Evidence of stereotypes, along with the basis of the vehement reactions that black women often have toward seeing black men with white women, are reproduced in Terry McMillan's

'Waiting to Exhale'. While the novel revolves around the lives and friendship of four black women, consider the following excerpt, in which Bernadine discovers that her black husband intends to leave her for a white woman:

> Now she looked over at her husband, thinking she wanted to be rid of him, had been trying to conjure up the courage, the nerve, the guts, to tell "him" to leave, but she didn't have that much courage yet. All she wanted to do was repossess her life. To feel that sense of relief when the single most contributing factor to her innermost misery was gone. But he beat her to the punch. Not only was he leaving "her". Not only was he leaving her for another woman. He was leaving her for a "white" woman. Bernadine hadn't expected this kind of betrayal, this kind of insult. John knew this would hurt me, she thought, as she tried to will the tears rolling down her cheeks to evaporate. And he'd chosen the safest route. A white woman was about the only one who'd probably tolerate his ass. Make him king. She's probably flattered to death that such a handsome, successful, black man would want to take care of her, make her not need anything except him. She'll worship him, Bernadine thought, just like I did in the beginning, until the spell wore off. Hell, I was his white girl for eleven years (1992: 26).

Reflected in McMillan's writing is not only the view that emerged in Lee's film that somehow a man is betraying himself and women of his race by engaging in an interracial liaison, but also the view subscribed to within theories of mate selection and early studies on interracial marriage, which have subsequently been inscribed into stereotypes, that successful minority men will marry outside of their race, often to elevate their social status.

Given the prevalence of interracial relationships among celebrities (O.J. and Nicole Simpson, Sidney Poitier and Joanna Shimkus, Clarence and Virginia Thomas, among others), it is commonly believed that financial success inevitably leads to marriage cross over among non-white men. It is this common sense belief that accounts for Bernadine's reaction to her husband's news, Drew's and the waitress' reactions to Flipper, and those that many women have encountered in dating a man not of their own background.

The other basis for negative reaction, particularly among black women, comes from the prevailing notion that there is a man-shortage, which is even more dramatic within the black

community since black males experience the highest rates of incarceration and homicide than any other group of men in the United States. Given this fact , and that white men are often capable of providing a form of financial security that black men cannot, black women often seem more tolerant of interracial relationships involving a black woman and white man, which McMillan also reveals in 'Mama':

> Big Jim paid for Angel and Doll's first trip back to Point Haven.
> They liked him now, and had had a sudden revelation. Just because
> he was white didn't mean he wasn't human. He talked just like any
> other man. He acted like any other man. He even had a sense of
> humor and he had one thing that none of Mildred's other men had
> ever had in the past: lots and lots of money. And he was generous
> with it. Big Jim gave them each fifty dollars for spending money.
> "Shit, if she wants to go out with a white man, that's her business,"
> Doll had said to Angel, as they were about to land in Detroit. "Who knows,
> we could end up with one ourselves. You never know" (1987: 192).

McMillan's work, like many other portraits of interracial couples within media, is reflective of prevailing attitudes within society. What is apparent, and hopefully moreso as a result of this analysis, is that there is an on-going dialectic between social circumstances and media portraits of human affairs. On the one hand, media such as television, books, and film survive and thrive by delivering audiences what they want to see and hear. In some instances this may mean that audiences are fed images that are like fantasies because they are so far removed from their lived experiences. On the other hand, audiences are fed images that go to the very heart of their emotions by mirroring real-life. In the former capacity, media influences and shapes social perceptions of the world. In the latter, it is instrumental in reproducing the existing social systems. In the case of interracial relationships it appears to be doing both.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUDING REMARKS

THE TERM "MISCEGENATION "

The term "miscegenation" provdies a remarkable exhibit in the natural history of nonsense. The term today is used in a pejorative sense as referring to "race mixture". The prefix "mis" (from the Latin *miscere*, "mix") has probably contributed its share to the misunderstanding of the nature of "race" mixture. Words that begin with the prefix "mis" suggest a "mistake", "misuse", "mislead", and similar erroneous ideas implying wrong conduct.

The word "miscegenation" was invented as a hoax, and published in an anonymous pamphlet at New York in 1864, with the title *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the White Man and Negro* . The pamphlet was almost certainly the joint product of two members of the New York *World* staff, David Goodman Croly, an editor, and George Wakeman, one of the reporters. The purpose of the authors was to raise the "race" issue in an aggravated form in the 1864 presidential campaign by attributing to the abolitionist Republicans and the Republican party the views set forth in *Miscegenation*. The pamphlet was intended to commit the Republican leaders to "the conclusions to which they are brought by their own principles", without any hope of success but in the expectation that their folly would be made all the more clear to them in granting the Negro the franchise. The brief introduction sets the tone of the whole pamphlet.

