ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of how white women in interracial relationships and/or white mothers of biracial children understand race. Through interviews with six self-identified white women who have black-white biracial children, I seek to understand what role racism plays in their lives and whether these women have a heightened consciousness about race as a result of being in an interracial family. Using their narratives and a spatial framework, I explore the concept of white supremacy, whiteness and blackness, representations of white femininity and black masculinity in the media, and how white women in interracial relationships cross the colourline in their everyday lives. I suggest that white women learn about colourlined spaces in public, but that they also learn about blackness and teach their biracial children about antiracism in private spaces. Overall, white women need to negotiate rules and norms within racial hierarchies in order to navigate white supremacy.
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Preface

White Women in Interracial Families

For this study, I interviewed six self-identified White women who are raising Black-White biracial children and who were or are in relationships with Black men. I explored their childhood and teenage years, their interracial relationships, and their lives as mothers of biracial children. I began the study interested in three questions: How do White women in interracial relationships understand race; what role does racism play in their lives, and do they develop a heightened consciousness about race as a result of being in an interracial family?

White women who are in interracial relationships and/or are mothers of biracial children ought to be studied because they are an example of a demographic group who regularly cross the colourline in their everyday lives. The colourline is the social, legal, political, and economic racial segregation between White and Non-White people historically and presently that I will explain more thoroughly in chapter one. Their actions have significant ramifications for society because of the threat or realization of miscegenation. Although anti-miscegenation laws no longer exist, miscegenation continues to threaten white supremacy because the lives of interracial couples and/or their biracial children obscure racial hierarchies and boundaries that still exist. As bearers of White babies and guardians of the white race, White women are of particular importance in white supremacy.

1 During the interviews I did ask my interviewees general questions about their relationships with their spouses, but I did not probe into detailed aspects of their relationships. What my thesis does not do is thoroughly deconstruct the relationship between my interviewees and their spouses. My intention going into the interviews was to focus on the mother-child relationship and to analyze whether these women’s racial consciousness changed as a result of them parenting a Non-White child. Some of the difficulties I encountered later in my study was a gap in my research pertaining to their relationships with their spouses. I realized that I had neglected to interrogate enough about their interracial relationships, when in hindsight, the parenting is the end story, and the relationship is the beginning. Therefore, I periodically felt that I was missing part of the story, which I will remind the reader of throughout the chapters when necessary.

2 Miscegenation – originally a derogatory term used to describe interracial sexual relations – was popularized by American David Croly in 1864. He was a pro-slavery journalist and wrote the pamphlet Miscegenation: The theory of the Blending of Races, Applied to the White Man and the Negro (New York: Dexter, Hamilton, 1864). For more information, see George Fredrickson’s Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914 (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 171-172.

3 Anti-miscegenation laws were laws prohibiting the marriage between white people and people of colour.
This chapter will begin by highlighting some of the scholarship that examines White women in interracial relationships and White mothers of Black-White biracial children, which includes books grounded in feminism and critical race studies, and parenting books. I will then outline the methodology used to make this thesis, my research questions and goals that framed this paper, and the design of my study.

In her acclaimed book, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, Ruth Frankenberg interviewed thirty women and used their life histories to demonstrate that, “…dealing with racism is not merely an option for White people – that, rather, racism shapes White people’s lives and identities in a way that is inseparable from other facets of daily life.”⁴ She found in her interviews that White women do discuss race and racism, that they are sometimes racist, and that they challenge racism too.⁵ *White Women, Race Matters* includes an analysis of White women in interracial relationships. She shows how the negative ideas about interracial relationships that shaped White women’s lives in the late twentieth century were connected to the anti-miscegenation laws of the previous centuries and to historical constructions of black masculinity and white femininity.⁶ However, interracial relationships are not central in her study.

Although this topic of White women in interracial relationships has remained marginal in critical race studies, there are a few notable authors that have written about this demographic group. Katerina Deliovsky wrote *White Femininity: Race, Gender & Power*⁷ to explore what white femininity is, how white heterosexuality is accessed and performed by White women, and how White women in North America (Canada, in particular) participate in white femininity via a set of privileges and rituals. Similar to Frankenberg’s work, Deliovsky also includes how interracial relationships shape white femininity. She uses her interviewee’s narratives about interracial families to demonstrate how White families transmit ideologies of compulsory white heterosexuality and racial solidarity to their family members, and how their daughters understand and conform to these ideologies.⁸ Deliovsky also outlines the rewards that White women receive for being racially loyal, and the punishments they

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⁵ Ibid., 71.
⁶ Ibid., 77-78.
⁸ Ibid., 58-59.
encounter from family members and strangers when they are in relationships with Non-White men.\(^9\)

Perhaps the most pivotal work written specifically about White women in interracial families is France Winddance Twine’s *A White Side of Black Britain: Interracial Intimacy and Racial Literacy*\(^{10}\), which documents her ten-year longitudinal study of White mothers of Black-White biracial children. Twine explores what she calls the “racial consciousness biographies”\(^{11}\) of her interviewees. The goal of *A White Side of Black Britain* is to “provide a theoretically grounded analysis of the ways that White members of transracial families negotiate race, racism, and racialization and acquire racial literacy.”\(^{12}\) Twine stresses that she privileges “the experience and practices of White members of transracial families who have learned to recognize, name, and resist routine forms of white supremacy.”\(^{13}\) As one of the few authors to critically analyze the lives of White mothers with Black spouses and/or Black-White children, Twine focuses on “how White members of transracial families negotiate the shifting means of their whiteness, and thus of race,” noting that “their daily cultural practices have been ignored by conventional analyses of social movements, racism, and anti-racism.”\(^{14}\)

However, academic studies are not the only field to marginalize the lives of White parents in discussions of interracial families.

Parenting books that address the parenting of biracial children focus on diagnosing racism as a problem in the lives of biracial children, and they offer advice on how to assist children in managing racist incidents and their multiracial identities. The intent of these books is to describe the children’s experience with race. While this focus on the children’s lives makes logical sense within the context of these books’ purpose, what the authors of these books fail to articulate are the ways that gender, race, and class intersect to shape the parent’s lives. Parents of biracial children who encounter race discrimination because of their parent-child relationship have few resources at their disposal. Parenting manuals assume that parents are already familiar with concepts of racism and will understand the advice offered with respect to their children. For example, Marguerite Wright wrote *I’m Chocolate, You’re

\(^9\) Ibid., 55-63.
\(^{11}\) Ibid., 23.
\(^{12}\) Ibid., 4, italics original.
\(^{13}\) Ibid.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., 8.
Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race-Conscious World, A Guide for Parents and Teachers. Wright is a psychologist, who specializes in children and family issues. She interviewed and counselled children in mental health centers, clinics, and schools. She conducted a range of experiments to determine what children knew about race, and concluded that children do not understand race as adults do. Wright’s book traces the developmental stages of racial awareness that children pass through, and argues that parents need to understand these stages in order to help guide their children toward positive self-esteem and self-worth. However, Wright’s book does not offer any suggestions for how parents themselves may understand race or gender, or how white supremacy structures parents’ lives. Wright either assumes that parents and teachers already understand these concepts, or that they do not need to understand these concepts in order to assist biracial children through the stages of racial awareness.

In contrast to Wright’s book, Kerry Anne Rockemore and Tracey Laszloffy theorize how race is experienced by people, how the history of various types of racism have formed people’s identities, and how communities, gender, and appearances affect individual’s experiences in their book Raising Biracial Children. This book is valuable because the authors highlight that racism is not limited to isolated incidents or individual acts. They outline examples of ideological racism, institutional racism, and individual racism, and emphasize how interracial families are implicated in the system of racism. However, some of this book has a positivist approach to race studies because the authors insinuate that people can be neatly categorized onto a black-to-biracial-to-white continuum. While the theories and models in this book are visually interesting, they essentialize raced identities.

Marion Kilson and Florence Ladd wrote Is That Your Child? Mothers Talk about Rearing Biracial Children. Initially, this book seems the most relevant to this thesis because Kilson and Ladd specifically analyze the demographic group of mothers with Black-White biracial children. Moreover, the authors are mothers of biracial children and they interviewed twenty mothers of biracial children. Although this is one of the few books that

16 Ibid., 8-9.
18 Ibid., 39-59.
utilizes a feminist methodology of offering mother’s narratives and advice about parenting biracial children to other mothers, it becomes quickly apparent that their stories are directed at middle and upper class mothers, and that they provide advice that some women would not be able to implement or relate to. For example, the authors spoke about the importance of having racialized housekeepers\(^{20}\), going on research sabbaticals and trips to Africa\(^{21}\), and they suggest that families should travel to Jamaica to see other interracial families\(^{22}\). One interviewee recalls that she felt that her children were safe from discrimination because they attended a private school\(^{23}\), while another set of parents were able to teach their children about black history because they both held doctorates in African American history\(^{24}\). In addition to their advice being directed at middle and upper class mothers, most of the advice that is offered centers on simply seeing Black people and acknowledging their existence, rather than resisting racism or understanding how white supremacy works. As well, all of the interviewees are from the Boston area, so readers from outside this geographical area may not be able to relate to their narratives. Finally, although *Is That Your Child?* does provide narratives from mothers of biracial children, this book is also dedicated to understanding the child’s experience, rather than assisting the mothers in learning about the role of race and gender in their own lives.

Overall, the goal of these parenting books is to document how biracial children experience and understand race, and how the children negotiate their racial identities. By learning about how the children understand race, the assumption is that parents may be able to address race more adequately. The books that do focus on the lives of White mothers with biracial children only provide narratives from other mothers with biracial children, rather than conceptual frameworks about how knowledge is constructed. The parenting books do not pay attention to the mothers’ need to understand what race and racism is, how these concepts construct the mother’s identity, or how these women are implicated in racial hierarchies and white supremacy. In essence, with the exception of Twine, few authors consider the mother’s lived experience and how White women who are mothers of biracial

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 10.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 4 and 10.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 97.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., 90.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., 100.
children need to negotiate the systems of racism, sexism, and white supremacy in order to parent their children. I hope to make a modest contribution in this direction.

**My Methodology, Research Questions and the Design of My Study**

As in France Twine’s work, I propose to explore how parenting biracial children shapes White women’s knowledge of race, and their experiences with race and racism. However, my study is different from *A White Side of Black Britain* because unlike Twine’s research, my interviewees do not live in a culturally-rich city with dominant ethnic enclaves and they are not active in social justice work. Both of these factors are significant because they suggest that my interviewees live in homogenous white neighbourhoods, and that they were likely detached from diversity issues or from learning about racial inequities in their immediate surroundings. As well, it must be noted that all of my interviewees were lower-to-middle class and they were all in heterosexual relationships. Therefore, this study is not include any analysis of how sexual minorities or various classes of people experience crossing the colourline.

My premise is that in order to understand the complex lives of White mothers with biracial children, we must first understand how they are produced as subjects through the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and the system of white supremacy. In addition to these concepts, we must also understand how they experience crossing the colourline and how they negotiate rules and norms within racial hierarchies in order to parent their biracial children and live in interracial families. I began my study with the following research questions in mind:

- How do White women understand whiteness?
- What is the role of White women in white supremacy, and how does controlling White women’s bodies and sexuality matter in white supremacy?
- How is the colourline lived or experienced, and what happens when the colourline is crossed?
- Are there raced and gendered experiences that are unique to White women with biracial children?
● Do White women with biracial children develop a better understanding of racial issues and racial identities? Does their racial consciousness change because of their mother-child relationship?

● How do White women negotiate their understanding of race and systems (patriarchy, sexism, racism) that they’re involved in, as White mothers of biracial children?

● What is the process through which White women come to a critical race consciousness?

● How can White mothers of biracial children effectively teach their children about race?

My research questions and goals are valuable to both critical race scholars and White mothers of biracial children. For critical race scholars, my research will examine the various ways in which White women negotiate their racial and gender identities, and will propose that White women can develop a critical race consciousness through their everyday experiences with crossing the colourline. My study will contribute an understanding of how White women may develop a critical race consciousness, and will suggest what criteria is necessary to move from learning about race, to experiencing race difference, which will perhaps lead to new teaching and learning strategies in anti-racist work. Finally, if we can understand how White women – who are of the dominant race and beneficiaries of white privilege – come to a critical race consciousness, and how they learn to recognize, appreciate, and even teach others (i.e. their children) about how race difference and racism operates, then perhaps we can transfer these methodologies to other systems of power, such as patriarchy, sexism, classism, and more. For White mothers of biracial children, I hope that my research will fill in some of the gaps that the parenting books have left open. That is, I hope my research sheds light on how we negotiate the terrain of race, and how we might contest the policing of racial boundaries in a white supremacist society.

It is important for the reader to know that my interest in this work, my research questions, and my goals are grounded in my own heritage and subject position as a biracial woman. My mother is Polish-American and my father is African-Canadian, and I grew up among other interracial families in our extended community. As a brown-skinned female in a Black-White
family, who grew up in a small predominantly-white city in Southern Ontario, I believe that I became acutely aware of race difference at a young age and yearned to understand race relations and racism. My interest in the demographic group of White mothers with Black-White biracial children is twofold. I can recall as a young adult that White women who had biracial babies with Black men (which included some of my close friends) wanted to speak to my mother for advice about rearing their children. I can now reflect on these moments and see that they wanted to hear about her experience with crossing the colourline in this intimate way. Secondly, as a brown-skinned biracial woman with a White mother, I have always been interested in how my mother understands race and how her whiteness\(^{25}\) differs from White women who are in monoracial families. My own and my mother’s experiences with race deeply informs this study.

Furthermore, my subject position must be considered because as a biracial woman, I elicited certain responses from the women that I interviewed for this thesis. The women I interviewed shared their life histories with me, showed me family photographs, laughed and cried at certain points throughout the interviews, and many of them asked me for advice about parenting their biracial daughters who looked like me. I believe that my appearance contributed to a sense of familiarity and kinship between us, and that they perceived me as an authority on this topic because of the categories of identity that I embody. As well, I am influenced to read their narratives through my subjectivity too. Therefore, I cannot claim neutrality throughout this writing process because as Joan W. Scott notes about historians, “…deciding which categories to historicize is inevitably political, necessarily tied to the historian’s recognition of his or her stake in the production of knowledge.”\(^{26}\)

In order to understand the figure of the White woman in an interracial family and her encounters with crossing the colourline, I begin this study by mapping the concepts that I will use and their meanings in chapter one. One of the main concepts deconstructed in chapter one and used throughout my study is white supremacy. I attempt to outline how white supremacy is a pervasive institution that permeates the ways society is structured from the past to present, and how this system structures the way people think and the choices they make. I also suggest many ways that the system of white supremacy shapes and reshapes the

\(^{25}\) The concept of ‘whiteness’ is explained at length in chapter one.

lives of White women in interracial families. Next, I outline how race is overdetermining in people’s everyday lived experiences and the meaning of whiteness and blackness, which are also reoccurring concepts throughout the study. I also include how race is gendered, the meaning of black masculinity and white femininity, and how these concepts take on such significance in the lives of White women with Black spouses. In contrasting whiteness and blackness in relation to White women in interracial families, an analysis of the colourline is pertinent. I examine what the colourline is, how it has manifested historically and in contemporary society, and what happens to the status of White women when they transgress this colourline. Lastly, chapter one concludes with a brief discussion about the notion of experience and how I read my data from my interviews.

Chapter two explores representations about White women and Black men that emerge in popular culture, and the messages that can be read from these representations. Scholarship in this area suggest that it is dangerous for White women to cross the colourline and that interracial relationships are abnormal, and I propose that these messages continue to exist in popular culture today. This chapter will explore how the warnings are constructed, through symbolic and material constructions in popular culture mediums such as television and film.

Chapter three and four will discuss my findings from the interviews. Chapter three will show how White women learn about colourlined spaces in public and come to know themselves in and through public spaces from childhood to adulthood. The women’s narratives reveal that public spaces are significant for them because they develop their racial consciousness in this learning sphere. Through their experiences with racial hostility, racism, and navigating raced spaces, their racial consciousness grows and they begin to identify things as a Non-White person would. They learn this in the public sphere because people react to their families in public, and react to them as a White women with an interracial family.

Chapter four will demonstrate that private spaces are also important for developing White women’s racial consciousness. As children, White women learn about white femininity in their homes and what is constituted as ‘normal’ for their subject positions. Later on in life, the private sphere is also where they will practice their gender role as a mother, but as a White mother with biracial children, their experience includes practicing what France Twine
calls ‘racial literacy’\textsuperscript{27}. This includes teaching about anti-racism through the language of equity, and teaching about blackness and ethnic identities to their biracial children. This chapter will also highlight the tensions that can exist in an interracial household, as White women and their Black spouses negotiate white supremacy on a daily basis. Finally, chapter five will summarize the findings in this thesis, and will theorize about what these women’s narratives and experiences suggest about negotiating white supremacy in everyday daily practices. I will suggest what the implications of this study are for anti-racist education, and the thesis will end with a brief discussion about the complexities of living with the colourline in a white supremacist society.

\textsuperscript{27} Twine, 8.
Chapter One: Understanding White Women in Interracial Families

In this chapter I outline the concepts that are needed in order to analyze the lives of White women in interracial families and the meanings of these concepts. As mentioned in the preface, in order to understand the lives of White women in interracial families, it is imperative to consider how white supremacy and patriarchy work through each other to structure White women’s lives. In this chapter I will explain white supremacy as a system, race, gender, and sexuality, and how the colourline is maintained. I suggest in this chapter that these are interlocking concepts that constitute the figure of the White woman in an interracial family, and that all of these concepts must be explored before we can discuss how these women experience crossing the colourline in the following chapters.

White Supremacy – The System

Any study about White women who are in interracial families or relationships should include an analysis of white supremacy because it is the system that they navigate everyday. White supremacy structures how they cross the colourline as a mother and/or partner of Non-White people, it produces the regular hostilities that they encounter in their everyday lives, and they learn how to live with it by accommodating it, resisting it, and negotiating it in their daily routines. Charles W. Mills describes the system of white supremacy in his book *The Racial Contract*. Mills identifies the ‘Racial Contract’ as a social contract between White

28 The colourline, in short, is the social, legal, political, and economic racial segregation between white people and Non-White people. I will explain this concept more thoroughly toward the end of this chapter.

29 Patricia Hill Collins was one of the first scholars to use the term “interlocking” in the context that I am referring to here in her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Uwin Hyman, 1990) on page 225-226. She said that rather than privileging models of oppression such as racism, sexism, and patriarchy in the additive model of oppression, we must understand how race, class, and gender are interlocked in one matrix of domination. Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack then take up the same argument in their essay “The Race to Innocence: Confronting Hierarchical Relations among Women,” in *HeinOnline, Gender, Race & Just.* (335, 1997-1998). They explain on page 335-336 that “This ‘interlocking’ effect means that the systems of oppression come into existence in and through one another so that class exploitation could not be accomplished without gender and racial hierarchies; imperialism could not function without class exploitation, sexism, heterosexism, and so on. Because the systems rely on one another in these complex ways, it is ultimately futile to attempt to disrupt one system without simultaneously disrupting others.” These two explanations describe how I am using the term above.

people only, which is why he calls it a *Racial Contract.*\(^{31}\) He uses the concept ‘Racial Contract’ to illustrate the ways that white supremacy encompasses multiple aspects of society. Specifically, he uses it to “to *explain* the actual genesis of the society and the state, the way society is structured, the way the government functions, and people’s moral psychology.”\(^{32}\) Mills notes that this contract is a set of formal and informal agreements\(^{33}\) that are both real and conceptual.\(^{34}\) He explains that this contract:

establishes a racial polity, a racial state, and a racial juridical system, where the status of Whites and nonwhites is clearly demarcated, whether by law or custom…the purpose of this state…[is] to maintain and reproduce this racial order, securing the privileges and advantages of the full White citizens and maintaining the subordination of nonwhites.”\(^{35}\)

Mills’ Racial Contract is a useful tool for deconstructing how white supremacy structures our political history, and how it continues to shape our current political systems. Mills notes how evidence of this contract can be found throughout global history. However, he says that part of living within a white supremacist society today requires us to routinely deny the existence of white supremacy in the past. He says, “Ironically, the most important political system of recent global history – the system of domination by which White people have historically ruled over and, in certain important ways, continue to rule over Non-White people – is not seen as a political system at all.”\(^{36}\) Mills argues that by ignoring the history of white supremacy, we are in fact re-writing history.\(^{37}\)

Edward Said agrees that understanding white supremacy is critical to understanding global history. He noted that in 1914 “Europe held a grand total of roughly 85 percent of the earth as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions, and commonwealths. No other associates set of colonies in history was as large, none so totally dominated, none so unequal in power to the Western metropolis.”\(^{38}\) During European global colonization and occupation of the Americas, Asia, Africa, and the Pacific, race was continuously used to indicate superiority and inferiority in several contexts, with Whites always occupying the superior

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., 5.
\(^{33}\) Ibid., 11.
\(^{34}\) Ibid., 4.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., 13-14.
\(^{36}\) Ibid., 1-2.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 27.
position. Mills explains that, “There is an opposition of us against them with multiple overlapping dimensions: European versus non-European (geography), civilized versus wild/savage/barbarians (culture), Christians versus heathens (religion). But they all eventually coalesced into the basic opposition of White versus nonwhite.”