"The word is spoken at last. It is Miscegenation - the blending of the various races of men- the practical recognition of all the children of the common father. While the sublime inspirations of Christianity have taught this doctrine, Christians so-called have ignored it in denying social equality to the colored man; while democracy is founded upon the idea that all men are created equal, democrats have shrunk from the logic of their own creed, and refused to fraternize with the people of all nations, while science has demonstrated that the intermarriage of diverse races is indispensable to a progressive humanity, its votaries, in this country at least, have never had the courage to apply that rule to the relations of the white and colored races. But Christianity, democracy, and science are stronger than timidity, prejudice and pride of short-sighted men; and they teach that a people, to become great must become composite. This involves what is vulgarly known as amalgamation, and those who dread that name, and the thought and fact it implies, are warned against reading these pages..."

Thus the word "misegenation" was invented by satirists to replace the vulgar term "amalgamation", as not being sufficiently elevated or distinguished. Indeed, the word does carry with it a sort of authoritative aura, implying, however, a certain lack of respectability, and even responsibility. The extent of the prejudice inherent in and engendered by this word may be gathered from the fact that [Webster's New International Dictionary] illustrates the use of the word by the example of "one who is

guilty of misegenation".

The word should be replaced by ordinary English words such as "Intermixture", "mixture", "admixture", and "intermarriage" (Montagu, 1992: 600-601).

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Montagu's call was heeded. Though the term miscegenation continues to be listed in the dictionary, it is not the word typically used to refer to marriages between people of different races. It would seem however, that eliminating the word from everyday vocabulary has not removed the vestiges of negative imagery and perceptions generally associated with the concept of intermarriage. The pejorative implications of the term miscegenation have carried over into more contemporary references to marriage or relationships between individuals of different races. What this suggests, perhaps more than anything, is that the difference lies not in what you call it, but more in who is doing the calling.

In recent decades, both in Canada and the United States there has been a resurgence of radical racism (Sher, 1983, Barrett, 1987). In his seminal work on this phenomenon, Barrett contends:

> The more extreme members of the right wing want nothing less than a totally white society. They contend that blacks and whites can never live together in harmony, that interracial marriage is more dangerous to civilization than the atomic bomb, and that a time will come when the world will erupt into a gigantic race war where one's battledress will be the colour of one's skin (1987: viii).

For someone like James Alexander Mcquirter, once grand Kleagle of Canada's branch of the Ku Klux Klan, and the thousands of other Canadians (Barrett, 1987) subscribing to the a radical right wing philosophy, the terminology used to describe marriage between whites and non-whites is inconsequential, since it is the act itself that they object to. For those espousing these beliefs, according to Barrett, expressions of their frustration with social and economic problems are mainfested in racism. He states:

> The right wing, especially the far right, under the guise of both scientific and religious justification, and on the premise that liberalism in the face

of human nature is unworkable, advocates that the world be rebuilt on the lines of natural law, which means in part recognizing the supposed animal like inferiority of non-white peoples (Ibid.: 355).

For these people, non-whites are a threat to their security, stability, and way of life and ultimately, those with whom they are coming into competition with for control over scarce economic resources. These beliefs have permeated their social interactions to the extent where they not only publicly denounce interracial relationships, but indoctrinate their children from birth, to fraternize only with whites, and to repudiate all other groups of people.

What this means for those choosing to be interracially involved is at the very least that they become objects of public ridicule at the hands of members of these groups, and targets of the groups themselves in public forums. At worst, they become victims of violence that is initiated to counter-act this force that is more "dangerous than the atomic bomb".

Resurgent racism alone does not explain the sometimes vehement reactions that interracial relationships elicit. Ethnocentric beliefs, which might be construed as a form of racism, emerge in connection with members of a group favoring their own kind. Individuals expressing attitudes of shock or discomfort at discovering that someone they know is interracially involved, do not necessarily maintain a belief in the natural superiority or inferiority of specific groups (Reitz, 1980). Instead they may be reacting as they do simply because they expected their children, family or friends to select a mate from within their own group, and/or feeling that marriages between individuals from the same cultural backgrounds are more successful. Some individuals holding these beliefs undergo a period of adjustment during which they come to terms with the surprising revelations, and finally accept what they consider to be an atypical choice. There are yet others who believe that interracial relationships are okay, as long as it doesn't involve someone they are close to. These attitudes are made resonantly clear in an interview Studs Terkel conducted with Dennis Carney, a twenty-five year old carpenter from Chicago, in which the following was stated:

If I see a black guy arm-in-arm with a white woman, it doesn't bother me.
I don't know if I'd want my daughter comin' home with one, if I had a daughter.
But this woman has a right to do what she wants to do. I see a lot of black
women that are very nice-looking that I wouldn't mind taking out (1992: 143).

Other plausible explanations for the hostility that these relationships evoke are potentially traced to marriage rates. A study by Yale sociologist, Neil Barrett, indicates that "one in four black women and nearly one in ten white women [in the United States] now in their mid-to-late thirties will never marry" (Shook and Shook, 1993: 11). Further, U.S. Census data reveal that "In 1986, the marriage rate for divorced women was 79.5 per 1,000 versus 59.7 per 1,000 for never-married women. The rate for divorced men was 117.8 per 1,000 versus 49.1 per 1,000 for never-married men" (Ibid.,: 22), and that there "are 96 white males for every 100 white females, but only 88 black males for every 100 black females" (Ibid.,: 28). The implications of this data are manifold.

Neil Barrett's figures reflect one of two things, either that as many as one in four black women and one in ten white women are making conscious choices not to marry, or that there that many women not marrying as a result of an inability to find suitable mates. Additionally, given the male to female ratios within each group, there are significantly fewer black men for black women to begin with. If black men start dating and marrying non-black women, the ratio drops even more. The off-shoot might be that black women start looking among non-black men for a compatible partner. That women wrestle with this dilemma is evidenced in a conversation between Savannah and Robin, two of McMillan's characters in 'Waiting to Exhale':

"This is a crap game we're playing girl, only nobody wants to roll the
dice."

"A lot of times all I want is somebody to talk to, act silly and bullshit
with. Somebody I can trust. He doesn't have to be a candidate for a
husband."

"I hear you."

"I want to know what it is we can do to get them to understand that?"

"Who you asking? All I can say is that black men can be one big question mark," Robin said. "One disappointment after another. Every now and then I wonder if I should go on and date me a white man" (1992: 199).

Not only do Savannah and Robin indicate that they are frustrated with the choices of men from within their own group, but they also reveal that they have minimum requirements that they expect a man to satisfy. In a way they operate from a position of "Pragma" - love with a shopping list, and when they find someone who satifies their basic criteria, they are likely to settle for that person, particularly given the odds of finding the ideal mate.

Is this to suggest then that all those marrying or dating interracially, have merely settled for a person outside of their group because the field of eligibles within it was so narrow? To the contrary. There are many, particularly those involved in interracial relationships themselves, who would claim that it is precisely because they were not willing to settle for the first semi-decent prospect that came along, that they opened up their options and considered prospects from other groups. In having done so, they believed they were able to find someone they truly love.

In the face of increased immigration rates to Canada in the last thirty years (Anderson, 1991, Ward, 1990), the complexion of the Canadian population has changed, which in turn has impacted upon the field of eligibles available to people, and that they are willing to consider as mates. As a matter of natural course, through meeting people at school, work, or in social milieus, people are finding themselves attracted to and interested in someone, that under different circumstances may have seemed an unlikely candidate for a mate, and with whom a relationship is likely to engender social disapprobation. Yet and still, they feel there is enough reason to pursue the relationship.

That reason, ultimately, may be found in Munroe's commentary regarding these relationships:

> Despite all the obstacles and outside pressures, according to Mitchell-Kernan and Tucker's UCLA study, interracial marriages, many of which are second marriages, have a high success rate, perhaps as a reflection of the thought and committment that went into making and maintaining them. "When people look at you in the street, I know they are thinking, 'What is it that's making these two stay together?" says Barry Campbell. "The answer is the same as in any normal relationship. You have your good days. You have your bad days, and you have to work out your problems. But in most interracial relationships, depending on your environment and your situation, everybody may be against you, so you have to have something special to keep it together. You develop a bond that may be different from other couples because in a lot of situations all you have is each other" (4/92: 102).

That bond, that something special, is perhaps best revealed by Campbell's mate, Jennifer Fox, who states:

> "I didn't find Barry Campbell because I wanted to be with a black man. People say you always see color, but when we are alone, I don't say to myself, "I am with a black man," I say, "I am with the man I love" (Ibid.,).