In addition to this superior-inferior binary, the very existence of a European colonial state is indicative of white supremacy’s presence. The creation of a European colony where a society already existed not only denies the existence of the previous non-European society, but it also implies that a modern society can only exist when Europeans intervene to build it. Furthermore, once this European colony was established, the previous Non-White owners of the land were either exterminated, given a subordinate status to the European colonizers, or were made invisible by being sent to reservations. The Racial Contract can also be seen as a historical fact because it can be found in treaties and theological pronouncements of ‘discovery’, colonial acts and Indian laws, and all of these acts privileged Europeans and subordinated Non-Whites. The legal slavery of First Nations peoples and Africans in North America was also based on the premise that Non-White people were racially inferior to European people.

Mills reminds us that the system of white supremacy and how it was constructed is not an irrelevant or far-removed part of our history. He states that “White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today.” For example, Canada is one of the White settler societies that also killed, displaced and continues to relocate its First Nations people. This history helps to explain why First Nations people still have higher poverty rates and higher suicide rates than non-Native Canadians. As well, the subjugation of Non-Whites in Canada continued through Canadian immigration policies. For example, in 1908, Robert Borden, Canada’s then immigration minister and future prime minister declared that “the Conservative Party stands for a white Canada” and even as late as 1955, the Canadian deputy minister of immigration said, “It is from experience, generally speaking, that coloured people in the present state of the White man’s thinking are not a

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39 Mills, 21, italics original.
40 Ibid., 13.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., 21.
43 Ibid., 26.
44 Ibid., 24.
46 Ibid., 29.
tangible asset…They do not assimilate readily and pretty much vegetate to a low standard of living…” and continued to talk about what he referred to as the “…problem of coloured people…”47 These sentiments continued to produce the “Keep Canada White” immigration policies until the second half of twentieth century48.

In addition to creating political systems which privilege Europeans on a global scale, white supremacy also works through the global economy. It is of particular importance to mention the effect that white supremacy has economically because there is a “…thesis of European specialness and exceptionalism [that] is still presupposed. It is still assumed that rationalism and science, innovativeness and inventiveness found their special home here…so that Europe was therefore destined in advance to occupy the special position in global history.”49 Mills demonstrates that European domination over the global economy is based neither on fate nor any unique inherent qualities that they have. He explains that European material advantages stem from their historical exploitation of the non-European world which they profited from via colonial conquest and colonial companies, plantation slavery, mining in non-European countries and trading non-European goods.50 Today, although former colonies have been decolonized, the global economy continues to be controlled by the former colonial powers through corporations and international financial institutions, and “Thus one could say that the world is essentially dominated by white capital…Whites control a percentage of the world’s wealth grossly disproportionate to their numbers…This globally color-coded distribution of wealth and poverty has been produced by the Racial Contract…”51 Furthermore, within formerly colonized states, Whites continue to live a better standard of living and reap the benefits of more opportunities than Non-Whites, which cannot be separated from intergenerational transfer of wealth from their White ancestors.52 On the other hand, Non-Whites continue to be discriminated against in employment (which includes wage and promotion discrimination), housing, and in services that they receive in contemporary white supremacist societies.53

47 Genevieve Fuji Johnson and Randy Enomoto, Race, Racialization, and Antiracism in Canada and Beyond (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 158.
48 Mills, 29.
49 Ibid., 33-34.
50 Ibid., 35.
51 Ibid., 36.
52 Ibid., 37.
53 Ibid., 38.
White Supremacy – How it is Lived

It is important to understand the political and economic facets of white supremacy because they are inseparable from how knowledge production is racialized and how white supremacy is experienced. In his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon, who is a Black man from Martinique who went to France to study medicine and is also an important anti-colonial theorist, provides descriptions of his experience with white supremacy. Fanon illustrates how a Black man understands the meaning of his black identity in a white supremacist society, and how racism is internalized and understood by its victims. Perhaps one of the most significant moments in this book is when Fanon recounts that while riding in a train, a child sees him and shouts to his/her mother, “Look, a Negro!” and then “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” During this confrontation, Fanon’s whirlwind of emotions quickly moves from amusement to near-paralysis as he deconstructs how it feels to be a Black person living in a white supremacist colonial society. He begins by describing how his personhood is erased and replaced by an array of stereotypes: “I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: ‘Sho’ good eatin’.’” Fanon experiences the trauma and violence of this moment of objectification. He says, “What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood...All I wanted was to be a man among other men.”

In addition to the confrontation described above, Fanon continues to discuss the narrow choices provided to him as a Black man living in a white supremacist society and how he lives within this system on a daily basis. He argues that race overdetermines his existence:

The white world, the only honourable one, barred me from all participation.

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54 It should be noted that Fanon is critiqued by feminists for making the male into the universal subject in *Black Skin, White Masks*, and positioning men as the exemplary colonized subject. Women, on the other hand, are only spoken of in terms of their sexual relationship with men. See Gwen Berger *Taboo Subjects: Race, Sex, and Psychoanalysis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 3.


56 Ibid., 112.

57 Ibid.
A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a man – or at least like a nigger. I shouted a greeting to the world and the world slashed away my joy. I was told to stay within bounds, to go back where I belonged...I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without.”

Even Fanon’s occupational position as a psychiatrist did not shield him from the system of white supremacy. Fanon clearly states that “No exception was made for my refined manners, or my knowledge of literature, or my understanding of the quantum theory.” Throughout *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon reminds his readers how non-negotiable this position of blackness is in white supremacy. He states, “Wherever he goes, the Negro remains a Negro.”

Fanon also analyzes various literary texts to demonstrate how white supremacy structures sexual relationships. He suggests that Black women despise Black men and avoid them because they want to “avoid falling back into the pit of niggerhood” that they are trying to escape, and to accomplish this they are “determined to select the least black” man possible. Fanon illustrates how Black women idealize whiteness and dream of turning white. He suggests that while Black women shun Black men, they spend their entire lives trying to find a White man to marry because marrying a White man can turn a Black woman white by allowing her to join the white world. It should be noted, however, that Fanon is critiqued for his analysis of Black women in *Black Skin, White Masks*. He is criticized for demonizing them, while he sympathises with Black men. For example, feminist Gwen Bergner argues that, “Fanon overlooks the ways in which colonial society perpetuates racial inequality through structures of sexual difference.”

Fanon also argues that Black men who marry White women are able to turn white, which is their goal too. He explains how a White woman can change a Black man’s racial identity: “By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a White man. I am a White man. Her love takes me into the noble road that leads to total...”

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58 Ibid., 114-116.
59 Ibid., 117.
60 Ibid., 173, italics original.
61 Fanon., 47-50.
62 Ibid., 44.
63 Ibid., 57-58.
realization...I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness.” Fanon argues that by marrying a White person, a Black person (man or woman) may become ‘deracialized’ by their intimate association with whiteness. Moreover, he suggests that both parties involved are aware of this racial negotiation. For all of his shortcomings in theorizing about Black women, Fanon understood that sexuality is an important battleground where competition between Black and White men is played out, and where masculine power is measured in the ability to possess White women.

Blackness and Whiteness

So far I have outlined how white supremacy is structured politically and economically, and I used Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* as an example of how the system is experienced. In order to understand the raced terrain that White women in interracial families live with everyday, the meaning of blackness and whiteness must be accounted for too. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how these binaries construct the figure of the White woman in popular culture.

In general, whiteness and blackness are constituted as opposites from each other, which assists in creating the hierarchal status of raced people. Blackness as a concept (which includes the culture, lifestyles, history and spaces associated with Black people) may change depending on the context in which it is used. Blackness can be found in a variety of subject areas. Blackness is in comedy, modern art, literature, music, film, fashion and beauty, sports, political activism, and much more. Although an expansive discussion of blackness is beyond the scope of this chapter, the complexity of the term ‘blackness’ deserves mention as it has warranted attention from many scholars. In the anthology *Black Popular Culture*, the “Editor’s Note” begins with a message on their use of the term ‘blackness’:

In recognition of the contest within African diasporic intellectual

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65 Ibid., 63.
66 Ibid., 71.
67 Ibid.
production over the meaning of the term ‘blackness’...let it suffice to say that...subtle differences in the ways scholars and artists think about the issues of black nationalism, essentialism, and Pan-Africanism, just to name a few, [is] revealed in the various essays and exchanges presented here. There is no definitive way this choice should be evaluated. It speaks to our personal histories and the diversity of thought and practice influencing our work.  

Therefore, while I will attempt to outline the ways in which blackness manifests itself through black nationalism, popular culture, and in opposition to whiteness, I recognize that there is a multitude of black experiences that changes via time periods and location.

Throughout this thesis, I will be using blackness within a North American context. To borrow from Herman Gray, “I use blackness to refer to the constellation of productions, histories, images, representations, and meanings associated with black presence...as a way to examine various positions and claims on it both from within the African American community and from outside of it.”  

Within the black community, blackness may relate to the history of Black people, which includes both a history of oppression and solidarity. Blackness has positive connotations, such as a black pride, black nationalism, a sense of unity among Black people, and a connection to Black leaders and ancestors, movements, and institutions that worked to earn equality for Blacks. These Black leaders and organizations include such names as Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, the NAACP, SNCC, the Black Panthers, and black academic institutions such as Spelman College, Clark Atlanta University, and Tuskegee University. From this perspective, blackness can be used as a metaphor for freedom, revolutionary activity, and a challenge to the status quo. Yet, in addition to these positive connotations, many negative connotations are associated with

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72 Black nationalism includes such things as “black self-determination, racial solidarity and group self-reliance, various forms of voluntary racial separation, pride in the historic achievements of persons of African descent, a concerted effort to overcome racial self-hate and to instil black self-love, militant collective resistance to white supremacy, the development and preservation of a distinctive cultural identity, and the recognition of Africa as the true homeland of those who are racially black.” See Tommie Shelby, We Who are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 24.
73 Tommie Shelby, We Who are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), x.
74 bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 37.
blackness that are connected to black history, many of which appear in popular culture mediums.

Representations of Black people in literature, film, and television has contributed to negative meanings of blackness. For example, during slavery Blacks were portrayed as lazy, simple, lacking culture, and mindless. In minstrel shows, White people performed in black face to portray Black people as fools and rapists. In the post-reconstruction era to the present day, these negative connotations of blackness continued as Blacks were stereotyped as certain characters, such as the Tom (the good negro who never turns against their master or employer), the Coon (the wild entertainer), the Tragic Mulatto (the mixed-race woman who is beautiful enough to attract a White man, but is tragically tainted by her black blood), the Mammie (the big and bossy house servant who is devoted to serving her white household), and the Bad Buck (the physically strong, violent, and hypersexualized male). Collectively, these characters create a blackness which is perceived to be more emotional, and representative of violence, chaos, backwardness and irrationality. Blackness is also associated with sexuality, instinct, and feelings above intellect.

In addition to these characters, there are also Black ‘identifiers’ that signify blackness in popular culture mediums, such as the soul-food restaurant or the black hair salon or barber shop. Representations such as these continue to be used in movies and television. For example, Spike Lee movies such as Boyz in the Hood, Juice, New Jack City, and Menace II Society, as well as the Black Entertainment Television (BET) network help to create a marketable type of blackness based on speech, music (from gospel, to blues, doo-wop, jazz, early rock ‘n’ roll, rhythm & blues, and now hip hop and rap), style and attitudes that are attributed to black lifestyles. Both White and Black authors and producers endorse these

77 Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’,” 251.
representations, and both Black and White audiences consume these images too. Bell hooks reminds us that “Systems of domination, imperialism, colonialism, and racism actively coerce Black folks to internalize negative perceptions of blackness, to be self-hating. Many of us succumb to this.”\(^{82}\) By continuously using these representations of blackness, people are able to juxtapose the various meanings of blackness to whiteness, which is often constructed as the opposite of blackness.

Whiteness (which includes the culture, lifestyles, history and spaces related to White people) is associated with reason, knowledge, intellectuality, and the ability to control emotional and sexual life.\(^{83}\) In contrast to the negative meanings of blackness, whiteness is also perceived as representing domination, enterprise, discovery, achievement, privilege, gentility, middle-class respectability, stability, calm, control, and order.\(^{84}\) Whiteness as a concept also connotes normality and trustworthiness,\(^{85}\) merit and advantage.\(^{86}\) Although whiteness, like blackness, may be difficult to define because of the diverse ways that it is used, most meanings of whiteness stem back to power and privilege because most White people benefit from being white, regardless of whether they intentionally want to or not.\(^{87}\) The benefits of whiteness are accrued from a range of experiences.

Whiteness can readily be detected by how people are treated. In schools, whiteness manifests itself in White students being perceived as smart, and being given second chances by teachers and other support staff.\(^{88}\) In banks, whiteness is used to determine whether somebody is given or denied access to credit because whiteness relays trustworthiness.\(^{89}\) Furthermore, whiteness is used to determine the quality and accessibility of healthcare, and it is used to grant job opportunities as well as job promotions.\(^{90}\) Whiteness also exists outside

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82 hooks, 166.
90 Ibid.
of institutions. In people’s everyday lives, whiteness is recreated when people choose where to live, work, and go to school. As well, whiteness is intergenerational. George Lipsitz, author of *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness*, describes how intergenerational wealth is maintained through whiteness:

> Whiteness has a cash value: it accounts for advantages that come to individuals through profits made from housing secured in discriminatory markets, through the unequal educations allocated to children of different races, through insider networks that channel employment opportunities to the relatives and friends of those who have profited most from present and past racial discrimination, and especially through intergenerational transfers of inherited wealth that pass on the spoils of discrimination to succeeding generations.

Another aspect of whiteness, which is sometimes contentious among academics, is that whiteness is invisible to White people. Many academics have noted that whiteness is so privileged, that White people are often not even aware of their own race, racism, or race privilege. Whiteness is a “social construction which produces race privilege for White people by appearing ‘neutral,’ unlinked to racial politics, universal, and unmarked.” Many White people believe that race is a negative characteristic that White people do not have, and therefore it is a characteristic that they do not have to deal with. They do not see the positive benefits and privileges that whiteness bestows upon them, nor how today’s major institutions were constructed for Whites by Whites and are still controlled by Whites. Instead, this too is believed to be normal. White privilege accounts for a lot of the taken-for-granted daily privileges that White people experience as ‘normal’. These include not being stopped at immigration controls or being respectfully served at restaurants, or being

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92 Ibid., vii.
93 Grillo and Wildman, 398.
95 Bush, 61.
96 Ibid., 60.
98 Ibid.
able to experience peaceful, police-event-free driving. Rather than attributing these privileges to race:

a White person is taught to believe that all that she or he does, good and ill, all that [they] achieve, is to be accounted for in terms of [their] individuality. It is intolerable to realise that [they] may get a job or a nice house, or a helpful response at schools or in hospitals, because of [their] skin colour, not because of the unique, achieving individual [they] must believe [themselves] to be.

White privilege also manifests itself in a culture of silence among White people, in which they are taught to disconnect themselves from their racial experiences. Starting in their youth, White children are often silenced by their parents when they make racial observations, and this culture of silence continues throughout their adulthood as White people are taught by one another not to discuss race and to leave that part of their lives uninvestigated in their daily experiences. The result is that most Whites do not think about their race unless they are directly asked to. Karyn D. McKinney, author of Being White: Stories of Race and Racism, describes this obliviousness like a child’s peek-a-boo game. She says, “as White people we are able to cover our eyes to consciousness of ‘race’ and, in doing so, fool ourselves into thinking that, because we do not ‘see’ race, we will not be seen as racialized beings. In this state of pseudo-invisibility, Whites have more often consumed the stories of racialized others, while their own lives remain unexplored.”

Richard Dyer also wrote about white invisibility in his book White, which analyzes representation of whiteness in Western visual culture. He says that, “As long as race is something only applied to Non-White peoples, as long as White people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people.” He cautions that when White people are perceived as ‘just’ humans, then they are able to speak for all humanity, while Non-Whites can only speak for their race. He argues that “White people need to learn to

101 Dyer, 9.
103 McKinney, 2.
105 Ibid., 3, italics original.
106 Dyer, 1.
107 Ibid., 2.
seem themselves as white, to see their particularity. In other words, whiteness needs to be made strange.”

Sarah Ahmed agrees that White people need to pay attention to their whiteness. She argues that while whiteness is presented as invisible in whiteness studies, it is only invisible to White people. For Non-White people, it is hard not to see whiteness; it seems everywhere.

Yet, while White people studied, classified, and categorized Non-White people as ‘racialized’ for the past few centuries, White people have not identified themselves as racialized; they were ‘just’ humans. This would account for the fact that it was not until the end of the twentieth century – with the emergence of identity politics – that discussions specifically about ‘whiteness’ by White people began in the academy. This timing could be because during the second half of the twentieth century, minority populations burgeoned in American cities, and made Whites experience their whiteness. It was at this point that Whites “…began to feel marked by ‘race,’ and once marked, there’s something to observe, to study, and to account for.” Meanwhile, African-American scholars have been observing and studying whiteness for over a century. For example, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote Darkwater in 1920, and in it he wrote a chapter titled “The Souls of White Folk”. This was one of the

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108 Ibid., 10.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Robert Miles coined the term ‘racialization’ to “refer to the process by which attributes such as skin colour, language, birth place, and cultural practices are given social significance as markers of distinction” in Regina v. Corporation of Victoria [1888] BCR 331 at 331. For reference see Kay Anderson, Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourses in Canada 1875-1980 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1991), 18. I am following David Theo Goldberg’s definition of ‘racialized’ in his book Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 2. He comments that ‘racialized’ includes “any and all significance extended both explicitly and silently by racial reference over discursive expression and practice.” Therefore, Goldberg suggests that being racialized means having racial significance, which means that white people cannot be racialized. Radhika Mohanram also suggests that being ‘marked’ includes being racially categorized as ‘brown’ or ‘black,’ and that these words “contain within them the social, economic and cultural history, as well as the markers of the places of domicile, of the subject.” For more information, see Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), xii. Mohanram says black bodies are marked by their body movements, language, and the way their body is held and how it occupies space on page xii. She too suggests on page 4 that black bodies are marked and immobile, while white bodies are unmarked and mobile.
112 Dyer, 2.
113 Ibid., 8.
114 Duster, 17.
115 Ibid.
first lengthy analysis of white identity and whiteness. Du Bois understood the privilege and merit attributed to whiteness. He wrote:

Today…the world in a sudden, emotional conversion has discovered that it is white and by that token, wonderful!...How easy, then, by emphasis and omission to make children believe that every great soul the world ever saw was a White man’s soul; that every great thought the world ever knew was a White man’s thought; that every great deed the world ever did was a White man’s deed; and that every great dream the world ever sang was a White man’s dream.117

In addition to black scholars writing about whiteness, Black people – as slaves, house servants, and other types of informants – have been conversing about whiteness and sharing facts and observations about whiteness for centuries, in order to survive and cope in a white supremacist society.118 Yet, in spite of the African-American scholarship and knowledge about whiteness that has existed for many years, it was not until White people identified and wrote about themselves that a field of “Whiteness Studies” was created to meet their interests.119 This, in itself, is another example of white privilege.

Today, whiteness is studied in the academy through many departments, including sociology, education, English, women’s studies, and in popular culture studies, to name a few.120 Whiteness is studied as representation, performance, hegemony, ideology, science, and as form of colonialism.121 Throughout the hundreds of books, articles, ethnographies and studies about whiteness, “This diverse scholarship is linked by a common denominator – an examination of how power and oppression are articulated, redefined and reasserted through various political discourses and cultural practices that privileges whiteness even when the prerogatives of the dominant group is contested.”122

Finally, White people have a history of allowing only certain European ethnicities to be identified as white, and therefore reap the benefits of whiteness. After all, “Given the overwhelming advantage of power, privilege, and material well-being associated with being

118 hooks, 165.
119 McKinney, 10-11.
121 Michelle Fine, Off White 2nd ed., ix.
122 Twine and Gallagher, 5-7.
‘white,’ who counts as ‘white’ is important.” In his book *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Matthew Frye Jacobson describes “three great epochs” that constitute the history of whiteness in the United States. The first epoch was in 1790 when America’s first naturalization law conflated naturalized citizenship with “free White persons”, which created an unambiguous boundary of whiteness based on citizenship and Anglo-Saxon heritage. In the 1840s, when America began to receive more immigrants from Europe (primarily from Italy, Germany, Hungary, Norway, and Russia), which included “undesirable” white-skinned people from Ireland, debates started about who was exactly fit for self government. This massive immigration continued from the 1840s until 1924, which prompted a “fracturing of whiteness into a hierarchy of plural and scientifically determined White races. Vigorous debates ensued over which of these was ‘fit for self government’ in the good old Anglo-Saxon sense.” Then during the 1920s, as African American migrants headed North and West, whiteness was reconsolidated. Jacobson notes:

> the late nineteenth century’s probationary white groups were now remade and granted the scientific stamp of authenticity as the unitary Caucasian race – an earlier era of Celts, Slavs, Hebrews, Iberics, and Saracens, among others, had become the Caucasians...

Clearly, the presence of Africans and other non-desirable people helped to consolidate and clarify a white identity. The Irish, Jews, and Italians ethnicities would still be considered inferior whites to the original and superior Anglo-Saxon whites, but they were at least categorically different from Africans, Aboriginals, and Asians.

Overall, whiteness has to be understood as a construction which elicits certain privileges and only allows certain people to identify as white. This aspect of whiteness is imperative to comprehending what happens when White people cross the colourline and are removed from the constructions of whiteness. In order to understand the figure of the White

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123 Deliovsy, 20.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid., 7-8.
128 Ibid., 8.
woman in an interracial family specifically, a discussion of how race is gendered is required too.

**Race, Gender, and Sexuality – Black Masculinities and White Femininities**

When analyzing the narratives or lives of White women who are mothers of Black-White biracial children, or who are partners of Black men, race has to be understood within the context of gender. Although the meaning of blackness and whiteness has already been outlined, race takes on even more meaning when it is contextualized as black masculinity or white femininity.

The meaning of white femininity has changed over the last few centuries, but there are certain aspects that have remained the same. Initially gender ideals and models of behaviour for European men and women were inspired by Christianity.\(^{130}\) Mary modelled behaviour for the white feminine ideal, which included purity, passivity, grace, and motherhood as fulfillment.\(^{131}\) These were the ideals that European women could aspire to. Yet in the 17\(^{th}\) and 18\(^{th}\) centuries, the perception of women’s sexuality changed. Rather than being perceived as inherently pure because of her role as a mother, Europeans began to believe that women were very sexual, impulsive and passionate because of their reproductive role, and that they needed to be controlled.\(^{132}\) Later, during the Victorian era, women were idealized as virtuous, moral, and domestic beings again, but needing the protection of a man.\(^{133}\) Although the perception of women changed throughout these centuries, what remained the same was the significance of White women’s reproductive role, sexuality, and the need to be domesticated and controlled by White men.\(^{134}\)

This construction of white feminine ideology served a purpose. Radhika Mohanram suggests in her book *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space* that “…the domestic ideal of a virtuous, homebound woman…is necessary for the construction of nationalism that

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130 Dyer, 16-17.
131 Ibid., 17.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
makes imperialism possible.”

She demonstrates that men and women have a sexual contract that served white colonial society. Women were the workers in the home, and in colonial societies this home is especially important because it signifies security and nostalgia for Britain. In the colony, women represented something that was constant and unchanging by reconstructing British homes in foreign spaces, to help comfort and fulfill the needs of colonial men who were in unfamiliar territory. “The act of moving to new lands, new spaces and new situations necessitated locating women as constant. The woman in the house compensated for the constant contact with difference.” To ensure that women understood their role in the home, conduct books were published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that taught women how to be good domesticated house managers and wives.

Another aspect of white femininity that has not changed is the role of the White woman as a mother. There are certain character traits that are expected of a ‘good’ White mother: she must care about her children, she must be in a heterosexual relationship, married, and above all, she must be racially loyal to White men. Good White girls are racially loyal, meaning that they marry White men and produce White babies. Their adherence to this relationship determines their respectability within the white community, and their acceptance into whiteness in general. Whiteness is gendered because it is “contingent on European women enacting a partnership and racial solidarity with European men” through sexual and familial relations. Furthermore, White women needed to remain racially loyal to White men because as bearers of White babies, and thus the White race, this loyalty ensured that the future of the White race was secure. Ensuring that White women were racially loyal also played a part in the economic aspect of white supremacy. Katerina Deliovsky explains that:

white bodies were needed for the reproduction of European domination and European women were the ‘reproducers’ of that population…Purity of race, essential for white empire and settler colonies, could only be

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135 Ibid., 158.
136 Ibid., 159-160.
137 Ibid., 165.
138 Ibid., 167.
139 Ibid., 154.
141 Deliovsky, 30.
reproduced within all-European unions.\textsuperscript{142}

In order to ensure that White women’s sexuality was controlled, anti-miscegenation laws were created. These laws criminalized interracial marriage and sometimes interracial sex. As well, interracial relationships were socially constructed as immoral and disgraceful, to deter White women from being in sexual relationships with Non-White men.\textsuperscript{143}

Although this sentiment was agreed upon in white society, not all White women were perceived as deserving protection. These raced and gendered identities were classed too. Middle and upper class White women were perceived as representing the feminine ideal of purity, and therefore if they were caught having a sexual relationship with a Black man, it was typically believed that the man had raped her.\textsuperscript{144} “It was imagined that elite English women could not harbour sexual desire for African men because they were too virtuous to entertain such ideas of men who were cast as beast-like. Their elite status as middle/upper-class English women was conflated with ‘white’ womanhood.”\textsuperscript{145} On the other hand, poverty had the affect of de-feminizing White women because they were believed to be more promiscuous, and therefore more willing to engage in relations with Non-White men.\textsuperscript{146}

White women’s whiteness, then, also depends on the image of Black men as sexualized beasts\textsuperscript{147}, which is why an analysis of black masculinity is also critical to this thesis. Similar to the image of white femininity, black masculinity has also changed over time and sexuality has remained a key aspect of its meaning. During slavery, the image of the Black male was a feminine, subjugated “coon”. As a human with no rights to freedom, marriage, or mobility, the Black man posed little threat to the White male as long as he remained a slave. After emancipation though, the Black male began to threaten white masculinity more. After the Civil War, white masculinity underwent a crisis in masculinity.\textsuperscript{148} Not only had southern White men lost the war, land, and slaves, but they had also lost some of their authority over White women because the women had stayed home

\begin{footnotes}
\item[142] Ibid., 56-57.
\item[143] Ibid., 57.
\item[144] Ibid., 33-34.
\item[145] Ibid., 34.
\item[146] Ibid., 33.
\end{footnotes}
independently to protect the homefront.\textsuperscript{149} After the war, White men returned home to women who were more self-sufficient and to the newly emancipated Black male. The presence of a newly freed population of Black men in America threatened white masculinity on many levels. From an economic perspective Black men could now own land and businesses that could compete with white-owned companies; from a political perspective they could now vote and potentially change the balance of power in government, and from a sexual perspective they were legally free to marry and consort with women.

It is at this time that the Black male figure underwent another transition. Rather than being perceived as the docile, feminine figure that he had previously been during slavery, the black masculine figure transitioned into the mythic black rapist. Post-emancipation, the figure of the Black male:

\begin{quote}
takes the form of an intense masculinisation in the figure of the Black male as mythically endowed rapist. Through the discourse of the Black male rapist, racial difference is cast now simply as sexual, but as a heightened sexual perversity.\textsuperscript{150}
\end{quote}

This hypersexualized and aggressive figure of the Black male served many purposes. The mythic black rapist provided White men with a reason to subjugate the Black male again. As Robyn Wiegman notes, “…within the ‘logic’ of an excessive hypermasculinization, the Black male’s claim to citizenship – voting rights, employment, and more abstract privileges of the patronymic – are violently denied.”\textsuperscript{151} As well, with the loss of some of the anti-miscegenation laws that had existed during slavery, the myth of the Black male rapist produced another reason why White women should abstain from sexual relations with Black men, and even fear them.\textsuperscript{152}

As previously discussed, White women need to remain racially loyal for white supremacy to work. With the Black male’s new freedom, White men’s need to protect White woman was renewed. Lisa Cardyn, author of “Sexualized Racism/Gendered Violence: Outraging the Body Politic in the Reconstruction South” comments that, “Freedmen, no longer restrained by the dictates of slavery, might now unleash their supposedly bestial tendencies upon unsuspecting White women. Worse still were signs that some White

\begin{footnotes}
\item[149] Ibid., 813-814.
\item[150] Wiegman, 83.
\item[151] Ibid.
\item[152] Ibid., 84.
\end{footnotes}
women...might actually prefer the sexual companionship of Black men.” The response to this Black male threat was both violent and sexual, and often involved lynching and castrating Black men who socialized with White women or were suspected of having sexual relations with them. Lynching was used to maintain white supremacy because it “attempted to preserve and reinforce by extralegal means the racial hierarchies that were no longer sanctioned by slavery...Upper-class and poor Whites united against Blacks, who were isolated in a color caste system...” The castrating of Black men during the lynching ritual was both a symbolic and sexual representation of gender roles:

In severing the Black male’s penis from his body, either as a narrative account or a material act, the mob aggressively denies the patriarchal sign and symbol of the masculine, interrupting the privilege of the phallus and thereby reclaiming, through the perversity of dismemberment, the Black male’s (masculine) potentiality for citizenship.

Therefore, for both the figure of the Black male and White female, racial difference has always been about sexual difference and maintaining raced gender roles.

**Establishing and Maintaining the Colourline**

This thesis has already mentioned some of the ways that White women have been legally and socially segregated from Black men. These barriers included anti-miscegenation laws, lynching, and the social disgrace associated with White women who were intimate with Black men. Collectively, these are some of the things that make up what W.E.B. Du Bois called the ‘colourline’ in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois stated very clearly in *The Souls of Black Folk* that “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colourline - the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea,” but the colourline had been established well before the twentieth century.

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153 Cardyn, 827-828.  
154 Apel, 25.  
155 Wiegman, 83.  
157 Ibid., 15.
There are many examples of the colourline - which is the spatial, social, legal, political, and economical racial segregation between White people and Non-White people. During slavery, the slave quarters were separated from the plantation house where the White slave-owner(s) lived with their family, and socializing between White people and Black slaves was strictly forbidden. When slaves and their White masters were physically together, it was understood that slaves were merely another piece of property, not a friend, companion, nor peer. Moreover, anti-miscegenation laws tried to ensure that Whites and Non-Whites did not become romantically involved or marry each other. After emancipation, legal segregation maintained the colourline between Whites and Non-Whites by creating separate facilities in every aspect of life. Blacks and Whites were not allowed to eat together in restaurants, sit next to each other on trains, buses, or streetcars, swim in the same pool, pray together in churches, be jailed or hospitalized together, attend the same schools, or even be buried in the same graveyard.

In the United States these “Jim Crow” laws existed until the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In Canada, Ontario was the first province to take steps toward social change with the 1944 Racial Discrimination Act, but it was not until the 1950s and 1960s that Canadian laws were created that made it illegal to refuse someone to move into a home, work, or be served because of their race.¹⁵⁸ Now that segregation is illegal, the colourline still exists in both of these countries through informal practices of segregation. David Goldberg, author of The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism, analyzes how informal segregation persist in America through racially redlining neighbourhoods in real estate practices.¹⁵⁹ He says that “The logic of the old segregation supposedly was swept aside – only to be replaced by the whisper of the new, the subtle and silent, the informal and insidious, what I earlier characterized as ‘the born again’ [racism].”¹⁶⁰

As well, during the post-emancipation era and the present, the colourline has been policed through illegal and violent means. The Klu Klux Klan in particular loathed the idea of interracial sex because it threatened the purity of the White race, and therefore threatened

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 77.
the existence of white supremacy. Lisa Cardyn notes that “…the maintenance of white supremacy in the American South demanded racial bipolarity and strict adherence to the colour line…thus the prevalence of interracial sex and the propagation of mulatto offspring embodied a powerful, concrete threat…”\textsuperscript{161} She also argues interracial sex always incited the KKK’s wrath, regardless of the individual’s marital status, race, or gender, and that intimacy across the colourline was read as an invitation to KKK terror.\textsuperscript{162} When interracial couples were found to be either having occasional sex, an intimate relationship or cohabitating, then both the man and woman could be victims of racial violence. Typically both people were whipped, which in addition to being publically humiliated, the whippings usually caused injury or death.\textsuperscript{163}

Black men were especially vulnerable in the Southern post-emancipation era. Black men who were suspected of having sex, a romantic relationship, interest, or too much social contact with White women were victims of lynching and castration, as previously mentioned. These lynchings were spectacles to which communities of people were invited to attend by advertisements and word-of-mouth. White adults and children alike gathered to watch as the Black man’s pain was prolonged by severing his genitals, toes, fingers and ears, which was followed by his hanging or burning to death.\textsuperscript{164} Throughout the ritual, photographers would take pictures and sell them later as souvenir postcards that White people could collect personally or publish in local newspapers.\textsuperscript{165} The advertising, photography, and community participation in this ritual testifies to the acceptability of policing the colourline through illegal means during the post-emancipation era.

Today, remnants of this racial violence persist as Black men continue to be lynched for having sexual relations with White women, albeit in smaller numbers, and as White people continue to act out these violent acts in other mediums in order to reinstate the colourline. For example, in June 2000, seventeen-year-old Raynard Johnson was found lynched from a pecan tree in front of his home in Kokomo, Mississippi, and his family claimed it was because he was dating a White girl.\textsuperscript{166} In July of 2002, Stanley Forestal of

\textsuperscript{161} Cardyn, 827.
\textsuperscript{162} Cardyn, 767.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 704.
\textsuperscript{164} Apel, 7.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 16.
Elma, New York, who was married to a White woman, was found hanging in a barn on his parent’s property. In May 2003, Feraris Golden was found hanging from a tree in Bell Glade, Florida, and it was rumoured that he was dating the daughter of a White police officer. At fraternity parties, White people have been photographed wearing KKK outfits and pretending to hang White men in black-face makeup. For example, during Halloween 2010, two men dressed up for a Halloween party at the Cambellford Royal Canadian Legion hall, one wearing a KKK hat and a confederate flag, and leading another White man in black-face around by a noose around his neck. The two men won first prize for the costume competition.

Black people have also been taunted with lynch-related harassment in the workplace. In 2000, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) filed at least twenty noose-related lawsuits. Lawsuits have been filed against White employers for harassing employees with a noose in hand, wrapping a noose around an employees neck, holding a noose and saying “This is what we used to do to you,” and for finding nooses hung in lockers and lunch rooms. Although companies often argue that these incidents were merely jokes, their connection to the past and their symbolic meaning is unmistakeable for their victims.

Within these messages of race hatred, the colourline continues to exist as Blacks and Whites understand its presence and navigate its existence everyday. For example, one of the women Ruth Frankenburg interviewed stated that “A lot of times if you were walking down the street – I’m a young White girl and there’s a Black man – he would drop his head an not look at you, it was a very subtle kind of thing, like, ‘I’m not looking at you, don’t worry.’” Frankenberg relates this to the violence Black men experienced historically for allegedly looking at, speaking to, or threatening White women. Therefore, even though it may be easy to see the demarcation of the colourline through segregation laws that previously existed, the divisions of the colourline can still be detected and understood in many ways today.

167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid.
171 Apel, 16.
172 Ibid., 17.
The Transgressor – White Women in Interracial Families

This chapter has outlined the system of white supremacy and how it is lived, the social construction of race, the meanings of whiteness and blackness, white femininity and black masculinity, and how the colourline exists and is policed in society. White women are at the heart of white supremacy because they are the reproducers of the White race and the guardians of the race in the home, therefore much is at stake when White women cross the colourline. This is why White people have tried to protect White women and keep them isolated from Non-White men with laws and social customs throughout the past few centuries.

White women in interracial families are perceived as transgressive by their communities because people can see that they have crossed the colourline when they are with their Non-White spouse and/or when they are mothering their biracial children, and people understand that they have transgressed the gender and racial boundaries that has been outlined in this chapter. When White women cross the colourline in this intimate way, their relationship with whiteness, race, and racism changes. Katerina Deliovsky, author of *White Femininity* notes that when White women cross the colourline:

their access to the rewards of ‘white’ membership is revoked. This revoking of membership signals that European women’s power is defined in limited and hegemonic ways and is contingent upon their actual and symbolic subordination to European masculine proprietorship. In this sense, compulsory ‘white’ heterosexuality, as hegemonic ideology, is revealed when it is disrupted by the presence of the racial Other. Consequently, ‘white’ womanhood is ideological, relational and most significant when in relation to blackness/otherness and maleness.\(^{174}\)

White women who cross the colourline can tell us a lot about how white supremacy, whiteness, and how the colourline works. Not only do they find themselves in a different position within the racial hierarchy, albeit on contingent and provisional terms\(^{175}\), but they also gain a heightened awareness of societal racism and become intimately connected with racial oppression through their transgressive role and their family life\(^{176}\). White women in interracial families know that they may lose their respectability and encounter violence when

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\(^{174}\) Deliovsky, 70.  
\(^{175}\) Frankenberg, 135.  
\(^{176}\) Ibid., 110-111.
they cross the colourline. This knowledge, combined with these experiences with race and racism, shape a White woman’s racial consciousness. Understanding this racial consciousness, where it forms and how it manifests is the premise for doing this work and will be outlined much more thoroughly in the following chapters.

Reading My Data – Experience as a Concept

The concepts in this chapter have also been deconstructed because the figure of a White woman in an interracial family cannot be viewed as an ahistorical concept, and white supremacy cannot be understood as simply ‘the way things work’. It is also important to understand how race and gendered racial identities are conceptualized, how these identities intersect, and how the politics of white supremacy influences these identities because I want to avoid essentializing categories of people or presenting them as fixed identities. In order to accomplish this, the notion of experience also deserves an analysis because it is relevant to how I will be reading my data from the interviews. I do not propose the modernist method of presenting stories as authentic accounts of experience to merely enlarge or challenge previous conventional understandings of White women’s experience. Joan W. Scott criticizes this methodology in her essay “The Evidence of Experience”. She notes:

When the evidence offered is the evidence of ‘experience,’ the claim for referentiality is further buttressed – what could be truer, after all, than a subject’s own account of what he or she has lived through? It is precisely this kind of appeal to experience as uncontestable evidence and as an originary point of explanation – as a foundation on which analysis is based – that weakens the critical thrust of histories of difference…these studies lose the possibility of examining those assumptions and practices that excluded considerations of difference in the first place. They take as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented and thus naturalize their difference.

Throughout this study, I will not be discussing experience as the origin of knowledge and I will not be highlighting my interviewee’s narratives as the bedrock of evidence. Instead, I will demonstrate how White mothers of biracial children contest given ideological

177 Scott, 776.
178 Ibid., 777.
179 Ibid.
systems, such as white supremacy and its categories of representation (black/white, feminine/masculine, superior/inferior), and how these categories constitute each other and function in white supremacist societies. Scott suggests that when historians rely on the subject’s own account of experience, what is left out are “Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, and how one’s vision is structured – about language (or discourse) and history – are left aside.” Therefore, I will continue to draw connections to the concepts in this chapter throughout the remaining chapters in this thesis.

When reading my interviewee’s narratives in the following chapters then, I cannot rely solely on my interviewee’s own account of experience. I need to also “attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences [because] it is not individuals who experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience.” The first concept that needs to be analyzed here is discourse. A discourse is: a way of speaking, thinking or writing that presents particular relationships as self-evidently true. Because such ‘truths’ are presented as unchallengeable, this means that, within a particular discourse, only certain things can be said or thought; to challenge these assumptions is to step outside the discourse….Discourses are important because they structure the ways in which we can think about things. Because they are treated as, and appear to be, self-evidently a reflection of ‘reality’, they can remain unchallenged, prescribing for us what is ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ behaviour, and penalizing those who attempt to challenge or step outside them…

Michel Foucault comments that in any society, there are relations of power that function through discourse and produce truth. He says that relations of power:

cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association…we must speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth.