This bond was mainfest among those participating in this study, according to the informants own accounts. Regardless of the strength or intensity of their bond however,what was consistently evident in these cases with was that the choice to date or marry outside of one's own ethnic or racial group elicited a reaction. The reactions ranged from mildly negative, bordering on intial shock, to extreme disgust which manifested in ostracism from family, friends and a community. Some of this can be linked to the fact that society has perceptions of a person and his racial group, and according to these perceptions, society makes demands on the person's behaviour, expecting and often mandating that person to behave and believe in prescribed ways. These prescriptions may correspond to a field of eligibles from which mates are to be chosen by members of a group and the consequences that will ensue if individuals opt to defy those prescriptions. Another aspect which potentially explains the reactions elicited by these couplings rests in the social perceptions of race and the behaviour these perceptions give rise to - namely: racism. There are myriad possibilities that potentially explain the reactions that

individuals have to unconventional couplings of this sort. The important point is that the awareness of these diverse reactions and explanations propelled the interest to examine these situations more closesly - not necessarily with an eye to providing a definitive explanation for the basis of individual choices and the social reactions engendered by those choices, but moreso with an intent to present a more detailed picture of the interracial experience that could only be gleaned from the perspective of the couples themselves.

The current research findings, in line with previous research done by Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan, suggests that by and large individuals who entered into a committed relationship with an individual from a race other than their own are typically older and often in a second marriage. The ages of individuals ranged anywhere from late twenties to early fifties for the couples in question, and approximately two-thirds had been divorced with children from a prior relationship. Couples claimed that a previous marital failure made them more keenly aware of what they were or were not willing to accept in a future relationship, and that this awareness made them in some respects more open to an interracial relationship, since they were more focussed on personal rather than physical characteristics in a mate, and further, given the result of their earlier efforts at mating, they were not as concerned with the reactions that their choices were likley to elicit. Their primary concerns were that they found someone with whom they were compatible and could build a life together, rather than worrying about what their family and friends, or the larger society might feel about their choices. The impact of independence, and distance from family and correspondingly age, was evident in the accounts rendered by participants. Some of the younger interviewees indicated that at early stages in their life, while they were dependent upon family and friends for emotional and financial support, they were incapable of following through on some of the choices they made in mates who were considered socially unacceptable. Further, the data revealed that a variety of factors

affected the nature of reactions they elicited. In particular geography, the economic and educational status of couples, the particular racial mix of couples, along with the degree to which the individuals have assimilated to Western culture have varying degrees of effect on the success or failure of interracial relationships. Some cities and regions evince greater tolerance of interracial couples. Economic and educational status often shields couples from the ignorance and intolerance that is often blatantly expressed among those who are less fortunate economically or less educated, black-white mixes often evoke the strongest negative reactions among family, friends, and the community at large, and individuals coming from families in which there is strong adherence to custom or tradition have the greatest difficulty in overcoming negative familial pressure.

What is apparent from the stories of these couples and the depictions of couples in other sources is that the more frequently individuals come into contact with one another, on common grounds of work, school or in social situations, and discover that they have mutual interests, shared experiences or backgrounds, there exists a very real possibility that they may enter into a relationship that is not socially authorized. What is also apparent is that while fundamental beliefs about the nature of the relationships and the potential success of them may not dramatically change, superficial social attitudes may reflect higher levels of tolerance and acceptance of the phenomena.

While efforts have been made in the study to provide a humanistic insight into the nature of interracial relationships and public perceptions of them, and link them up with more common sense beliefs about race, racism, and mate selection, there is much on this topic that was beyond the scope of this study. Some directives for future research on the topic include critically developing the link between the social disapprobation toward interracial relationships and resurgent racism, comparatively analyze reactions toward interracial relationships in various

locations to determine the extent to which tolerance and intolerance is linked to geographic locations of the couple, as well as sytematically examining the link between socio-economic status and levels of tolerance.

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APPENDIX ONE

CONFESSIONAL TALE

When I was 10 years old, three individuals from Hong Kong came to live with our family. Pumi and Amrik were engaged to be married, having made what East Indians refer to as a love match, and they had Amrik's niece Mindy in tow, all three prepared to enroll in school in Vancouver.