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180 Ibid., 778.
181 Ibid., 777.
182 Ibid., 779-780.

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Rather than experiences constituting ourselves, it is these discourses that construct our subjectivity. Our subjectivity is our sense of self, which includes our conscious and unconscious thoughts, our emotions, and our personal feelings.\textsuperscript{185} While the discourses create the social context in which our sense of selves take place, our subjectivities also produce stories about ourselves and others. Scott notes that subjects do have choices and the agency to select and resist certain discourses, but these subjects are not autonomous individuals exercising free will, so the choices are limited.\textsuperscript{186} For the purpose of this thesis then, it must be understood that my interviewees did not produce their own subjectivity. They are produced by white supremacy and other historical discourses about white femininity and black masculinity. My interviewees too are constituted through these systems, histories, and social contexts that work in and through their lives.

\textsuperscript{186} Scott, 793.
Chapter Two: Teaching the Colourline

In the previous chapter, I outlined some of the ways in which White women were segregated from Black men in the past. This included legal mechanisms such as anti-miscegenation laws and legalized segregation, and the societal norms and expectations that White women should be racially loyal to White men. I explained how white femininity entails marrying White men and having White babies, and when White women abide by these rules, they are accepted into whiteness and granted respectability within their communities. This racial solidarity between White women and White men is critical to maintaining white supremacy because White women are reproducers of the White race. In order to maintain white supremacy, Black men have been portrayed as hypersexualized rapists that prey on White women, and the colourline was policed illegally by the KKK and lynch mobs in the post-emancipation era.

Today, society still disapproves of White women in interracial relationships and/or White mothers of Black-White biracial children. In popular culture, for example, White women who cross the colourline are routinely denigrated. I suggest in this chapter that popular culture texts serve as warnings for White women to abstain from having intimate relations with Black men and having biracial children, which is a way of reinforcing the colourline today. This chapter will begin with a discussion on language, representations, signs, and stereotypes, drawing from Stuart Hall’s work. This introduction will highlight how representations create meaning about things, including people’s identities, and how raced and gendered stereotypes help to produce the subject of the White women in an interracial family. Next, I will review what the scholarship says about interracial couples in popular culture. Many scholars have studied representations of miscegenation in various popular culture texts, and Black-White interracial intimacy specifically, and their work reveals that these representations are consistently shown as negative, abnormal, and even dangerous. Finally, I will make a small contribution to this area of scholarship by providing contemporary examples of White women in interracial relationships in television sitcoms that have aired in the twenty-first century, to demonstrate how the warnings to stay away from Black men still exist today.
Language, Representations, Signs and Stereotypes that Produce White Women in Interracial Families in Popular Culture

In order to adequately discuss how White women in interracial families are portrayed in popular culture, I must begin with a brief explanation of how language – which includes words, sounds, images, facial expressions, gestures, clothing, and more – is used to give meaning to our culture and our sense of identity. To discuss this, I turn to the work of Stuart Hall in his book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Throughout this chapter, I will be highlighting the language used in various popular culture texts that describe the lives of White women in interracial families. It is critical to explain the importance of language because it is the medium through which meaning is produced, exchanged, and shared among people, and it is the way that our emotions, thoughts, and ideas are represented in our culture. Culture, in this paper, will refer to a group of people who interpret and express themselves in similar ways, share similar conceptual maps (i.e. mental representations) about the world, share the same language systems, and therefore will be able to understand each other and ‘make sense’ of the world in roughly the same way.

Within a culture, people give meanings to objects, events, and people by the ways that they interpret, use, speak, and feel about things, and more importantly for this chapter, how they represent things. Things do not have fixed meanings; the meanings of things are produced and changed as people classify them, speak about them, and relate them to certain concepts and values in everyday interactions and media outlets. In addition to creating meaning, language also has the effect of organizing our social life with rules and regulations about what is ‘normal’ and acceptable. Hall argues that the important thing about the elements of language is not to simply to identify what these elements are – such as words, gestures, sounds - but rather to identify:

what they *do*, their function. They construct meaning and transmit it.
They signify. They don’t have any clear meaning in *themselves*. Rather,

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188 Ibid., 1.
189 Ibid., 2.
190 Ibid., 3.
191 Ibid.
192 Ibid., 4.
they are the vehicles or media which carry meaning because they operate as symbols, which stand for or represent (i.e. symbolize) the meanings we wish to communicate. To use another metaphor, they function as signs. Signs stand for or represent our concepts, ideas and feelings in such a way as to enable others to ‘read’, or decode or interpret their meaning in roughly the same way as we do.\(^{193}\)

Hall identifies language as a signifying practice, and that language is the vehicle through which we construct our cultures.\(^{194}\) Hall suggests that in addition to the types of power that we typically think of, which includes coercion and constraint, power can also exist in representations.\(^{195}\) Through representations, people mark, classify, and stereotype groups of people, or symbolically expel them from forms of popular culture too. This is a symbolic and cultural type of power which he connects to Michel Foucault’s practices of ‘power/knowledge’ because these representations produce discourses and new types of knowledge about groups of people.\(^{196}\)

Representations of interracial families or couples in popular culture, then, is one of the critical ways that meaning is produced about relations between the races.\(^{197}\) This chapter will demonstrate that various popular culture texts have a cohesive and instructive message about interracial relationships, which is that miscegenation is not socially acceptable. According to these texts, it is both abnormal and unnatural for the races to mix. For example, White women in popular culture texts who have sexual encounters with Black men, have children with Black men, or marry Black men are portrayed as reckless, oppressed, and/or sexually deviant women. Moreover, interracial relationships are portrayed as dysfunctional and even dangerous. This is one of the ways in which mass media continues to classify people according to raced and gendered identities that have been constructed in the past. When Black men and White women are shown as a couple, or when White women are shown mothering biracial children, they are signs that carry and express meaning about black masculinity, white femininity, and interracial families.\(^{198}\) White women and Black men represented through two-dimensional figures on a television screen do not carry meanings on

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\(^{193}\) Ibid., 5, italics original.
\(^{194}\) Ibid., 5-6.
\(^{195}\) Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’,” 259.
\(^{196}\) Ibid., 259-261.
\(^{198}\) Ibid., 18.
their own; they are given meanings as signs in popular culture mediums, and when these meanings are produced continuously as representations of concepts within a culture, then they begin to appear as fixed and natural.¹⁹⁹ Hall concludes this point succinctly when he states that “The main point is that meaning does not inhere in things, in the world. It is constructed, produced. It is the result of a signifying practice – a practice that produced meaning, that makes things mean.”²⁰⁰ According to this constructionist approach to language, we are always constructing meaning through representations and we communicate these meanings through mediums such as film and television shows.²⁰¹ In order to contest and challenge these representations, we must identify them, highlight the meaning(s) that they produce, and determine what they signify in our culture.²⁰²

These signs must also be deconstructed because they have the potential to create and reinforce negative stereotypes for Black-White couples, and act as a warning for White women to stay away from Black men. Situating interracial couples or mothers of biracial people as unstable or problematic is a stereotype which serves a purpose in contemporary culture. Hall defines stereotyping as the process through which people or things are reduced to a few essential simplified characteristics that are perceived to be fixed by nature.²⁰³ Richard Dyer notes that creating normalcy – by continuously portraying interracial couples as problematic, for example – is a habit of the dominant group, who “…attempt to fashion the whole of society according to their own world-view, value-system, sensibility and ideology,” and they are so successful at doing this that they make these stereotypes appear “natural”.²⁰⁴ This naturalization component of stereotyping is critical because if characteristics about people are believed to be cultural, then they able to be changed, but if they are believed to be natural or innate to somebody’s race, then these characteristics are unchangeable, and therefore fixed forever.²⁰⁵

Along the same lines as Dyer, John Storey suggests that distorted images of groups of people in popular culture texts creates a ‘false consciousness’, which he argues, “…works in

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¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 21.
²⁰⁰ Ibid., 24, italics original.
²⁰¹ Ibid., 25.
²⁰³ Ibid., 249.
²⁰⁴ Ibid., 299.
²⁰⁵ Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’,” 245.
the interests of the powerful against the interests of the powerless.”206 Thus, repeated images of dysfunctional interracial families in popular culture texts are neither an accident, nor a coincidence. Erica Chito Childs, author of *Fade to Black and White: Interracial Images in Popular Culture* notes that, “Representations of interracial relations and the decisions that are made about what can be told and what is ‘unspeakable’ reveal the ideas, practices, and prerogatives of the dominant group – Whites, and more specifically, White men,”207 and that the omission of interracial families in popular culture or the way that they are negatively portrayed when they are present “should not be surprising given that White men control most media outlets, in terms of the creation, production, and promotion of media.”208 White men, as discussed in chapter one, have a vested interest in keeping White women away from Black men. The messages that can be read in popular culture texts confirm this notion too.

**Interracial Relationships in the Media**

Many scholars in the fields of critical race studies, gender studies, and media studies have thoroughly analyzed and deconstructed images of interracial intimacy in popular culture texts, including Black-White couples specifically, and the implications of these images and messages in society. Representations of interracial relationships have been studied in literature, film, television and theatre, although film has perhaps garnered the most attention across a range of scholarly fields. Older films such as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967) are commonly analyzed, in addition to more recent films such as *Jungle Fever* (1991), *The Pelican Brief* (1993), and *Save the Last Dance* (2001).

Among the vast array of scholarship that contributes to this area of research, most scholars note how representations of Black men and white women together in popular culture texts relay the historical messages discussed in chapter one, which is that miscegenation is socially immoral. These images are controversial for the producers, audiences, and society and general. Collectively, there are also important themes that arise in the scholarship about

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208 Ibid., 8.
Black-White interracial intimacy. To begin with, many academics note how representations of interracial couples or families are either absent from popular culture, or that they are highlighted as the exception when they are present, rather than being presented as ordinary couples. These representations contribute to the message that interracial couples are abnormal or that there’s something unusual about them. Secondly, images of interracial intimacy portray that crossing the colourline is unnatural, problematic, and even dangerous for those involved. Finally, due to the fact that interracial intimacy is perceived as controversial or taboo in popular culture and society, scholars have made note of the ways that producers and writers deemphasize images of interracial couples in their work, while still addressing the topic, in order to protect themselves from censorship and critique. These are the common themes that are discussed throughout the scholarship about Back-White interracial couples in the media.

In various popular culture texts, Black-White interracial couples are highlighted as abnormal, exceptional, or they are excluded entirely from many projects. During the first half of the nineteenth century, this trend may have been because of laws that prohibited representations of interracial intimacy. For example, in 1930 there was a Mississippi state law that banned literature from including interracial marriages, and from the 1930s to the 1950s, the Hollywood Production Code forbid images of miscegenation in film. Yet even today, companionship, intimacy, and love are represented as existing solely between people of the same race, which teaches audiences that only monoracial relationships are acceptable. Critical race scholar and feminist bell hooks observes that:

True love in television and movies is almost always an occurrence between those who share the same race. When love happens across boundaries…it is doomed for no apparent reason and/or has tragic consequences. White and Black people learning lessons from mass media about racial bonding are taught that curiosity about those who are racially different can be expressed as long as boundaries are not actually crossed and no genuine intimacy emerges.

In addition to laws, there are other reasons why producers, directors, and writers exclude images of interracial couples from their work. In advertising commercials, for

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example, companies fear that they may lose customers or that they may be censored if they advertise their products with images of interracial families or couples.\textsuperscript{211} So instead, they show couples of the same race, and typically these couples are White.\textsuperscript{212} In television soap operas, which often feature storylines that are explicitly sexual in nature, interracial couples are also excluded. In one race study conducted in 1997 by Sharon Bramlett-Solomon and Tricia Farwell, in which these researchers watched 132 hours of soap operas over an eight-week period, they found that no interracial couples were included.\textsuperscript{213} Clearly, interracial coupling is too taboo for even soap operas.\textsuperscript{214}

When interracial couples are included in television or film, they are either included in order to serve a purpose, or they become the focal point of the text. For example, in daytime talk shows, interracial couples are often featured, but they are used to highlight stories about dysfunctional couples, discrimination, violence, and family disapproval.\textsuperscript{215} Renee C. Romano, author of \textit{Race Mixing}, describes how one White man, who was married to a Black woman “felt as though he and his wife had been asked to participate in a freak show rather than a serious discussion of the issues of being an interracial couple.”\textsuperscript{216} Interracial couples who have been interviewed for talk shows report that they are often rejected from the shows because they are “too reasonable” or because their relationship is not problematic enough.\textsuperscript{217} While talk shows in general aim to glamorize situations and create spectacles out of relationships and ordinary situations, these representations contribute to the societal consensus that interracial couples are unusual and that people should avoid being in an interracial relationship.\textsuperscript{218} Or, as authors Barbara Perry and Michael Sutton argue, “The message conveyed by this consistently negative imagery is that [interracial relationships] are ‘unnatural’ and incapable of long-term success; so great is the raced and gendered border crossing that participants cannot hope to survive the leap.”\textsuperscript{219}

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\textsuperscript{211} Perry and Sutton, “Seeing Red over Black and White,” 896. \\
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 894. \\
\textsuperscript{216} Ibid, 277. \\
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 278. \\
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{219} Perry and Sutton, “Seeing Red over Black and White,” 894.
\end{flushright}
chapter), interracial couples are rarely integrated seamlessly into the plots. Instead, it
comes commonplace for their problematic interracial relationship to be a major part of the
story, rather than these characters simply being a part of the show.  

In addition to interracial couples being excluded or highlighted as abnormal in
popular culture, many scholars have noted that there are certain messages that can be read
about crossing the colourline too. The messages about crossing the colourline are that it is
unnatural, problematic, and dangerous. The movie Jungle Fever is one example of a movie
that has contributed to the message that interracial relationships are unnatural. Some
academics note that even the title Jungle Fever signifies that interracial couples are
unnatural. For example, Diana R. Paulin argues that this title:

reinscribes the notion that interracial love is the result of irrational,
racialized, heated passion – which manifests itself as a sickness –
confirming the dominant belief that interracial sexual relations are
wrong or immoral. By naming this intimate black/white desire a
“fever,” the film serves to reproduce the notion that interracial
desire is transgressive and that it contaminates pure blood lines. 

Author Michele Wallace also notes the significance of the movie’s title, and how its meaning
is specifically aimed at Black-White interracial couples. She notes that “Jungle Fever turns
out to be a condition in which Blacks and Whites (Asians, Native Americans, and Latinos
appear to be both immune to the disease and irrelevant to the narrative) become intimately
involved because of their curiosity about racial difference (perish the thought) rather than for
love.”

The movie Jungle Fever, by filmmaker Spike Lee, is centered on two interracial
relationships. One relationship is between a White woman named Angie and a Black man
named Flipper, and another is between a Black woman named Orin and a White man named
Paulie. Both of these are relationships are transgressive in the film because the film positions
the white and black communities as segregated communities, and clearly marks sexual
liaisons between the two races as taboo. For example, Paulie’s friend Frankie states that “I’d
fuck a nigger or a spick in a second,” and his friend Vinnie responds, “I’d do it too. But I

220 Ibid., 895.
222 Michele Wallace, “Boyz N the Hood and Jungle Fever,” in Black Popular Culture: A Project by Michele
wouldn’t let anybody see us together. No way I’d be down on 18th Avenue with a Black on my arm. No fuckin’ way.” These statements clearly define interracial sex as acceptable, as long as it remains behind closed doors, whereas interracial relationships in public are taboo and unacceptable.

In addition to highlighting interracial sex as transgressive, the characters in *Jungle Fever* draw attention to the gendered racial identities that were discussed in the last chapter of this thesis. Flipper, a Black man, is married to a Black woman named Drew. In spite of being a married man, Flipper has an affair with Angie, a White woman, which is purely sexual in nature. In one scene, Flipper reveals to his friend that he’s having an affair with a White woman, and his friend responds, “You got the fever – the both of yous!” Evidently, Flipper cannot resist the opportunity to have sex with a White woman because of his “jungle fever.” Angie too is a victim of the fever. She is portrayed as a weak woman who cannot resist being seduced by a Black man, and that the affair is partially due to her lack of self-control. As well, rather than being about love or emotional attraction, Flipper blatantly accuses Angie of being attracted to his black skin, which depicts this relationship as solely based on race and sex. Each character’s rationale for being in an interracial relationship is guided by their raced and gendered identity. Flipper is the hypersexualized Black male who lusts after a White woman, and Angie is the weak-willed White woman who cannot resist the temptation of being intimate with a Black man. These are not the only stereotypes that are regularly made about interracial relationships.

In her PhD dissertation, “The Color of Love on the Big Screen,” Nadia Ramoutar examined various aspects of interracial relationships in popular films from 1967 to 2005. She concluded in her research that in addition to portrayals of White women in interracial relationships being rare or atypical in film, there is:

> a disturbing trend in Hollywood’s portrayal of White women who chose sexual or romantic partners of another race in the films under study: there is clearly something socially, morally, or personally wrong with them… White women in interracial relationships are

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224 Wallace, 125.
225 Ibid., 126.
227 Ibid., 175.
always portrayed either as flawed, fragile, or considerably less important than the other characters in the film. No healthy, balanced, or safe portrayal of a White woman in an interracial has been offered in the history of film from 1967 – 2005.\textsuperscript{229}

More specifically, Ramoutar notes how in the films that she studied, White women in interracial relationships were typically drug addicts, sexually promiscuous, victims of sexual, physical, and verbal abuse, needy and dependent, and facilitated problems for other characters in the movie.\textsuperscript{230} They were also unemployed, lacked any skills, and were only useful as a sexual companion to a man.\textsuperscript{231} As well, these characters were often insignificant in the storyline, insomuch as the films typically omit any information about what happens to these characters at the end of the film or in their future.\textsuperscript{232} Furthermore, in contrast to the white feminine ideal discussed in the previous chapter, White women in interracial relationships in film are depicted as being unfeminine. For example, Ramoutar notes that characters such as Mia in \textit{Pulp Fiction}, Elvira in \textit{Scarface}, and Barbara in \textit{Billy Jack} are uncaring, untrustworthy, difficult and demanding.\textsuperscript{233}

After deconstructing these problematic portrayals of White women in interracial relationships, it may not be surprising to learn that in these films, interracial relationships are also doomed to fail. To begin with, Ramoutar notes how these women are typically unwed or divorced.\textsuperscript{234} As well, many of these relationships either end in violence or death. Ramoutar argues that, “Being hurt or killed is a ‘normalized’ portrayal of a possible outcome of an interracial relationship in film. For the viewer, this repeated message over so many years offers the warning - interracial relationships result in pain, conflict or possibly death. This frame makes salient the undesirable nature of interracial sex or love.”\textsuperscript{235} Therefore, not only are White women in interracial relationships portrayed negatively, but interracial relationships in general are depicted as unsuccessful and even dangerous.