At the time that my parents had informed us that the three of them were to arrive, I naturally assumed from their names, and other information about their families, that they were all of Indian descent. It came as somewhat of a surprise to finally see Mindy's face. Her facial features did not belie her Chinese ancestry, in fact they would not even hint at confirming a notion that Mindy was a mix of Chinese and East Indian, or any other combination of ethnic backgrounds. This woman was Chinese and nothing else, if her face was to be used as the only barometer by which heritage could or should be gauged. As one moved from Mindy's face to other aspects of her personhood, her East Indianness became very difficult to dispute. She was clad in traditional Indian clothes, wore her hair the way most traditional Indians did, spoke Punjabi fluently, believed in the Sikh religion and was very devoted to the faith, ate and cooked Indian food, and exhibited all the behaviour that would make any set of Indian parents proud. Sure she spoke Chinese as well, and ate the food, but then Pumi and Amrik who were incontestably of Indian descent demonstrated the same tendencies, and little else could be expected of someone raised in Hong Kong. As the conflicting information was assimilated and processed, the initial shock subsided, and Mindy's identity was never up for discussion --- at least not in our household.

Two years after Mindy had arrived, it was somehow decided that she was ready for marriage. I'm still not certain if it was her parents, my parents, her Uncle, or Mindy herself, who decided

that the time was prime, but it was evident from phone calls, the numbers of strange men who passed through our house accompanied by a pair of older people that were as quiet as the single men were during their visit, and the number of cups of tea that Mindy nervously poured, that the search for a husband was on. For those of us who knew Mindy, we figured it wouldn't take very long before some intelligent and equally pleasant young man would snatch her up. But there are things about arranged marriages that seem to elude presumptuous 12 year olds who figure that they know all there is to know about life and other people's attitudes. The possibility that these young men and their parents would decline the offer of Mindy's hand simply because she looked slightly different from most of the women he had been invited to look at had never crossed my mind. Months lagged on and no prospective mate had materialized. I couldn't fathom it - I had seen less attractive, less intelligent, less pleasant and less kind women secure matches a lot quicker than Mindy was managing to do. I was confused by the unwillingness of men who were clearly interested in finding a wife to accept Mindy as their mate. What I, and Mindy for that matter was oblivious to was the only thing that seemed to be of issue to the rest of the world. Though she clearly behaved and thought like an Indian, they could not ignore that she looked Chinese.

Disturbed by the revelation, I thought it appropriate to discuss it with my mother. The conversation amounted to nothing more than an exercise in futility. My mother told me to forget it. Mindy was not Chinese, she was Indian and everyone knew it. Months later when Mindy prepared to walk down the aisle it was with an Indian, as she and all who knew her had expected. What I did not know then, but am aware of now, and have concluded must have been a decisive factor in Raj's decision to marry Mindy, was that had he not married her he would have been forced by immigration authorities to return to India...I guess he settled for the lesser of two evils.

Twenty years later, Raj and Mindy remain married with two daughters and a son, all three of which I gather through reports made by Pumi, are somewhat confused about their identity. It seems that the children are often taunted by other Indian students about their Chinese features, and by Chinese peers about looking Indian. Mindy handles her children's queries in about the same way my mother handled my question about Mindy's identity so many years earlier - she tells them to forget it and that they are Indian.

Four years ago, my cousin Michael informed the family that he was going to marry his then girlfriend, Diane. On the surface, there was nothing atypical about his announcement. After all, he and Diane had been dating for about a year, he was 28 years old and they were expecting their first child. Both Diane and Michael had been born in Vancouver, attended schools in the same neighborhoods, went to the same gym, and had some mutual interests and friends. For Diane and Michael, as a result, the decision to marry seemed entirely natural and rather timely given the impending birth of their first child. Most others, beyond Michael's siblings, seemed to be dealing with incredible amounts of discomfort because of the upcoming marriage - see, the fact is that Diane is Chinese. Every time Michael was out of earshot, the talk rattled on with individuals expressing disbelief that there was actually going to be a wedding. Some wondered: How could Michael marry someone who was Chinese? He was so good looking, a nice boy from a wealthy family, surely he could find a beautiful Indian girl. Others wondered: What about the children, how would they feel about being half Chinese and half Indian? How would Michael and Diane make it given their different backgrounds? And yet others, representing the suspicious-of-Diane faction, found excuses for Michael's supposed lapse in judgement by claiming that Diane had deliberately gotten pregnant because she knew that she couldn't have gotten an East Indian man under any other conditions. (Too bad Mindy hadn't thought of the trick 20 years ago!) But the common strain in all the unwarranted and unsolicited commentary was: How could

Michael disappoint his parents so much, it was bad enough that his sisters had married White people, but Diane was Chinese. There's no doubt that everyone who met Mindy 20 years earlier were plagued by some of the same issues. The irony is that those people who seemed beseiged by them now had been totally ignorant of the concerns when the woman they were trying to get married off looked Chinese to a prospective Indian groom.