Yet, perhaps even more instructive is the fact that simply the idea of interracial sex has been portrayed as unsafe; people do not need to actually be in a relationship or sexually

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{229} Ibid., 53.
\item \textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 53-54.
\item \textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 69-70.
\item \textsuperscript{232} Ibid., 68.
\item \textsuperscript{233} Ibid., 87-88.
\item \textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 134.
\item \textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 80-81.
\end{itemize}
active for the lesson to be learned in popular culture that the participants will be hurt. For example, the movie *The Birth of a Nation* by D.W. Griffith, which is based on the novel *The Clansmen* by Thomas Dixon, has been studied and critiqued by many scholars who examine representations of interracial intimacy because it was not only the first film to portray interracial sexuality,236 but it was also highly controversial.237 Set in the American South during the Civil War and Reconstruction Period, the movie idealizes the Ku Klux Klan as saviours of white supremacy because they restore peace in the South after the Civil War breaks out.238 One scene in particular involves a Black man named Gus who is portrayed as the Black Buck239 in the movie. Gus is determined to rape the daughter of the movie’s main family, the Cameron family. Gus (who is a White actor in black-face) lusts after her, stalks her, threatens her, and eventually she jumps off of a cliff to escape him. Donald Bogle, author of *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film*, explains this significance of these representations in *The Birth of a Nation*, in relation to the history of miscegenation discussed in the last chapter of this thesis:

Griffith played on the myth of the Negro’s high-powered sexuality, then articulated the great white fear that every Black man longs for a White woman. Underlying the fear was the assumption that the White woman was the ultimate in female desirability, herself a symbol of white pride, power, and beauty...But Griffith attributed the attraction to an animalism innate in the Negro male. Thus the black bucks of the film are psychopaths, one always panting and salivating, the other forever stiffening his body as if the mere presence of a White woman in the same room could bring him to a sexual climax. Griffith played hard on the bestiality of his black villainous bucks and used it to arouse hatred.240

Not only was this imagery significant in the early twentieth century when this movie was released, but some scholars argue that it set many trends for many films that followed it.241

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237 The movie *The Birth of a Nation* was controversial for many reasons, most of which centered on the racist depiction of black people in the movie. After the movie was released, some newspapers censured the film, race riots and racial violence increased in some cities, and the NAACP picketed the movie and held mass demonstrations against it. The movie was eventually banned in nineteen cities and five states. For more information, see Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film*, 4th edition (New York: Continuum, 2001), 15.
238 Ibid., 12.
239 As discussed in chapter one, the Black Buck is a racial stereotype placed on black men. The Black Buck stereotype is the physically strong, violent, and hypersexualized male.
241 Ibid., 13.
For example, in the movie *Cruel Intentions* (1998), one White woman named Kathryn plots to ruin another White woman named Cecile by persuading Cecile’s Black male piano instructor to seduce Cecile. The message that is understood in this plot is that Cecile’s honour and family reputation would be destroyed if she were to sleep with a Black man.\(^{242}\) Thus, even the threat of interracial intimacy was, and still is shocking and scandalous.

Some scholars also attribute real violence perpetrated against Black-White couples to these negative messages about interracial intimacy in popular culture. For example, Barbara Perry and Michael Sutton wrote an article called “Seeing Red over Black and White: Popular and Media Representation of Inter-Racial Relationships as Precursors to Racial Violence,” in which they examined how the media is connected to real contemporary examples of racial violence in the United States and the United Kingdom.\(^{243}\) They argue that the negative portrayal of interracial couples in the media “condition an environment that facilitates, if not encourages, violence against those in inter-racial relationships.”\(^ {244}\) In their article, Sutton and Perry provide some examples of how interracial couples are still targets of violence. Two contemporary examples that they provide include the deaths of Anthony Walker in 2005 and Jody-Gaye Bailey in 2006. Walker was 17 years old when he was murdered. It was reported that Walker was attacked in Merseyside, UK because his girlfriend was White.\(^ {245}\) After being beaten, he was then murdered with an axe.\(^ {246}\) Jody-Gaye Bailey, a Black woman, was murdered in Florida in 2006 because her murderer was upset that Bailey was in a relationship with a White man.\(^ {247}\) While it is difficult to prove that the media directly influences people to murder others, Perry and Sutton remind us that, “among the potential effects of the media tendency to stigmatize or demonize [interracial relationships] is that it contributes to a culture that bestows ‘permission to hate’ – indeed, permission to engage in hate crime.”\(^ {248}\) Regardless of whether these above murders are related to the media, what is for certain is that the media does create a cohesive message about interracial unions, which is that they are unusual and immoral.

\(^{243}\) Ibid., 164.
\(^{244}\) Ibid., 887.
\(^{245}\) Ibid.
\(^{246}\) Ibid.
\(^{247}\) Ibid., 898.
\(^{248}\) Ibid.
Finally, the ideas and images about interracial intimacy – that it is abnormal, highly problematic and even dangerous for those involved – affect how writers and producers use these controversial images and storylines about interracial couples. Some scholars have noted that in both the past and present, writers and producers use interracial storylines cautiously, and have methods to protect themselves from censorship and critique. These methods include how they present the story about interracial couples, and how they present the characters involved in an interracial union. The popular movie *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* is a movie that encompasses both of these methods. In 1967, when this movie was released, it was known for being a civil-rights integrationist movie because it was about a young White woman named Joanna who brings her Black fiancé named Dr. John Prentice to dinner with both of their parents, in order to get their family’s approval for marriage. Some scholars applaud the film as being “ground-breaking” because it brought the issue of interracial marriage to the American public, especially during an era in which fifteen American states still had laws forbidding interracial marriage. However, even though the movie did highlight interracial marriage and may initially appear as integrationist based on this plot, many scholars have problematized the role of race and racism in this movie, and have demonstrated that this movie is more assimilationist than it is integrationist because of its storyline and the characters in the movie.

To begin with, many academics have argued that in spite of having a reputation of being an integrationist film because of its storyline, *Guess* actually avoided any serious discussions of race or racism. Rather than engaging in any discussions about race difference, most of the characters in this movie support race blindness. For example, Joanna’s character is colourblind, and her ignorance of race is portrayed as a virtue in the movie, rather than a deficit. Her Black fiancé, John, values her obliviousness to race difference, and Joanna’s parents also encourage her to overlook race. As well, racism in this movie is limited to individual acts of racism, rather than being presented as institutional, structural, or social.

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249 Ibid., 897.
252 Ibid., 159.
253 Ibid., 158.
For example, one of the only moments of racism that is addressed in this movie is when Christina, who is Joanna’s mother, has a confrontation with her friend and co-worker Hilary. After Hilary meets John, she has a private conversation with Christina in which she tries to sympathize with Christina about how shocked she must be in learning her daughter’s fiancé is Black. After Hilary expresses her concern, Christina fires Hilary from her job and tells Hilary that she does not want to know her anymore. In this famous scene, Christina gets rid of Hilary, the racist person, and thus there is no need to explore racism further. As some academics note, Guess presents an “idealized world in which institutionalized racism is absent (rendering anti-racist activism unnecessary).”254 By omitting any social or political context in this conversation, racism is presented as merely a problem between two individuals which is quickly resolved in the movie, never to be discussed again.255

In addition to excluding any serious conversations about race or racism, the movie also presents an interracial relationship that is completely void of interracial intimacy or sex. This representation of a White woman and a Black man who are a sexless couple allows the producers of this movie to present the topic of interracial relationships, while avoiding the hostile and controversial aspect of this topic – interracial sex, or miscegenation. Both Joanna and John are presented as chaste; the only romance between them occurs at the end of the movie in a simple kiss, and even this was seen through the cab driver’s rear-view mirror.256 Perry and Sutton note that this absence of sex and minimal affection allowed the threat of miscegenation to be minimized,257 and thus, the topic of interracial marriage in this movie is presented without the controversial aspects of race, racism, or even interracial sex.

Many academics in the fields of critical race studies and media studies have also noted the significance of John’s character in the film, and the importance of using actor Sidney Poitier to play the role of John. To begin with, the character Dr. John Prentice in Guess belongs to an elite minority class. He is a famous and gifted doctor, and is also the head of the World Health Organization. Therefore:

By making the Black man an eminently qualified and desirable suitor at the top of a professional class to which only the smallest minority of

254 Ibid., 161.
257 Ibid.
Blacks could possibly belong…the film reduces the social dimensions of racial conflict to that of mere contrasts of skin color while completely avoiding the historical, cultural, and economic legacy of what it means to be Black in America.\textsuperscript{258}

Moreover, the film does not explore John’s experience of being a Black man in an interracial relationship, “which could be a traumatic one within an alienating white context.”\textsuperscript{259} Instead, he is presented as the ideal Black man who is easily assimilated into a White family and white society in general.\textsuperscript{260} The ability to assimilate into white society is also mirrored in the actor who was chosen to portray John, which is the famous Black actor, Sidney Poitier.

Poitier is known for fulfilling the same type of role in most of his movies, including John in \textit{Guess}. His characters were always tame, conservative, educated, intelligent, spoke proper English and had immaculate manners.\textsuperscript{261} As well, similar to the character John in \textit{Guess}, Poitier’s roles typically included characters who were sexless.\textsuperscript{262} Therefore, White audiences were already accustomed to this well-mannered character prior to seeing \textit{Guess}, and would have been comforted by his non-threatening presence in this film because it represented the exact opposite of the Black Bucks discussed earlier. In addition to being sexless and sterile, Poitier did not represent any of the black stereotypes discussed in chapter one of this thesis. He did not represent any African cultural past, he had no dialect, and he was not portrayed as being lower-class or from a ghetto.\textsuperscript{263} Some scholars have even referred to him as a “colorless Black” or have commented that he has “little ethnic juice in his blood.”\textsuperscript{264} In short, for White audiences, “Sidney Poitier was a Black man who had met their standards…[he was] the perfect dream for White liberals anxious to have a colored man in for lunch or dinner.”\textsuperscript{265} Poitier and the characters that he played in movies were devoid of all historical, racial, or cultural context, which allowed movie producers and directors to present roles that included a Black man without engaging in the racial and gender issues that typically follow Black actors.

\textsuperscript{258} Guerrero, 77-78.
\textsuperscript{259} Projan\textsuperscript{s}ky and Ono, 161.
\textsuperscript{260} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{261} Bogle, 175.
\textsuperscript{262} Ibid., 176.
\textsuperscript{263} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid., 181.
\textsuperscript{265} Ibid., 175-176.
In general, all of the methods used in *Guess* described above indicate that this movie is assimilationist, in spite of its reputation of being integrationist. Herman Gray, author of *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for “Blackness”* describes how media constructs an assimilationist standpoint. He says:

I consider shows assimilationist to the extent that the worlds they construct are distinguished by the complete elimination, or, at best, marginalization of social and cultural difference in the interest of shared and universal similarity. These are noble aspirations, to be sure, but such programs consistently erase the histories of conquest, slavery, isolation, and power inequalities, conflicts, and struggles for justice and equality that are central features of U.S. society.  

Moreover, Stephanie Greco Larson, author of *Media & Minorities: The Politics of Race in News and Entertainment* explains the reasoning behind presenting an assimilationist theme. She explains that:

The assimilationist theme used in television and film storytelling reassures White audiences that America is color-blind...On the one hand, we can think of these images of black achievement in films and television entertainment as progressive. They contradict the assumption behind the White man’s burden theme that Blacks are inherently inferior. On the other hand, they still privilege white culture by presenting a certain picture of what acceptable and successful Blacks should look like.

Thus, presenting a movie as assimilationist, such as *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*, is one method of storytelling that allows producers to use race-related plots while avoiding any significant dialogue about race and racism. However, these are not the only methods that academics have found that writers utilize when telling stories about interracial intimacy.

Author Diana Paulin has coined the concept “surrogacy” to describe how some writers substitute things – such as people, relationships, and time periods – in for other things that they actually represent, in order to indirectly address a topic or identity that these substitutes are supposed to depict. For example, Paulin analyzes two texts that use the

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method of surrogacy. These include Bartley Campbell’s 1882 play, *The White Slave*, and William Dean Howells’s 1893 novel, *An Imperative Duty*. Both of these stories are about White men who are in love with Black women, and are written in eras that had anti-miscegenation laws. Therefore, both of these stories were not only controversial, but they were also subject to being heavily censured. In order to present their contentious stories, Paulin notes how both of these writers used white-skinned Black-identified women in their stories.\(^{269}\) Using white-skinned women who identify as Black created racial ambiguity in the two storylines, and allowed these authors to explore interracial relationships because they were not easily identifiable to their audiences.\(^{270}\)

In Campbell’s play, the main character Lisa, who is supposed to have some Black ancestry in her bloodline, not only appears white, but she also behaves like an educated white aristocratic lady in her mannerisms and speech, and is treated as such by those around her too.\(^{271}\) Thus, Lisa is a surrogate for Black women; she is supposed to represent blackness in the play, yet she is presented as white in all other aspects.\(^{272}\) The use of surrogacy in this play allows Lisa to be a less threatening figure, and allows Campbell to explore interracial intimacy in a subtle and indirect way. Similarly, in Howell’s novel, the main character Rhoda learns as an adult that she has Black family, and therefore her bloodline is contaminated by blackness. Yet, she too is presented as appearing white, and thus both her and Lisa’s blackness is unmarked. Paulin argues that by using white-looking characters who identify as Black, these authors create a “space for rehearsing anti-miscegenation fears and for testing racial essentialisms; at the same time, their proximity to whiteness, both culturally and visually, provides a safe return to dominant segregationist ideologies that governed the United States in the late 1800s.”\(^{273}\) Writers continue to find ways to present stories about interracial intimacy in an indirect, non-controversial way, in order to write about these stories that are perceived as immoral, problematic, and threatening even in the present day.

\(^{269}\) Ibid., 421.
\(^{270}\) Ibid.
\(^{271}\) Ibid., 424-426.
\(^{272}\) Ibid., 426.
\(^{273}\) Ibid., 438.
White Women in Interracial Relationships in Television Shows –
The Contemporary Warnings to Stay Away From Black Men

It is important to acknowledge that White women in intimate relationships with Black men or as mothers of Black-White biracial children are still portrayed as problematic, or not shown in the media at all. While popular culture texts presented in the last section were from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I will highlight how this trend has continued into the twenty-first century. White women in interracial relationships with Black men are still shown as overly sexual. Their relationships are still routinely depicted as unhappy ones, riddled with racial problems and sexual drama. For example, on the American television series Sex and The City, the all-White cast rarely featured Black men as the White women’s sexual partners. In season 3 episode 5 “No ifs and or Butts”, one of the main characters, Samantha, becomes sexually involved with an African-American man named Chevon for the one episode. As Perry and Sutton have noted in their work, rather than being integrated into the storyline, Samantha’s new interracial relationship became the storyline. During this one episode, their short-lived relationship and all of its problems was the main theme of the episode. Samantha and Chevon’s relationship becomes problematic when Adena, Chevon’s sister (who is also Black) tells Samantha that she does not approve of her and Chevon’s relationship because “You’re White and I have a problem with my only brother getting serious with a White woman”. When Samantha continues to date Chevon, Adena confronts her again and explains to Samantha “This is a black thing. Now would you please go and leave my brother alone?” Samantha leaves momentarily, then returns to say, “Excuse me, but no woman no matter what colour has the right to tell me who I can or cannot fuck”. Adena then yells at her, “Get your little white pussy away from my brother!” and the two women begin to physically fight. Later on in the episode, Chevon explains to Samantha that he cannot date her because his sister disapproves of their interracial relationship, and the two break up. The episode ends without anybody addressing the racial tensions that erupted between Samantha and Adena.

275 “No ifs and or Butts,” Sex and The City Season 3 Episode 5, aired July 9 2000, <http://www.bigvidpro.com/?v=zrv1uOtMAEJi8ByX5gPyrQ> (7 November 2009).
In a television series like *Sex and The City*, sexual topics are common. What is not common is the White female characters having sexual relationships with Black men. It is noteworthy that the producers chose to make Samantha and Chevon’s relationship all about sex, rather than romance or a committed relationship between the two of them. The producers also chose to make this interracial relationship controversial, which reinforces the belief that the two races will face persecution if they become sexually intimate. Moreover, all of the problems this couple confronts comes from Black people in this episode; no White people challenge or disapprove of their relationship. By not addressing the racial tensions that exist between the two women and the interracial couple, the producers normalized the situation, which could be seen as a warning to all White viewers that interracial relationships are problematic and the consequences of violence, being stigmatized, and a failed relationship are inevitable. All of these messages mirror the messages that were discussed in the last section precisely. Furthermore, by positioning the Black woman as the aggressor in this episode, and by having her clearly state that, “This is a black thing,” the producers conceal the role that white supremacy plays in a confrontation such as this, and blames the situation on the temporary hostile Black characters. By stating that this confrontation and racial tension is a “black thing,” the producers successfully suppress the persecution that Black men have faced historically for dating White women, which would cause a Black woman to discourage her brother from pursuing a White woman in the first place.

In another American TV series, *The Game* which airs on the Black Entertainment Television (BET) channel and features an almost all-Black cast, there is one main character that is a White woman, Kelly. She is married to a Black man, Jason, who is a professional football player. Again, their relationship is shown to be unhappy and complicated, as Kelly is made to be the submissive weak White woman, in comparison to her controlling and aggressive Black husband. In season 1, episode 5, Kelly becomes frustrated with Jason making all of the family decisions. After calling him a dictator, Kelly cries “…You never ask me [about decisions]; you tell me. I get it Jason – you’re the king!” and she runs off. Then in the same season, in episode 16, Jason decides that he wants another child. When Kelly decides to prolong having another child because she got a job working for her Black friend

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Tasha, Jason wants her to quit. After convincing him to let her keep her job, Jason says to her “But you’ve got to promise me that once you get this independent-woman-thing out of your system, we’re going to have another baby…I don’t want you bringing any of Tasha’s black sass home with you either…”277. Finally, in season 3, their marriage ends. In this television series that features one interracial married couple, again the viewers are made to feel sympathetic for Kelly because of her submissive and dependent role, and the producers make it clear that this couple is only happy when Kelly is obedient, or can convince Jason to allow her to do things. This is a warning sign of what happens when White women are not racially loyal. Kelly represents the docile and motherly feminine ideal, that is in stark contrast to her “sassy” Black friend Tasha. Jason represents the black masculine stereotype that is predominantly sexual and hostile towards his White woman, and prioritizes having children before his wife’s career goals. Together, these two opposite gendered racial identities are destined to have a miserable relationship, and eventually their relationship too is doomed to fail. Clearly, this relationship is comparable to the failed interracial relationships that were highlighted by Ramoutar in the previous section of this chapter.278

This stigmatization of White women in relationships with Black men also applies to characters who are White mothers of Black-White biracial children on television shows. Images of White mothers with biracial children often include being an irresponsible care-free woman, in addition to being overly sexual. She is the opposite of the ‘good’ White mother that is idealized in white femininity. On another all-Black cast American television series that aired on BET, Girlfriends, there was one main character that was Black-White biracial, named Lynn. Until season 3, episode 9, the viewers knew that Lynn is biracial and had been adopted, but they had never met her biological white mother. In episode 9, “The Mommy Returns”, the viewers are introduced to Lynn’s mother, Sandy, who is portrayed as sexually promiscuous, irresponsible and selfish. The producers use the entire episode to demonstrate how Sandy is unladylike and un-motherly, and therefore the antithesis to white femininity.

Within the first few minutes of meeting Sandy, the viewers are able to gauge Sandy’s wild demeanour as Sandy humorously takes a few minutes to try and guess who Lynn’s father is when she meets Lynn for the first time. She says, “Oh my God! Look at you! I

278 Ramoutar, 134.
haven’t got a clue who your father is!” and even calls herself a “dead-beat hussy” in front of Lynn’s friends. In the next scene, as Lynn and Sandy are speaking at a bar, the viewers are again reminded of Sandy’s sexuality and irresponsibility. Sandy explains to Lynn that when she became pregnant with her, Sandy was producing documentaries about passion and sexuality, and admits to smoking and drinking while pregnant with Lynn. Finally, the climatic scene occurs when Sandy brings over a date to Lynn’s house. Lynn, Sandy and her date Tom, and Lynn’s roommate William are in a jacuzzi together, when Lynn turns to see that Tom has removed Sandy’s bikini top, and Sandy is making out with Tom, straddling him, in front of Lynn and William. After Lynn demands that Sandy to stop her behaviour, Sandy claims, “It’s just sex, we’re all adults here. When did you become such a prude?” Lynn replies, “Who cares? You were about to have sex in front of me and you’re my mother!” Sandy then says, “I told you. I don’t want to be your mother”, and the conversation ends with Lynn leaving the scene. This episode of Girlfriends exemplifies the stereotypes that were used to create Sandy’s character. The entire episode highlights the fact that Sandy loves sex. Moreover she is portrayed as un-motherly because Lynn was a mistake, Sandy did not care for herself physically while she was pregnant, she gave Lynn up for adoption, and proudly states that she does not want to be her mother. Within this short episode, the producers use every mechanism possible to show that this fallen White woman is not the ideal ‘good’ mother.

Canadian television series are guilty of this stereotyping as well. In the Canadian television series Sophie, the main character Sophie is a White mother of a Black-White biracial child. Similar to Sandy in Girlfriends, Sophie is an unwed single mother, and her biracial son Robby was from an unexpected pregnancy. This television show again positions this mother as irresponsible. To begin with, Sophie and Andre had a one-night stand after meeting in a taxi in season 1, and Sophie became pregnant. In the first episode of season 2, “Sophie’s Choice”, the viewers are quickly able to piece together what had happened in season 1. Within the first few minutes of the first episode, Sophie’s mother is shocked to meet her new brown-skinned biracial grandson. Sophie’s White boyfriend learns that Sophie cheated on him with a Black man and had a baby by him (the ultimate transgression), and

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Sophie surprises Andre by telling him that he has an eight-month-old son. At the end of the first episode, Sophie learns that Andre is engaged. When Andre turns to her for advice about what to do about his two families, Sophie’s character is again shown to be a weak and indecisive woman. She says, “Don’t ask that. I’m a romantic, impetuous, impulsive, imbalanced, and a whole lot of other ‘ims’.” Furthermore, towards the end of the second season, beginning in episode 8 “Who’s Your Daddy?”, Sophie and Andre begin to have an affair, in spite of him being engaged to another woman. Sophie is portrayed as comfortable and content to be his mistress. The plot for Sophie again reinforces the stereotype that White mothers of biracial children are immoral and reckless women, and that their interracial relationships are based on sex, and not on love or commitment.

Analyzing popular culture texts are important because they are “…a site where collective social understandings are created.” According to the television series Sex and The City, The Game, Girlfriends, and Sophie, White women in the twenty-first century continue to face sanctions for their decisions to be with Black men because they are committing themselves to licentious lives, filled with sexual, gender, and racial oppression. Perhaps the most damaging aspect of these images and signs of White women transgressing their racial boundaries is the impact that they have on interracial communities who are confronted daily with messages of their own pathology.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Black-White interracial relationships are portrayed as unusual, immoral, and highly problematic in various popular culture texts, which is why writers and producers use these representations cautiously. I suggest that these cohesive messages about interracial love and intimacy teaches people that crossing the colourline is dangerous. These stories warn White women to stay away from Black men; they produce meaning about interracial couples and the subject of the White woman in an interracial family. The pervasiveness of these representations demonstrate that the problem of White

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281 Ibid.
282 Storey, 5.
women in interracial relationships is not about one person stepping out of their kin group. Rather, the controversy surrounding this topic is embedded in how interracial intimacy threatens white supremacy. Society is invested in the idea that the races should not mix, and people are taught about these ideas today through the media.

These negative images, combined with the historical legacies of racism that laid the groundwork for today’s popular culture, are likely to affect my interviewee’s lives because these images teach them who they ought to be. After exploring the frequency of these negative representations about interracial love and intimacy, one can only wonder how Black-White couples cope with all these images. In a world that condemns interracial love in television series, film, literature and theatre, White women who choose to be in Black-White relationships must learn to navigate white supremacy in their day-to-day lives, and develop coping strategies to deal with this system that consumes them and their families.
Chapter Three: Learning about the Colourline in Public Spaces

Another way to analyze white supremacy in North America is to analyze dominance spatially. More specifically, we can analyze the making of subjects via their journeys through various racialized spaces. Although it has already been demonstrated historically that racial classifications can change throughout time periods\textsuperscript{283}, the meaning of white bodies also has the ability to change everyday as White people journey through racialized spaces. For example, White women who are raised in homogenous White families and social spaces are identified as White when they travel through spaces alone during their childhood. However, later in life, if these same White women have Black spouses and/or Black-White biracial children, they become blackened when they are seen with their interracial families in public because of their association with blackness\textsuperscript{284}.

One way to analyze how the meaning of white bodies may change is to trace the life histories of White women who have Black-White interracial families, and to analyze how they experience race spatially throughout different time periods in their lives. Ruth Frankenberg states that these White women, “…provide a lens through which to examine the multiple meanings of racial difference. Their experiences also illuminate the limits of racial privilege for those whose families of reproduction transgress the prescribed ideals of their local communities.”\textsuperscript{285} By analyzing the life histories of my five interviewees and contextualizing where they have learned about race difference as young White women, and then as a White women in interracial families, this paper will unmapped\textsuperscript{286} the spaces in which

\textsuperscript{283} In Matthew Frye Jacobson’s book \textit{Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), he describes how various European ethnic groups were welcomed into whiteness. See chapter one for more details.

\textsuperscript{284} As described in chapter one, blackness refers to the culture, representations, lifestyles, attitudes, history, and spaces associated with black people. In general, this may have both positive and negative connotations. While blackness may refer to black pride or black nationalism, blackness is also associated with being emotional, violent, irrational, backward, and sexual. See chapter one for more details.


\textsuperscript{286} Sherene Razack defines ‘unmapping’ in her essay “When Place Becomes Race,” in \textit{Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society}, ed. Sherene H. Razack (Toronto: Between The Lines, 2005), 5. She defines unmapping as the process of denaturalizing geography by asking how spaces come to be built. Razack suggests that the purpose of unmapping is to “undermine the idea of white settler innocence (the notion that European settlers merely settled and developed the land) and to uncover the ideologies and practices of conquest and domination.” She also argues that in unmapping, there is an important relationship between identity and space, and by questioning how places are raced, we can remember and confront the racial hierarchies that determine our lives. On page 17, she describes how to unmapped spaces: “To denaturalize or unmapped spaces, then,
White women associated with blackness experience race difference and develop their racial consciousness. My interviewees narratives reveal that the public sphere is a significant learning space for them. I suggest in this chapter that White women in interracial families learn about the colourline through their experiences with race in public spaces, and that they develop their racial consciousness through these experiences. Initially, journeying through public spaces enables these women to develop an understanding of race relations in their youth, and to define their relationship to whiteness\(^\text{287}\) and blackness prior to being in an interracial family. Then later in life, their awareness of race heightens as they venture through public spaces as White women in interracial families. This is because people draw attention to their family’s race difference in public, their family encounters racial discrimination, and they learn to utilize their white agency to protect themselves and their family in public. These experiences allow these White women to develop a critical race consciousness and embody race difference as they had not been able to prior to being in an interracial family.

The research for this chapter and chapter four will be based primarily on the narratives of my five interviewees. All of the interviewees are self-identified White women who have Black-White biracial children, and all of the women are in relationships with the fathers of their children. Two of the women are married to their father’s children, one couple is engaged, one couple is living common-law, and one woman has been dating her father’s children for several years. All of the women are currently living in the same predominantly-white city\(^\text{288}\) in Southwestern Ontario. All of the women were employed at the time of the interview, and identified themselves as being in lower-to-middle class families. All of their families\(^\text{289}\) of origin were lower-to-middle class as well. One of the women had attended some university classes, but none of the women had graduated from university. The majority

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\(^{287}\) As described in chapter one, whiteness refers to the culture, representations, lifestyles, attitudes, history, and spaces associated with white people. Although the definition of whiteness is complex, most scholars agree that whiteness is associated with positive connotations such as power, privilege, normality, trustworthiness, intellectuality, respectability, control, and merit. See chapter one for more details.

\(^{288}\) For confidentiality purposes, I am not naming any of the cities that my interviewees grew up in or currently live in.

\(^{289}\) Please note that I did not question what their partner’s family’s class origins were, nor did I find out this information throughout the interview.
of the women had attended and/or graduated from college. As well, none of the interviewees were active in social justice work during their youth or adulthood.

Four of the five women that I interviewed – Annalise, Olivia, Tatiana, and Darcy\(^{290}\) - all shared similar childhoods. They all grew up in small towns or cities in Ontario that had predominantly-white populations, although they all said that they knew of a few Non-White families and individuals who were the racial minority in these areas, and some small communities of Non-White people. Each of these women could recall a few people of colour in their childhood, such as a friend or neighbour that was a visible minority, or a classmate that they met in school that was one of the few Non-White students who attended the predominantly white schools, but their interaction with Non-White people was limited. These women did not live in racially diverse neighbourhoods, but they were still aware of raced spaces and social inequalities that existed in their communities. Furthermore, these four women are all currently in their twenties and thirties, so they are not old enough to have experienced legalized segregation that existed in Canada until the 1950s and 1960s. Therefore, their childhood memories of race and racism are limited because of the geographic location and the era in which they grew up in.

One of the interviewees named Jennifer\(^{291}\), on the other hand, differs from the other four interviewees in many ways. Jennifer was born in the 1950s and was raised in a lower-class industrial city in Michigan. This city was racially segregated while Jennifer grew up there from the 1950s through the 1970s. She vividly recalls there being a set of railroad tracks that ran through the city she grew up in, which was used as a racial boundary in the city. On one side of the tracks lived predominantly White people, and on the other side of the tracks lived predominantly Black people. Both of the high schools in the city she grew up in were located on the white side of the railroad tracks. Moreover, without using the academic vocabulary “white flight,” Jennifer described how the White families who had lived in her city for a long time moved out as crime levels and populations of Non-White people increased in the city. She recalled, “As the White families moved out, more Black families and Spanish [families] would move into the area.”\(^{292}\) Jennifer’s interpretation and

\(^{290}\) All of the names used to refer to my interviewees, their families, or people in their stories have been given pseudonyms, to protect their identity and ensure their confidentiality.

\(^{291}\) Ibid.

\(^{292}\) Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
explanation of her childhood demonstrates that she is a racially aware White woman. Due to the fact that Jennifer’s narratives are rich with racial and spatial content, I will focus on her narratives of her youth at the beginning of this chapter. Her narratives highlight where and how White women can learn about race difference as a child, and they explain how she defined her relationship to whiteness and blackness prior to being in an interracial family. As the chapter progresses, I will increasingly incorporate the other four interviewee’s narratives, to demonstrate how White women’s racial consciousness develops through spatial experiences.

**Learning about Race and Space**

Having established Jennifer’s socioeconomic status and location, we can begin to unmap the spaces that she lived in by “…exploring [these] spaces as a social product, uncovering how bodies are produced in spaces and how spaces produce bodies.” In order to denaturalize or ‘unmap’ these spaces, we must ask many questions about the space, the materiality of the space, and what is happening in the space to produce certain types of subjects. Specifically, Sherene Razack recommends that we ask the following questions when unmapping a space:

What is being imagined or projected on to specific spaces and bodies, and what is being enacted there? Who do White citizens know themselves to be and how much does an identity of dominance rely upon keeping racial others firmly *in place*? How are people kept in their place? And, finally, how does place become race?

Asking these questions will help us unpack how spaces become marked as a certain type of places, and how people and bodies within these spaces are produced as belonging to, or excluded from the spaces.

In addition to asking these questions, there are many aspects of people’s lives and histories that we must interrogate in order to understand the relationship between space and subjectivity. This process involves analyzing the spaces that people belong to, the spaces they socialize in, and the spaces they use for recreation. These may include spaces of degeneracy (such as slums, colonies, areas of prostitution, crime, and/or violence), or spaces of gentility

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294 Ibid., 5.
(such as suburbs, middle class and elite areas, or university spaces). Beyond the spaces they claim as their own, we also must explore the spaces they move between, the people and the environment that they encounter during these moments of transitions, and how they travel to and from these locations. Finally, we must also historicize the relationship between people and the spaces they inhabit. The racial and colonial history of the land is of utmost importance in determining why people belong to certain spaces, as settling the land typically involves processes of dispossession, policing boundaries and the movement of bodies within these boundaries, and establishing control of the land by creating various legal and social hierarchies amongst people.

Learning about spaces and how they produce subjects is also an interdisciplinary task that requires the analysis of geography, law, sociology, and history. Spatial theorists reject that spaces simply evolve, or that spaces are empty, innocent, or meaningless. Space is often marked as belonging to certain people through laws, and these laws end up having social effects. Nicholas Blomley reminds us that owning property produces a social ordering because access to property and real estate (which inadvertently includes access to wealth, health, and well being) demonstrates one’s class and position in the social hierarchy. He demonstrates that property and the boundaries they entail are protected through state laws and disciplinary rule. Kathleen Kirby argues that the creation of property through cartography helps to create the identity of the bourgeois citizen or Enlightenment individual, who she calls the “Cartesian subject”, because people know themselves through their relationship to their space. She suggests that the individual comes to understand who they are by creating their space and mastering their environment by making it rational, managed, and controlled. Mapping allows the Cartesian subject to measure, standardize, and control their boundaries.

By paying attention to the material and symbolic meaning of spaces, spatial theorists have shown that spaces produce national identities, which is one way that spaces teach

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295 Ibid., 7
296 Ibid., 8.
299 Ibid., 132.
people who they are. Richard Phillips argues that “Hegemonic constructions of race, gender, class and other dimensions of identity reflect the characteristics of the spaces in which they are mapped. In other words, the nature of the spaces – real and imaginative, material and metaphorical – make a difference to the nature of the hegemonic identities.”

Carl Berger analyzes the geography of national mythology and its effects. He demonstrates that many Canadian values are tied directly to the landscape and climate, and that these values create a racial character for the mythologized Anglo-Saxon settler in Canada. The character of this Nordic race is assumed to be derived from the northern latitude and winters. These stereotypic attributes include strength, self-reliance, and hard-working, and these coalesce to define the dominant White, hardy northern race. These images of the White northern race, which included British and French, was reinforced in novels, travel literature, and paintings. Alternatively, this also meant that the southern races were assumed to be inferior and weak because of their association to southern latitudes. This is one way that national stories, racial stories, belonging, and difference are taught through space.

Spatial theorists also challenge the belief that spaces such as white areas, Chinatowns, ghettos and red-light districts evolve naturally. By combining critical race studies and spatial theory, we can analyze how spaces reproduce racial hierarchies and social inequalities. For example, Kay Anderson analyzes the creation of a Chinatown in Vancouver, British Columbia to demonstrate that this raced space is a European creation, and even the name “Chinatown” is a title created by Europeans. She argues that through spatial policies and state practices, the residents of Vancouver and the government created a category of “Chinese” and its meaning in direct opposition to European culture, and that the reductive racial stereotypes about Chinese people encouraged the settlement, organization, and

302 Ibid., 20-21.
303 Ibid., 6-7.
306 Ibid., 29.
307 Ibid., 24.
boundary of a Chinatown. Critical race scholar David Theo Goldberg urges people to understand the raced nature of spatial arrangements. He writes that:

Just as spatial distinctions like ‘West’ and ‘East’ are racialized in their conception and application racial categories have been variously spatialized more or less since their inception into continental divides, national localities, and geographic regions. Racisms become institutionally normalized in and through spatial configuration, just as social space is made to seem natural, a given, by being conceived and defined in racial terms.

Goldberg describes in his essay “Polluting the Body Politic” how racialized Others have been spatially segregated from civilized white society in North America through the invention of slums, suburbs, and gentrified areas that have racially divided neighbourhoods throughout the second half of the twentieth century. These spaces reinforce racial difference and classed difference too.

Finally, even spaces that appear open to everybody, such as ‘public’ spaces, have the ability to teach people about which bodies are desirable and legitimate, based on boundaries of inclusion and exclusion that exist in public spaces. Samira Kawash writes about New York City’s Jackson Park, and how residents called the “Friends of Jackson Park” petitioned to have the park gate padlocked to exclude homeless people from the park at night. By padlocking the park, the space defines the homeless as illegitimate and undesirable bodies in the space, while it simultaneously produces the citizens as the legitimate ‘public’ and natural owners of the space. All of the above examples of public space, segregated space, legal space, and raced space show “how such spaces are organized to sustain unequal social relations and how these relations shape spaces”.

This chapter will highlight how my five interviewees developed their subjectivity in and through space, beginning with Jennifer’s narratives of her childhood in Michigan. In addition to being able to clearly define the racial boundaries in the city she grew up in and the city’s racial history of white flight, Jennifer also recalled race riots that she witnessed,

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310 Ibid., 27-30.
312 Ibid., 187-188.
314 Ibid.
and racial tensions between Blacks and Whites that were fuelled by local murders and fights that took place between the two races. As well, she spoke about how only a few Black students attended her secondary school, and she acknowledged that attending her school must have been difficult for them as racial minorities.

Although Jennifer describes the racial segregation in the city she grew up in and the railroad track as a social boundary, she did not provide any explanation as to why people were segregated, or any comments as to who was disadvantaged or advantaged by this situation. These segregated landscapes deserve to be deconstructed because “Landscapes have become ‘texts that can be ‘read’ for the relations they inscribe and naturalize. What we see ‘out there’ in the built and physical landscape is not objectively given…but rather is the transformation into material form of past and newly forming beliefs and practices.”

Jennifer’s narratives regarding white flight, and the construction of a mental and physical boundary in the form of a railroad track indicates that the racial segregation in this city was being held together by desire, rather than legal or political force. Denise Ferreira da Silva notes, relying on Cox (1948), that:

...segregation produced the ‘social instability’ and ‘stagnation’ characterizing black conditions. ‘What segregation really amounts to’, he concluded, ‘is a sort of perennial imprisonment of the colored people by Whites’, which provides ‘the milieu for the planned cultural retardation of the colored peoples’ where ‘they may mill and fester in social degeneracy with relatively minimal opportunity for even the most ambitious of them to extricate themselves’…it also produced ‘degraded’ consciousness, which reflected the spaces they inhabited.

Radhika Mohanram has succinctly articulated that “Racial difference is also spatial difference, the inequitable power relationships between various spaces and places are rearticulated as the inequitable power relationship between races.” One clear indication that the Whites were privileged by these public spatial arrangements is the fact that both of the secondary schools were located on the white side of the railroad tracks, which forced young Black students to cross the racial boundaries and travel through the white spaces almost everyday. During these journeys to and from school these Black students could

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316 Anderson, 28.
318 Radhika Mohanram, Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 3.
visibly be seen as bodies out of place\textsuperscript{319}, which made them vulnerable to racial violence and racism as visible minorities intruding in a segregated all-white area.

As a young, single White female, Jennifer was able to develop her racial identity and her limited understanding of race in relationship to these segregated public spaces that privileged Whites. Unlike the Black students who were forced to cross over into the white segregated area, she was able to travel to school quickly and safely everyday. Furthermore, although she knew there were rigid racial boundaries in place, her narrative demonstrates that they were permeable because she was able to pass through them. More importantly, her narratives regarding transgressing these spaces situate black spaces as degenerate and fearful spaces, while white spaces represented safety and civilization. For example, when I asked her, “At any time in your youth, do you recall there being a ‘bad’ area that you weren’t allowed to go in?” she responded, “Yes, the [black] side of the tracks. You didn’t go there alone. I can remember one time going there for a basketball game, and when the game was done, we just ran home so fast because we were scared for our lives because we had crossed over to the wrong side of the tracks.” I then inquired, “Who taught you that you weren’t supposed to cross the tracks?” She replied, “It was just well known that there were many [White] kids that had crossed there and got beat up.” She also recalled that as a young adult, she had to travel through black neighborhoods to get to work, and she recalled that she would “Hope like heck that [her] car doesn’t break down, and if it does, get the heck out of there!”\textsuperscript{320}

Even though my other interviewees did not experience the same level of racial segregation that Jennifer did, some of them were still able to identify raced spaces and social inequalities within their communities. Olivia was able to identify areas that Lebanese people lived in\textsuperscript{321}. Darcy lived in a rural area, so she identified the city as the place where you would find Non-White people, and that she wasn’t allowed to go there because “bad people” lived there.\textsuperscript{322} Tatiana also recalled that there was a place where “bad people lived” and that she wasn’t allowed to go there as a child.\textsuperscript{323} As an adult, she now knows that it was a subsidized

\begin{footnotesize}
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\textsuperscript{319} Ibid., xii. \\
\textsuperscript{320} Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011. \\
\textsuperscript{321} Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011. \\
\textsuperscript{322} Darcy (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011. \\
\textsuperscript{323} Tatiana (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011. \\
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housing area, and she told me that people now refer to it as the “ghetto”. These racial and class divisions still attest to a history of social segregation in these communities. Ruth Frankenberg, author of *White Women, Race Matters* explains that:

> the very existence of a neighbourhood whose residents are all white itself bespeaks a history of racist structuring of that community. Elements of that history might include both the ‘redlining’ of neighborhoods by realtors to keep Black people from buying property in them and also the economic dimensions of racism that would place affluent neighborhoods beyond the reach of most Black families.  

Unlike the majority of the interviewees, however, Jennifer was allowed to travel through these spaces in their youth, and had to do so often during her daily routines.

Jennifer’s journeys through black public spaces, where she would fear for her safety, provide insight into how spaces are racialized, and how these spaces teach people how to understand their racial identity. Richard Phillips reminds us that when people journey through unfamiliar spaces, they *become* a certain person by having their identity continuously reinforced during the journey. He notes that, “the nature of the spaces – real and imaginative, material and metaphorical – make a difference to the nature of the hegemonic identities.”