From my perspective, there wasn't a substantive difference between these two marriages other than the fact that one was arranged and the other was not. In many respects, this factor seems to distinguish the nature of marriages for me more than a host of other possibilities. Though I've always had a curiosity about marriages between people of seemingly different nationalities, I've never been as consumed by thoughts about them as I was when I began to hear the discussions that took place in reference to Michael's choices. I presume part of the reason why it became more meaningful was that as I grew older, it was becoming clearer to me that there was little likelihood of my marrying an Indian, and a strong chance that I would someday be the subject of similar talk. While so many people seemed obsessed with Diane's Chineseness, I really could not see what warranted all of the negative talk. Diane and Michael have as much in common with each other as Raj and Mindy did, and though a pregnancy replaced the deportation factor as a central issue in Diane's and Michael's decision, at least they knew that they were compatible on a sexual level, among others. It was certainly true that most people would notice that Michael was East Indian and that Diane was Chinese, that their children might be subject to some cruel taunting because they were a mixture of East Indian and Chinese, and that there was little chance that the marriage ceremony would put an end to the derogatory comments being made. Instead, the circle of people engaging in such talk would inevitably grow to include far greater numbers of people than the family and close friends it had been confined to thus far. My contention was, however, that Diane's and Michael's marriage should have been no more or less

acceptable than Raj and Mindy's. Surely they would be subject to the same problems, and with any luck, enjoy the same pleasures. The fact that they formed an inter-ethnic couple might present some unique problems that others avoided by marrying mates of seemingly similar backgrounds, but was this just cause to condemn the marriage to failure?

At the time that I began to seriously consider examining interracial marriages and relationships as a thesis topic, I had the pleasure of seeing the classic "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" for another time. Given my romantic inclinations, I was touched by the film when I originally saw it. The more recent viewing left with me with overwhelming awe of the movie's timelessness and insight. Those familiar with the film will recall that Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn's onscreen daughter, Katherine Houghton, returns home for a visit and announces that she plans to get married. What might be cause for celebration under ordinary circumstances quickly becomes complicated by the fact that Houghton is White, and the man she plans to marry, while being a doctor, happens to be Black (played by Sidney Poitier). The film's plot focuses on the mixed emotions that the engaged couple's parent's have about the announcement. Between the two sets of parents, and the housekeeper, every logical and conceivable reason for not proceeding with the marriage is articulated. Having battled with all of the reasons why the two should change their minds, and what the prospects for the future hold should they fail to change their minds, a confused Spencer Tracy before the film's end calls the entire cast of characters into his living room to offer his perspective on the news that he has heard. Tracy's commentary begins by recounting the sequence of events he has been embroiled in throughout the day, and then he moves on in rather profound detail to offer what he believes are all of the reasons that others might hold as valid for backing out of the marriage, and ends with what he believes is the strongest reason for going ahead with it - love.

If in the tradition of current moviemaker's, the director or producer of "Guess Who's Coming

to Dinner" had elected to make a sequel, I might have fewer questions about the way life turns out for couples who find themselves in situations that continue to be regarded as somewhat socially unacceptable. Unfortunately, they didn't and my curiosity about the ways in which the public receives inter-ethnic marriages, and how couples deal with that reception rages on.

One of the primary factors that many involved in inter-ethnic relationships and those who confront them in social situations acknowledge, is that there remain vast numbers of people who are appalled by the prospect and incidences of inter-ethnic marriages. The notion of seeing a man and a woman of different ethnic backgrounds together is an unpalatable consideration, and even more physically threatening when manifest. Though attempts have been made to understand precisely what it is about these unions that make it so difficult for people to accept, the propensity tends toward explanations based on speculations about stereotypes.

Robin and John have often faced these facts within their 12 year marriage. Robin, who is also my cousin, and in fact Michael's sister, married John, a White man, after a year long romantic involvement. Their acquaintance and friendship pre-dated any intimate relationship by a number of years. By the time that Robin made the decision to accept John's proposal, she had dealt with the difficulties inherent in her current situation since she had terminated a five year live-in relationship with another White male just a year earlier. Her family, though unaccepting of Robin's earlier relationship, was aware that she and her love interest were co-habitating. In addition, her parents had been confronted with inter-ethnic relationships through the 12 year involvement that their older daughter had experienced with a White male. They had been forced to deal with a White man's presence in their home, as well as with the fact that he was the love interest of their daughter, when the man accompanied their daughter to the family home. Though they tolerated the presence of the White boyfriend, they had not begun to accept the probability that their daughter might marry someone of a different ethnic background than

her own in their heart of hearts. Even in the face of these facts, when Robin and John asked her parents to attend their wedding, they refused, and even went so far as to suggest that they would not speak to her, essentially disowning her, should she choose to go through with the wedding. Twelve years have passed since Robin and John wed, and though the parents now communicate with the couple, there are family members who remain non-plussed by the marriage. Recently, at a family gathering, one of Robin's mother's brothers approached John and asked him why he had opted to marry Robin when he had so many White women to choose from. Robin's uncle clearly intimated that he considered White women more attractive than East Indian women (perhaps if he thought he could get away with it - he would have chosen to marry a white woman as opposed to the East Indian who was chosen for him). In characteristic form, John rather pointedly remarked - Did you ever consider the possibility that I love Robin?