For Jennifer, travelling through these public spaces taught her to equate black spaces with thoughts of fear and criminality, and white spaces with feelings of safety and belonging, which is precisely the same thing that White women have been taught historically about Black and White people. The segregation created different categories of people, and Jennifer developed a community with the other White people in her neighborhood. She knew that she did not belong in black spaces because of the feelings she had when she was in black spaces. She felt paranoid, fearful, and nervous being in black spaces, and would physically try to escape them whenever she was in these spaces. Yet, she continued to transgress these spaces regardless, and was able to formulate her own perception of white spaces as safe and civilized as a result of it. Sherene Razack reflects on Phillips’ essay “Mapping Men: Spaces of Adventure and Constructions of Masculinity”, which is about young boys who also embarked on journeys through racialized spaces, and describes the journey’s significance:

> The subject who comes to know himself through such journeys

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324 Ibid.
325 Frankenberg, 47.
326 Phillips, 45.
first imagines his own space as civilized, in contrast to the space of the racial Other; second, he engages in transgression, which is a movement from respectable to degenerate space…third, he learns that he is in control of the journey through individual practices of domination…Here the young White boy comes to know himself as white and in control and as possessing superior values, a knowledge gained through the bodies and spaces of the racial Other. \(^{327}\)

Jennifer’s journey’s were similar in the fact that the spaces taught her about both Black and White people, rather than actual experiences with people. She never reported experiencing confrontations with people in these spaces; it was simply the spaces alone which helped her formulate her understanding of and relationship with whiteness and blackness.

Furthermore, after crossing the railroad track boundary and distancing herself from its symbolic presence, Jennifer was aware that she still wore her location on her skin while she was in black spaces. Author Lindsay Bremner says that skin is a moving signifier, “…a wall, so to speak – that located one in space, that granted or denied access, that opened or closed doors, that determined where or with whom one might socialize, work, shop, or fornicate.”\(^{328}\)

In the city she grew up in, Jennifer was aware that she carried the racial boundary on her face and that it made her body vulnerable in certain spaces. Her white face and body denied her access to black spaces, and privileged her in white spaces. However, the meaning of Jennifer’s white skin and her accessibility and status in these spaces are not permanent. They have the ability to change as her relationship with blackness changed throughout life.

**Collapsing the Colourline**

One of the first steps in becoming associated with blackness for all of these White women was becoming romantically involved with a Black man. As previously mentioned, even though Jennifer was the only interviewee who grew up in an era of entrenched segregation, the other interviewees lived in predominantly white cities, which attests to the history of racial segregation or racism in these areas. Therefore, it must be mentioned how they came to meet Black men in order to eventually have an interracial family. To begin with, it must be noted that while I asked my interviewees general questions about their

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relationships with their spouses, I did not probe into detailed aspects of their relationships. In other words, the lack of information about their spouses is not due to their reluctance to talk about their relationships, but rather due to my shortcomings in not asking them about their spouses. What my thesis does not do is thoroughly deconstruct the relationship between my interviewees and their spouses. My intention going into the interviews was to focus on the mother-child relationship and to analyze whether these women’s racial consciousness changed as a result of them parenting a Non-White child. Some of the difficulties I encountered later in my study was a realization that there was a gap in my research pertaining to these women’s relationships with their spouses. I realized that I had insufficiently explored interracial relationships. In hindsight I see that the parenting is the end story, and the relationship is the beginning. Therefore, I periodically felt that I was missing part of the story. Nonetheless, I will briefly outline where some of the interviewees met their spouses and theorize how this was possible in the racially homogenous areas that they lived in.

The interviewee’s narratives revealed that there are spaces in which the colourline may collapse, or be crossed without such strict social consequences. For example, Olivia met her husband through an online dating service.\textsuperscript{329} In the privacy of her home and through the privacy of her online account, she and her future-husband could meet up at any time of the day, and have the freedom to become romantically involved without being socially monitored or ridiculed by others. As well, Jennifer met her husband at his place of work, at an auto-body shop.\textsuperscript{330} While he cleaned her car, she sat at a distance in the garage as they discussed their future plans together, which involved moving to California from Michigan.\textsuperscript{331} However, to an outsider looking in, this interaction would have appeared as another neutral customer-to-service man relationship. He was a Black employee working on a white woman’s car, which would have seemed ordinary to another person in this public space. Both Olivia’s and Jennifer’s narratives reveal that there are spaces where the colourline may be crossed without such dire consequences because the romantic relationships between these Black men and White women were concealed. Annalise, on the other hand, revealed in her narratives that there are also contact zones where White women may interact with Black men because the spaces are considered to be degenerate to begin with. For example, Annalise met her fiancé at

\textsuperscript{329} Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
\textsuperscript{330} Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
\textsuperscript{331} Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
Although bars are public spaces, they are also known for being spaces of crime, violence, and sexuality. It could be argued that in spaces such as these, where vice is expected, Black men and White women may be able to meet. Therefore, in spite of living in predominantly-white locations, my interviewees managed to meet and start romantic relationships with Black men, which indicates that the colourline may be crossed, under certain, albeit controlled, circumstances.

Learning about Race and Space as a White Woman in an Interracial Family

When all of my interviewees became romantically involved with Black men and had Black-White biracial children, their racial identity became more complex. While remaining the White women that they had always been, their experiences in public spaces with their Black partner and/or Black-White biracial children demonstrated that strangers in public no longer viewed them as only white; they became more raced when they were with their family. As people continuously drew their attention to their family’s racial differences in public spaces, and as they and as their family members experienced racial discrimination, their own racial consciousness increased.

All of the women’s racial consciousness began to change as strangers in public began to inform them of their family’s hypervisibility. Some indications were subtle. For example, Jennifer described that when she was dating her partner, and they would drive together in a car, people in traffic would pass them by, and then turn to stare at them. After this regularly happened in various public locations, they determined that people were staring at their racial difference. Knowing that they were visibly marked bodies in areas that were mostly racially homogenous, they decided as a couple to avoid towns that were known for having only White residents, or what Jennifer referred to as “hick towns”. Darcy also identified people’s staring at her and her family as a subtle indication that people were noticing their race difference. When I asked her, “Do you think that you’ve ever been discriminated against as a White mother with a biracial child?” Her initial response was “Yes. Just in public places, nowhere specific, mostly with strangers. Just looks, not comments. Just how they react, the

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332 Annalise (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
333 Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
double-takes and things like that.” As well, Olivia reported that she felt that she and her daughter were sometimes looked at disapprovingly because of their race difference. She said “there are times where I’ll be… pushing her… you know, in a stroller…Most people just smile at the baby, or smile at me…but then you’ll get like the odd older person, an older White person that will look at me, and look at her, but they don’t smile.” Darcy also noted that when she was grocery shopping with her Black partner, “there’s always people staring. I will never forget the day when there were these two old people in front of us, and the lady whispered to her husband. They both turned around and looked at us. Then they walked away, to the complete other end of the grocery store.”

These subtle moments of everyday racism are difficult to identify and can be easily overlooked, yet as mothers of biracial children and partners of Black people, these White women learn to connect people’s body language to messages about their family’s race difference. Even though most of these women were not raised in hostile racial environments, they are still able to distinguish people’s subtle messages of disapproval directed toward their interracial families. These messages must be read within the contexts of sexuality, gender roles, and raced gender roles that were discussed in the previous chapters. The looks and actions described above are based on these White women’s implicit sexual activity with Black men that can be determined when they are with their interracial families. Strangers stare at these women because they identify them as race traitors, and people look away or physically move away from them in order to disassociate themselves from the stigma of being a race traitor.

Strangers in public notify these women of their family’s racial difference in more overt ways too. For example, after Jennifer’s eldest son was born, and the two were staying in the hospital together, Jennifer was told to document her son’s bowel movements on a chart. When she was reviewing the hospital chart, she noticed the nurse had written “FATHER IS BLACK” in capital letters at the top of her child’s chart, which was not a formal part of the record. Then, years later, after her eldest daughter was born and her two children were playing outside, an Italian neighbour who barely spoke English managed to ask

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334 Darcy (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011.
335 Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
336 Darcy (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011.
337 Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
Jennifer, “Different fathers, huh?” and pointed to her children.\footnote{Ibid.} Although her children had the same father, Jennifer’s son was dark-skinned and her daughter was fair-skinned, which is likely what the neighbour was referring to. It was at this point that Jennifer began to realize that people in public viewed her children as racially different, despite the fact that they were full-blooded siblings.

The fact that Jennifer’s awareness came about in a public space cannot be overlooked. Radhika Mohanram notes that, “The category of the ‘black body’ can come into being only when the body is perceived as being out of place, either from its natural environment or its national boundaries”\footnote{Mohanram, xii.}. When the nurse wrote on Jennifer’s hospital chart that Jennifer’s partner was Black, she was doing so because she believed he was ‘out of place’ being in a hospital room with a White woman, and she obviously felt it was her duty to warn the other nurses of his presence in this white space. When the neighbour questioned Jennifer’s children’s parentage, the neighbour likely thought that Jennifer’s dark-skinned son did not belong in a white neighbourhood, and was not in his ‘natural’ environment, especially when his caregiver was White, and his sister appeared to be White too.

Annalise also explained a story in which her fiancé’s Black presence alarmed and even scared White employees because his body was perceived as being out of place. She explained how she and her fiancé were refused service at a bank because of their appearance and the employee’s understanding of racial stereotypes:

\begin{quote}
One day we went to the bank, and they thought that we were going to rob the bank. I went in with my sunglasses on and he had his [long] hair out, and we brought in $400 Canadian dollars and we wanted to change it for Jamaican money. And the [White] lady [bank teller] stepped back, and then the other lady who was sitting down stood up and was looking at us. And we were wondering, “What’s the problem?” And they said, “We won’t change it.” So the stereotype is also that Black men are drug dealers, Black men are bad, and White women coerce them to do this stuff!\footnote{Annalise (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.}
\end{quote}

Annalise’s example again highlights how raced bodies matter in certain spaces. Banks, like hospitals, are business spaces that are highly monitored and legally protected against criminals. When the bank employees saw Annalise and her fiancé, they had an embodied response to Annalise’s fiancé’s racial presence. Even though Annalise’s fiancé was bringing...
money into the bank, the bank employees still interpreted his racial presence as a threat. Mohanram comments that the meaning of black body is fixed.\textsuperscript{341} Annalise learned through this experience that her fiancé carries the meaning of his race wherever he goes, and for these bank employees who equate blackness with criminality, their perception of Annalise’s fiancé was embodied and communicated spatially. Parallel to Fanon’s experience with white supremacy that I highlighted in chapter one, when the child on the train said “Look, a Negro!”\textsuperscript{342}, Annalise’s fiancé was reduced to his blackness that was marked and visible on his body.

The other women that I interviewed also learned from people’s reactions to their families in public that strangers do not identify White women as the mothers of brown-skinned children. Annalise said that when she is in public with her Non-White friends and her son, strangers do not identify Annalise as the mother, and will instead say to her friends that “Your son is so cute.”\textsuperscript{343} Moreover, when strangers have seen Annalise cuddling her own child, they have commented that, “You’re such a good auntie.”\textsuperscript{344} Furthermore, Darcy reported that random strangers have blatantly told her that her daughter does not look like her, while other strangers have asked about her daughter, “Is she yours?” Clearly, people either do not identify these women as the mothers of their biracial children, or feel uncomfortable doing so. These experiences are examples of second-hand racism\textsuperscript{345} that White mothers of biracial children experience because these comments and assumptions that people make about their mother-child relationship undermines their maternal status in public spaces.\textsuperscript{346}

Strangers in public spaces also make negative comments about these White women’s Black partners too. These experiences teach White women in interracial relationships about the low value of black masculinity in white supremacist societies, especially in reference to

\textsuperscript{341} Mohanram, 4, 7-10.
\textsuperscript{342} Fanon, 111-112.
\textsuperscript{343} Annalise (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
\textsuperscript{344} Ibid, italics added.
\textsuperscript{345} Ruth Frankenberg notes that second-hand racism or “rebound racism” may be based on the presence of a black person, and that it is not the same racism that black people would experience, but that white women still are negatively affected by this rebound racism nonetheless. See Ruth Frankenberg, \textit{The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 112.

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stereotypes about Black men’s sexuality and their parenting skills. Olivia was another interviewee who became a racially aware White woman. When I asked whether she had ever been affected by racial stereotypes, she spoke about how her husband was often stereotyped, and how she felt about it. She told me that people have asked her whether her husband has any other children besides the daughter they share. She explained that she knew people were only asking her that odd question when they learned that her husband was Jamaican, and therefore people assumed (incorrectly) that he had other children because Jamaican men are stereotyped as fathering several children by different women. Likewise, Olivia also told me that one of her White girlfriends, who is married to a Barbadian man, told Olivia that while she was in line at a restaurant one day with her biracial son, a White woman that she did not know looked at her son and asked Olivia’s friend, “Does the father see him a lot?” Olivia’s friend replied, “Um yah, we’re married,” and the lady awkwardly replied, “Oh, that’s nice.”

Encounters such as these were significant for Olivia in many ways. To begin with, as the wife of a Jamaican man and mother of a biracial baby girl, Olivia spoke about how these stereotypes saddened and bothered her because they were aimed at her family members that she loved. She understood the negative racial and sexual contexts of these comments, and she described how this second-hand racism disturbed her because she knew that her husband was perceived as a reductive stereotype that did not accurately describe him. The repetitiveness of this situation taught Olivia to resist racism too. She explained another incident that took place at her work:

I would talk about my husband when we were engaged, and I showed this one girl his picture and she said “Oh he’s Black!” And I was like, “well yah he is,” and she said, “I didn’t know that you dated Black guys. I didn’t think that you were the type.” She made a comment like that and it was really awkward, so I said, “What do you mean?” and she said, “I don’t know. I didn’t mean anything bad by it. I just didn’t know that he was Black.”

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347 Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
348 Ibid.
349 Ibid.
350 Ibid.
351 Ibid.
352 Ibid, italics added.
Questioning her co-worker’s statement and its meaning is one way that White women in interracial families resist everyday forms of racism. By questioning the woman’s statement, Olivia is indicating that the statement is racist, inappropriate and that she understands the underlying messages in it (even if the person saying the statement does not). Furthermore, by speaking with her friend about these situations, and by sharing their stories of second-hand racism, these women are creating safe spaces where they can discuss each other’s personal stories and validate each other’s experience with second-hand racism. This, in itself, is a very feminist form of resistance to racial and gender subordination. Finally, these comments also highlight how white supremacy works in everyday situations. White supremacy allows White people to ask insulting questions and say degrading statements about people’s race and sexuality without even knowing, or at least acknowledging the ignorance of what they said. White people assume that they can have unrestricted access to the private lives of Black people.

In addition to being made aware of their family’s racial difference in subtle and overt ways, the women I interviewed also learned about race and racism when their families were verbally discriminated against because of their race in public spaces. Tatiana also has Black-White biracial nephews and nieces. One day when she was at the library with her niece, a White boy commented to another White boy about her niece, “Don’t touch or hang out with that brown girl.”353 This White child had learned to associate blackness with either contamination or dirtiness, and felt the need to warn other White children of her presence. Darcy recalled that when she was in a bar with her Black partner, one White man randomly said to her partner, “You Jamaicans need to go back to Toronto. And take your guns with you, we’ve got guns here too.”354 In the above example, this White man is verbalizing his racial loyalty by creating a ‘we’ versus ‘they’ argument, and he is confirming his and other’s white domination and solidarity by explicitly stating that “we’ve got guns here too.”355

One significant memory that Jennifer recalled was when she and her partner were trying to cross the border from United States into Canada with their eldest son, who was still a baby. She said that their child had his father’s last name, but Jennifer and the father of her child were not married yet. When they arrived at the immigration office, Jennifer recalled

353 Tatiana (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011.
354 Darcy (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011.
355 Ibid., italics added.
that the immigration officer was very rude to them, and insisted that they had no proof that her partner had actually fathered the child. Jennifer recalls that the woman asked her partner, “Are you sure you’re the father of this child?” and insinuated that he was trying to smuggle a Caucasian woman and her baby into Canada. The immigration officer refused to allow them to enter into Canada. They were refused entrance into Canada until her partner contacted a government official whom he knew personally to speak to the immigration officer, to assure her that the baby belonged to both of them.

What’s interesting in this example is that Jennifer’s partner was a Canadian citizen, yet it was he who was being questioned as a criminal in this incident. The immigration officer did not suspect that Jennifer, who was not a Canadian citizen, was perhaps trying to smuggle a Black baby into the country instead. Sociologist Denise da Silva argues that legal spaces are raced spaces, and that White people live within the domain of justice, while Black people do not, which is likely why Jennifer’s Black partner would be perceived as a perpetrator in this legal space. She notes that, “…the white body and the social (geographic, economic and symbolic) spaces associated with whiteness have been produced to signify the principles of universal equality and freedom informing our conceptions of the Just, the Legal, and the Good.”

She continues to explain that, “Because principles, procedures, and judicial decision-making are informed by the principles associated with the culture of the dominant ‘racial group’, and because those implementing them usually share the interests and principles of those who will benefit from race-based exclusion, the argument that racism is foreign to the domain of Law cannot be sustained.” Jennifer’s Black partner was inherently more guilty and suspect than she was upon entering the immigration office, simply because he was a Black man entering into a legal space. Author Anna Secor would agree that his dark skin signified guilt in this space, and would even say that by simply entering this checkpoint - in the form of an immigration office - that this action by itself was “tainted with guilt”.

356 da Silva, 426.
357 Ibid., 423.
358 Ibid., 424.
Jennifer recalls feeling neither fear nor anxiety about the situation. She felt annoyed by the immigration officer’s actions and felt that the officer was acting inappropriately. Jennifer’s response to the situation demonstrates that she is aware that she resides within the ‘domain of the legal’ as a White woman because she did not feel threatened by the situation or the immigration officer’s attitude. Many racialized Others would have been frightened by the officer’s actions, while Jennifer interpreted them as a mere annoyance. Finally, this couple’s class must also be contextualized in this situation. Both Jennifer and her partner were from lower class backgrounds, which would make them even more vulnerable when crossing a border. As an interracial, lower-class young couple, the immigration officer would not think that the couple held any political clout, and would therefore feel more inclined to intimidate and discipline them at the border.

Hospitals are another site of contestation for interracial families. France Twine, author of A White Side of Black Britain, describes hospitals as “another institution in which women can be surveyed and disciplined…Like women of color, the White transracial mothers in my study reported that hospital staff assumed they were abusive or negligent mothers and treated them accordingly.” Tatiana reported the same treatment during our interview. When I asked her “Have you ever been discriminated against as a White mother with brown children?” She replied:

When [my son] was checked [at the hospital] as a little baby, I felt like the nurses were really mean to me, because of my family’s race…
I felt like they judged me, because they thought I was like a single mom…
they just assumed that I wouldn’t breast feed, and they were just very judgemental toward me… I felt kind of picked on in there. I was in a room with other parents, and I wasn’t being treated like everybody else.

Darcy also felt that she had been discriminated against in a hospital setting, but for her, the experience continued after the hospital visit. She recalled:

[When my daughter] was very young, she wasn’t feeling very well. I took her to emergency…it was hours and hours of waiting.
I was really upset, and [she] was getting upset – she was tired and wanted a nap, and was hungry….So I just got fed up and told the nurse that we’re leaving because this is taking too long, and I’ll have her seen by my family doctor…Sure enough, two days later I received a letter

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361 Tatiana (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011.
from the Children’s Aid Society (CAS), because the nurses at the hospital had called CAS on me. I was extremely upset and I was angry because the more I thought of it, I thought – I’m a young mother and I’m White and my child is Black… I’m just wondering about what if [she] had the same skin colour as me – would they have called CAS on me?³⁶²

Both of these women’s narratives demonstrate that they were being stereotyped as unfit mothers because they did not fit the description of the ‘good’ White mother that I discussed in the previous chapters. In institutionalized spaces such as hospitals or immigration offices, White women in interracial families are treated as second-class citizens because of their racial disloyalty. They are no longer allowed to take advantage of white privilege, and instead they are blackened because of their association to blackness.

Narratives such as these demonstrate that White women in interracial families do experience violence for crossing the colourline, and that they develop a critical race consciousness because of these experiences. My interviewee’s narratives demonstrate that they understand when they and their families are being stereotyped, accused of doing something awful, or are being perceived negatively. They are able to recall racial discrimination that they’ve encountered in their lives and they are sometimes able to resist it. Their narratives also highlight how white supremacy is working in everyday experiences and what is at stake in a daily way.