Perhaps John hit the nail on the head and realized what seems to elude so many people in our world. Love - hailed as a primary ingredient for success in marriage in the Western world, is so often disregarded as legitimately existing between men and women of different ethnic backgrounds. It is as though all those people who are readily prepared to concede its existence between couples of the same ethnic background want to undermine or ignore its power in a union between couples of mixed ethnicity. Perhaps it is because love is regarded as a natural phenomenon, and so many continue to see a relationship between ethnically diverse individuals as unnatural.

If this be true - what could be taken as the unnatural elements? This issue is best addressed by considering, first, what it is that seems natural about ethnically similar relations. Obviously people contend that there is an innate compatibility between individuals of the same ethnicity. There is a belief that from a cultural standpoint, having been raised in the same tradition, with the same religious philosophy and comparable values, that individuals are more

apt to interract more comfortably and favorably. Many also believe that this compatibility transcends the relationship between the pair and permeates the relationship that develops between the families of the wedded couple, and by extension to the society of which they are a part and that this is of immeasureable value. There is also a sense of comfort that many continue to experience when they see people together who resemble one another physically, that is replaced by discomfort when there is a striking contrast in appearance of the pair.

All of these issues confronted me, not only as a student considering this topic from an academic perspective, but even more so, during the course of my adult life. Beyond the questions that I thought about as a result of others experiences, I began to have even more when the time came for me to deal with my own choices. It dawned upon me as I began reflecting upon the experiences of family members who had been interracially married that in the course of my life, there have been upwards of 150 couples that I have personally met whose relationships were interracial. In meeting these individuals, I was privy to the types of things that they dealt with that were purely a result of the fact that they had chosen to be with someone of a different background. Because I increasingly found myself dating men who were not of my own ethnic background, I anticipated having to deal with the issues I had seen others confront, and realize in retrospect that the way in which I either dealt with or avoided the potential conflicts was shaped by my perceptions of others' experiences.

During my life I have had one serious involvement with a man of my own background, and it was clear to me almost at the outset that it would never result in marriage. After that experience, with the exception of a handful of casual dates, I was never involved with another East Indian man. Regardless of the intensity of the involvements that I had over the coming years, excepting my most recent relationship, I always found it easier to keep my involvements a secret from my parents and family members. Except for close friends and others I knew who

were interracially involved, most people I knew did not meet the men in my life. I expected the rejection, hostility and at worst feared the ostracism that so many others had been subjected to.

While I attempted to avoid these unpalatable consequences by concealing my partner's identity from my family, I was incapable of minimizing negative reactions encountered in public. Over the last ten years I have had strangers swear at me in public because of my choices, been the target of racist invective, had my sanity questioned, exposed to looks that could kiil, and been made to feel like an outsider by 'his' family in many instances.

When I eventually mustered the courage to inform my family about a relationship that I was having with someone not of my own "race", many of my expectations, particularly about my mother's attitude materialized. Not only did she experience profound difficulty in understanding my choice, but made it patently clear that I had another choice to make: between her and my relationship. Ultimately, my mother and I were embroiled in emotionally draining arguments over the issue, and that left me feeling as though she intended to make good on the threat to disown me if I persisted in defying her wishes. Other family members' reactions ranged from total support to reluctant acceptance.

The strange thing is that while I expected my family to be disappointed in my choice, I never really gave the possibility that 'his' family might not be thrilled with his choice much of a thought. Hence, I was surprised to discover that my partner's family was actively trying to dissuade him from further involvement with me. In my mind, maybe because I had always known how the East Indian families reacted to this kind of news, and believed that the strong adherence to tradition and custom accounted for their attitudes, I maintained a naive belief that people from other backgrounds were more liberal, tolerant or accepting of the unconventional choices that their children might make.

As I became more open about discussing my relationships and experiences with friends and

acquaintances, what registered with most people as I recounted tales from my past was shock or disbelief. Many found it difficult to fathom that people behaved as I described, while others thought either that I tended toward exaggeration in my accounts, or that they were fabricated by an over-active imagination.

It was the inability of many, who themselves had never been in a position to know first hand that what I told them wasn't that unusual that provided the final impetus to pursue the current research. Not only would research on the subject of interracial marriages and relationships provide the public with a glimpse into private lives, but would potentially reveal the underlying sources of the various reactions that individuals have both to the relationships themselves, as well as the reports of interracial couples experiences. With all this in mind, I embarked on my research, bolstered by the belief that it was a topic that elicited at times tremendous interest, at others a raised eyebrow which I took as a reflection of at least curiosity about the subject.

I have been counselled at various times to work toward a quantitative analysis of incidences of interracial marriages, and the attitudes toward them. I however felt discouraged by suggestions that I pursue my research from that perspective. I became interested in sociology because I viewed it as a discipline in which the humanities are uniquely combined. In an effort to understand social behaviour and systems, sociology has not depended on placing the burden of explanation solely upon individuals as psychology does, nor does it rely exclusively on more theoretical or speculative approaches that philosophy often engages in. Instead, it provides an opportunity to engage in both while allowing the process to be grounded in both the parts and the whole, that is society itself, and the basis upon which society's existence depends: the individual human beings.

It was and remains my contention that in dealing with something as personal as marriage and

relationships, a humanistic perspective was the appropriate framework for analysis. Not only would a qualitative analysis do more justice to those whose time and experiences were instrumental to the research, but at the same time adhere to the ethnographic tradition in sociology.

Like most, this project and ultimately this thesis have undergone a series of changes as it passed through the stages of conception to fruition. Some of those changes were the result of practical limitations that were realized in the course of engaging in the research process, others were a natural by-product of allowing the results to take their own shape rather than trying to shape them into what I expected my research to reveal, and finally others were borne out of the struggle to overcome obstacles that I incurred while trying to take my findings and explain them in theoretical contexts that were sociologically sound. It is my sincere hope that I have not violated the spirit of the project or the principles of sociological inquiry, but more importantly, hope that my efforts have remained true to the objective of enhancing our understanding of interracial relationships, from an interpersonal and social perspective.

APPENDIX TWO

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APPENDIX THREE

FILMS:

JUNGLE FEVER: WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP

MISSISSIPI MASALA: EAST INDIAN FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP

THE CRYING GAME: BLACK TRANSVESTITE/ WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER: WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP

LOVE FIELD: WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP

MISTRESS: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

MADE IN AMERICA: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

HEAT AND DUST: WHITE FEMALE/EAST INDIAN MALE RELATIONSHIP

THE WORLD OF SUSIE WONG: ASIAN FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

A PATCH OF BLUE: WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP

WHITE MEN CAN'T JUMP: HISPANIC FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

BODYGUARD: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

OTHELLO: WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP

THE KING AND I: WHITE FEMALE/ASIAN MALE RELATIONSHIP

AMERICAN FLYERS: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

TELEVISION SHOWS:

A DIFFERENT WORLD: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

ALL MY CHILDREN: BLACK FEMALE/ WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP, WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP, ASIAN FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP

GENERATIONS: WHITE FEMALE/ BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP

ONE LIFE TO LIVE: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP, WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP

AS THE WORLD TURNS: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

THE JEFFERSONS: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

KNOTS LANDING: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

FRESH PRINCE OF BEL-AIR: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

NIGHT COURT: ASIAN FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP

L.A. LAW: WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP

STREET LEGAL: WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP

STAR TREK DEEP SPACE NINE: ASIAN FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

SHALOM, SAALAM: EAST INDIAN FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

QUEEN: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

GENERAL HOSPITAL: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP

A FIGHT FOR JENNY: WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP

BOOKS:

JASMINE: EAST INDIAN FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP (FICTION)

FIRST WIVES CLUB: WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP (FICTION)

QUEENIE: EAST INDIAN FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP (NON-FICTION)

YOUR BLUES AIN'T LIKE MINE: WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP (FICTION)

INVISIBLE MAN: WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP (FICTION)

SULA: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP (FICTION)

WAITING TO EXHALE: WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP (FICTION)

MAMA: BLACK FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP (FICTION)

A MARRIAGE OF INCONVENIENCE: WHITE FEMALE/BLACK MALE RELATIONSHIP (NON-FICTION)

DAYS AND NIGHTS IN CALCUTTA: EAST INDIAN FEMALE/WHITE MALE RELATIONSHIP (NON-FICTION)