While some critical race theorists note that these White women are only temporarily or symbolically blackened while they’re with their families³⁶³, the stigma of associating with blackness does have the ability to affect these women’s lives even when their interracial families are not present. For example, Jennifer noted that she has likely been “passed over for job opportunities” because employers knew she had a Black spouse, and because of this, she was hesitant to tell people at her workplace that her husband was Black.³⁶⁴ Annalise also reflected on how she would consider hiding her fiancé’s race from people at her work. She recalled an incident at work in which another White woman was “discovered” as being in an interracial relationship, and how her co-workers reacted to finding out:

> There’s a co-worker of mine and her husband is from Barbados, and when she came to a dinner one night, people were saying, “We’ve worked with her for so long, and we had no idea that she dated a Black man.” It was

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³⁶² Darcy (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011.
³⁶³ Frankenberg, 113.
³⁶⁴ Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
the highlight of the night! I was thinking, “Oh my God.” And at that time I had just started working there and I was single…But I thought to myself, if I have to put up with that [spectacle], then I don’t want to do that. 365

In situations such as these, both Jennifer and Annalise are confronted with the decision of either being stigmatized as White women in interracial relationships, or they can hide the fact that their spouse is Black and suffer the second-hand racism in silence. If they decide to hide their family’s interracial identity, then this is a defence mechanism that safeguards their whiteness and their family’s financial security. When White women do decide to reveal their family’s racial identity, there are consequences for being identified as a race traitor or “that type” of White woman, as Olivia’s co-worker said previously 366. Other White women who have Black spouses say that they believe that they are not invited to dinners, weddings, and other gatherings because of their family’s race. 367 Therefore, there are many social consequences for being an ‘open’ or ‘out-of-the-closet’ White woman in an interracial family.

The fact that these women are being discriminated against for employment and socially ostracized by others demonstrates how race is gendered. For example, Sherene Razack has written about how White men who enter into spaces of prostitution with Non-White females are able to move freely through these raced spaces, and then return to their respectable and privileged lives as White men. She says, “Their temporary abandonment of societal norms does not weaken [their] claims of respectability…that is, once [they] leave the space of degeneracy, having survived it unscathed, they return to respectability.” 368 However, this is not the case for White women. As White women who live with Black men, they are unable to fully exit the space of degeneracy as White men do because their gender restricts them from doing so. This is undoubtedly due to the importance white supremacist societies place on White women’s sexual purity, as reproducers of the race. Unlike their male counterparts, women must either hide their associations with blackness, or suffer the consequences for defying a white supremacist, patriarchal, and racist society that disapproves of White women having sexual and familial relations with Black men.

365 Annalise (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
366 Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
367 Frankenberg, 105.
368 Sherene Razack, “Race, Space and Prostitution: The Making of the Bourgeois Subject,” 357.
White women with interracial families who have been alerted to their family’s race difference, and who have been discriminated against because of it, continue to develop a heightened racial awareness. Sometimes they learn to give in to white supremacy and to accommodate the system. Although Olivia is a racially aware White woman who understands the role that race and gender plays in her family’s life, she also understands the enormity of white supremacy, and that she cannot win against the system all of the time. For example, even though Olivia challenges racism as a White woman in an interracial family, she admitted that sometimes she needed to accommodate white supremacy in order to protect her family too. For example, when Olivia bought a used toy from an elderly man on an online website, she asked her husband to pick it up for her. Before her husband left to get the toy, she considered calling the older man to tell him that her husband was a “tall Black guy” because she wanted to avoid a racial confrontation between the two men. Although Olivia did not end up doing this, she told me that she feared that the older man would be White, and that he would be either scared or hostile toward her husband because of the criminalized and aggressive stereotype placed on Black men. Olivia admitted that it was unnecessary to warn the old man of her husband’s race and height, but she also knew that if she did not, that the two men may be uncomfortable with the situation. Indeed, the situation might even be a dangerous one for her Black husband.

It is situations such as these in which white supremacy is inevitably intertwined into everyday situations, and it demonstrates how even racially aware White women know that they cannot win the battle with white supremacy every time. Furthermore, racial and gender subordination is often interlocked. Olivia also spoke about how she is conscious of wearing her wedding ring. She explained that due to the weight she had put on during her

369 Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
370 Ibid.
371 Patricia Hill Collins was one of the first scholars to use the term “interlocking” in the context that I am referring to here, in her book Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (Boston: Uwin Hyman, 1990) on page 225-226. She said that rather than privileging models of oppression such as racism, sexism, and patriarchy in the additive model of oppression, we must understand how race, class, and gender are interlocked in one matrix of domination. Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack then take up the same argument in their essay “The Race to Innocence: Confronting Hierarchical Relations among Women,” in HeinOnline, Gender, Race & Just. (335, 1997-1998). They explain on page 335-336 that “This ‘interlocking’ effect means that the systems of oppression come into existence in and through one another so that class exploitation could not be accomplished without gender and racial hierarchies; imperialism could not function without class exploitation, sexism, heterosexism, and so on. Because the systems rely on one another in these complex ways, it is ultimately futile to attempt to disrupt one system without simultaneously disrupting others.” These two explanations describe how I am using the term above.
recent pregnancy, she was unable to wear her wedding ring, and that she was highly aware of when she was in public without it on because she didn’t want people to think that she was “trash.” Olivia knew that being perceived as an unmarried woman was a gender deficit that would compound the stigma of being a mother of a biracial child.

White women in interracial families also learn to utilize their white agency in public spaces to protect themselves and their families from racial discrimination. For example, Jennifer described how she would search for new homes to live in without her spouse because she knew that people would approve of her as a White female tenant, but would negatively judge her and her Black spouse if they viewed rentals together. When Jennifer was young, she manoeuvred through racially segregated spaces and did not consider how people were privileged or disadvantaged by them. As a White women with an interracial family, she now understands that white spaces are privileged spaces to live in, and she uses her white privilege to overcome these spatial inequalities and to secure these spaces for her Non-White family.

These strategies that White women develop to secure privileges for their interracial families are not unique to North American interracial families. France Twine noted how an interracial couple she interviewed in England spoke about the same strategies while shopping for houses. The White woman she interviewed would go shopping with her White father for houses in Leicester, England, in exclusively white neighbourhoods. Knowing these areas were racially segregated by its residents, she and her Black husband agreed that he would not join them while shopping for the houses. The couple intentionally used her white privilege to buy the property. The woman who sold her property to them later found out that she had unknowingly sold her property to an interracial couple and stated that, “…she was sorry she left [the other neighbors] with a nigger for a neighbour.” These examples highlight the materiality of raced spaces and how these White women can use their racial awareness to privilege their families.

Searching for property is not the only example of White mothers using their racial consciousness and privilege to improve their interracial family’s life in public spaces.

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372 Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
Another mother interviewed by Twine described how she is involved with her biracial daughter’s school to assert herself as her daughter’s (White) protector:

I’ve become involved in the school because I’m interested in supporting it anyway, but I realize that also I want to pave the way for her. I’m also very conscious of the fact that if there is an issue that I take up, they will deal with me as a White person…I may have access into…institutional society as a White person that a Black person wouldn’t have…And, obviously, I will use that to [my daughter’s] advantage.374

As well, another White mother reported that if her biracial son did not arrive at home on time, she would routinely call the police station to question if he’s in custody and to complain about the attention her biracial son had been receiving by the police in their white neighbourhood.375 She recalls telling one police officer in a telephone conversation, “My son is 6’3”, Black and male. Your officers have been giving him a lot of hassle recently. They’ve stopped him on numerous occasions as he’s got his key in this door coming into our home. Squad cars have stopped him and asked ‘What are you doing?’ because this is not in a black area.”376 This mother knew that because of her racial and class privilege, the police officers would be more polite to her, would be more willing to discuss the matter with her, and therefore, would inadvertently take more care when dealing with her son.

The above situation also highlights state processes that occur in white neighbourhoods that allow residents to understand who belongs and who does not belong within the community. When the White mother’s biracial son would be verbally harassed by police officers, it sent a clear message to the brown-skinned young man that his body was not wanted in the space, and did not belong in the white neighbourhood. In doing so, the police officers were claiming the public space as belonging to themselves and the White residents. Without the protection of his White mother, it is likely that the biracial young man would be arrested and detained by police officers for trespassing in the white neighbourhood, which would likely lead to him being physically evicted from the space. By calling the police station and asserting her white privilege in telephone conversations with police officers, his

375 Ibid., 200-201.
376 Ibid.
White mother could demonstrate that he belonged inside their white neighbourhood with her, and thus, inside the ‘domain of the legal’.  

Not all experiences in public spaces required stranger’s reactions or comments to prompt my interviewee’s learning experience; sometimes these women were able to learn about race difference from their own observations. Each of the women I interviewed confirmed that because they were in an interracial family, they had experienced being a visible minority in public spaces. Due to the fact that all of my interviewees live in predominantly-white areas, this was not something that they had experienced prior to being in an interracial family. Jennifer described how she is always the racial minority at her husband’s family functions. Darcy recalled being a visible minority when she visited her partner’s family in Trinidad and Tobago, and she commented that, “Um, it was different. I didn’t feel that uncomfortable, but I did realize that I was the only White person there.” Tatiana described a trip to Jamaica, when she and her partner were visiting her partner’s family in a rural area of Jamaica, and that the neighbourhood children were compelled to touch her skin because they had never seen a White person before. Olivia was able to connect her experience with being a visible minority to the experiences of Black people who are regularly visible minorities. She commented that:

I remember the very first time that I ever felt like a [visible] minority…
And I remember thinking, “wow, so this is what it feels like!”… cause I definitely stood out, people were looking at me, and stuff like that…
I have gone places with a Black person, and they’ve mentioned, “Oh, there’s only one other Black person here.” They always seem to notice that…I think that when you are the minority in a group, you’re always looking for those that look like you.

Although my interviewees did experience being a racial minority in these settings, it must be noted that their white skin aroused interest in people, not fear or condemnation, as black skin sometimes does. This is a crucial difference between the experiences of a White person as a racial minority and the experience of a Black person as a racial minority.

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377 da Silva, 447.
378 Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
379 Darcy (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011.
380 Tatiana (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011.
381 Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
In addition to being able to empathize with the experience of being a racial minority in public spaces, Darcy also learned the fluidity of race and how its meaning can change throughout different locations. She recalled that when she was visiting her partner’s family in Tobago, a stranger came up to her, looked at Darcy’s daughter and said “Oh, look at the White baby!” Darcy’s daughter is brown-skinned, with brown eyes and brown curly hair, so she exclaimed that, “I’ve never heard anyone say that! She’s always considered the Black child here. I was like, whoa, that’s weird!” Clearly, Darcy was surprised by this interaction, but it taught her that her daughter’s race is a social construction that can change according to her location. While Canadians perceived her daughter as a Black baby, people in the Caribbean perceived her daughter as a White baby.

Conclusion

For White women in interracial families, a lot of racial learning takes place in public spaces. Many times it is in the form of being alienated or discriminated against in both subtle and overt ways, but White women can also learn about race through neutral and harmless interactions that highlight race difference too. Through these experiential lessons on race, White women who partner with Black men and have Black-White biracial children develop a racial consciousness that they did not have prior to being in an interracial family. This chapter has shown that White women’s racial consciousness is created and re-created through the public spaces they journey in, and by the relationships they have with Non-White bodies. In addition to analyzing the life histories of White women in interracial relationships, we can use a spatial approach to determine where these women learned about race as young White women, and as members of interracial families. Public landscapes are essential to White women’s racial learning because they are already established as raced spaces when the women enter into the spaces, and when these women interact with strangers, they are able to explore and deal with genuine, uncensored race-based interactions.

As young White women living in racially homogenous white communities, they were passive actors in race relations throughout their childhood. Although they were able to

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382 Darcy (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011.
383 Ibid, italics added.
decipher racialized spatial divisions, they did not think of themselves as participants in race relations or beneficiaries of white privilege. This is not unusual, given that “…one effect of colonial discourse is the production of an unmarked, apparently autonomous white/Western self, in contrast with the marked, Other racial and cultural categories with which the racially and culturally dominant category is constructed.” It was not until these women were intimately involved with race difference as members of interracial families that they became aware of how race difference is perceived to be deviant, and that they became discriminated against in public spaces. It is with this new knowledge that they were able to challenge racist ideals by using their white agency to protect and aid their Non-White family members in public spaces, and to teach and equip their biracial children to deal with racial conflicts in public spaces. Therefore, not only did their knowledge of race relations heighten as they moved through raced spaces, but their involvement in race relations evolved from being passive, to being personally involved in complex race relations. All of these changes were a result of their racial experiences in public spheres because it is an important sphere in which racial learning takes place.

384 Frankenberg, 17.
Chapter Four: Learning about the Colourline in Private Spaces

Thus far, I have discussed what whiteness\textsuperscript{385} means and how White people are welcomed into whiteness. To contextualize the lives of my interviewees, I have also outlined how white femininity dictates that White women must be racially loyal and heterosexual, which requires them to be in a relationship with a White man (preferably married to him) and have White children. When a White woman abides by these rules, then she is contributing to the reproduction of the White race, and therefore she is granted respectability within her community. When a White woman defies these social rules and has a Black partner, she quickly encounters social disapproval and often hostility in public spaces. In this chapter, I consider how race is negotiated in the privacy of the family home.

I will continue to use a spatial approach to determine how private spaces – and in particular, the family home – are learning spheres where White women are taught about gender and race. My interviewees’ narratives reveal that even though they are inducted into whiteness in the family home, they also develop their racial consciousness in the Non-White family households of friends. Later in life, as mothers of biracial children, they utilize their homes to teach their children about anti-racism and other equity issues, and they continue to learn about how spaces are raced through the tensions that exist between them and their Black partners in their interracial households. The family home is a lifelong learning space that continually produces and reproduces raced and gendered identities for White women in interracial families, and this raced learning environment fosters the development of their critical race consciousness in a variety of ways.

Learning about Whiteness in the White Family Home

Some scholars argue that the family home is not only the first space that we learn about our culture and identity, but perhaps it is the most important place because it is where

\textsuperscript{385} As described in chapter one, whiteness refers to the culture, representations, lifestyles, attitudes, history, and spaces associated with white people. Although the definition of whiteness is complex, most scholars agree that whiteness is associated with positive connotations such as power, privilege, normality, trustworthiness, intellectuality, respectability, control, and merit. See chapter one for more details.
we develop our sense of belonging at such an early age in life.\textsuperscript{386} For young White women in monoracial families, the home is a site of racial learning because they are taught about what is considered ‘normal’ and acceptable behaviour for White women. Dreama Moon, author of “White Enculturation and Bourgeois Ideology: The Discursive Production of ‘Good (White) Girls’” studied the communicative and cultural practices between White family members inside the family home to determine how whiteness is made in the family home and how it works within the family home. In this article, Moon asks:

\textit{How does one get to be (and remain) white? If “whiteness” is socially constructed, as critical scholars claim, then “White” people must be made. This “making” of “whiteness,” like other identities, is accomplished via a complex enculturative process that begins in the family/home.}\textsuperscript{387}

Moon argues that white enculturation involves both the “evasion of whiteness,” and “white solipsism”.\textsuperscript{388} The “evasion of whiteness” includes how Whites learn to disconnect socially and emotionally to issues involving race and racism, and learn to not “see” how these issues affect their lives. At the same time, “white solipsism” allows Whites to see their experiences with whiteness as universal and normative, and they therefore do not perceive Non-White experiences as significant, nor even in existence.\textsuperscript{389} Moon argues that the White family home is the first site of production of whiteness, and that families use this private space to inculcate family members into whiteness.\textsuperscript{390} It is in the family home that White people first learn to ignore how race and racism affects their lives. White family members do not discuss the power relations associated with race, or what whiteness is.\textsuperscript{391} This culture of silence that begins in the family home teaches White family members to accept their white privilege as normal.

For most of my interviewees, whiteness was such a routine part of their everyday family life as a child that they had difficulty identifying it or even speaking about it as an adult. For example, Darcy grew up in an all-White family, in a rural neighbourhood that had

\textsuperscript{387} Ibid., 178.
\textsuperscript{388} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{389} Ibid., 178-179.
\textsuperscript{390} Ibid., 179, 181.
\textsuperscript{391} Ibid., 178.
no Non-White people. It was not until her early adulthood that she began seeing or socializing with Non-White people. Yet, when I spoke to her about her childhood, she did not think of herself or her family as White, and although she could verbalize that she was French Canadian, she did not (or would not) elaborate on what being French Canadian or white meant during our interview. Olivia also identified that all of the people in her family were White and that all of her family’s friends that visited their house during her childhood were White, but she could not identify nor elaborate on any discussions, references, or lessons about whiteness that took place in her family household.

Although the expectation to be with a White man may not be explicitly spoken about in the family home at an early age, it will be addressed by family members when White women attempt to venture outside of these expectations by expressing sexual interest in Non-White men. These unspoken rules within the White family can create moments of confusion for White women who attempt to cross the colourline. They know that they are doing something abnormal because they can see that their families are all-White and that there are no interracial couples, but they have difficulty articulating and deciphering what’s going on in the moment that they consider crossing the colourline. For example, Annalise did indicate in the interview that as a young woman, she felt disconnected to whiteness, or what she identified as white “culture,” even though she could not articulate exactly what whiteness is. Annalise briefly commented a few times during the interview that “Like on the outside I’m White, but on the inside it feels like a different person,” or “As a teenager, I had a lot of soul-searching and a lot of understanding to do because I felt connected to other cultures more than Caucasian.” This inability to fully articulate her feelings about whiteness is a side-

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392 Darcy (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011.
393 During the interview, I asked Darcy what her ethnicity was and she replied “French-Canadian.” She also spoke about how she attended a small French elementary school as a child, and when I asked her if any ethnic or religious celebrations took place at the school, she said that they celebrated the Catholic holidays because it was a Catholic school. I also asked Darcy what her nationality was, and she again stated, “French-Canadian.” However, when I asked her to describe what it meant to be French-Canadian or Canadian, she briefly answered that it meant having freedoms and that she learned about the wars Canada had participated in during history classes. These were the only statements Darcy made about being French-Canadian throughout the interview. Therefore, her statements about her ethnicity were neutral; they were neither positive nor negative. This deserves mentioning because some scholars have identified being French-Canadian as a racialized identity in Canada, but Darcy did not identify her French-Canadian ethnicity as such. For more details about a racialized French-Canadian identity, see White Niggers of America by Pierre Vallieres (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971).
394 Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
395 Annalise (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011, italics added.
effect of the white enculturation that Moon describes because White people are taught not to speak about race from an early age. Furthermore, Annalise spoke about how she felt disconnected from the white ideals that the rest of her family lived by, such as the need to be in monoracial relationships, and that both she and her family would question why she couldn’t be like other White girls who accepted the ideals of white femininity. Annalise did not describe why she was attracted to Black men nor why she was not attracted to White men during the interview, but she did describe how crossing the colourline confused both her and her family:

I used to think, why can’t I be normal? My family would ask me, “Why can’t you be normal? Why won’t you date a White person? A White man? Why can’t you be like every other White girl who wants to grow up, get married, with their white picket fence?” I never wanted that stuff. Yes, I wanted to grow up and get married, but I never pictured myself with a White man... Then later on I had to realize in life... I’m Caucasian. I’m proud, and I can’t be anything but Caucasian... People would always say, “Oh, but you’re a Black woman at heart.” And no, I’m a White woman, I just have different views than most typical White women... I felt free once I figured out who I was as a person.396

Annalise’s narratives are significant for many reasons. Not only is she able to describe how she felt disconnected from the white superiority in her family home, and how her family members felt disappointed in her racial disloyalty, but her narratives also demonstrate how whiteness was perceived heterosexually and materially too. Her family did not want her to be with a White person, they discussed how they wanted her to be specifically with a White man. Her family’s thoughts of normative whiteness also included marriage and an image of middle-class home with a white picket fence. Annalise is able to articulate the struggles she endured for not participating in whiteness, which included being identified as abnormal by her family members, which even made her question herself. She also demonstrates that she had to reconcile those differences in her mind in order to establish peace with her anti-racist identity. This is a major step in the development of her racial consciousness. As a racially aware White woman, she is now able to reflect on her past and identify how her family tried to induct her into whiteness, and the consequences she endured

396 Ibid.
for not joining her family members in reproducing whiteness. Although her peers identified her as a “Black woman at heart,” Annalise has grown to understand that White people can be anti-racist too, but that they will be perceived as abnormal or race-traitors because they are White people that reject whiteness.

For the women I interviewed, the White family home continued to be space of white supremacy even after the women became involved with Black men and had biracial children. Upon hearing about her engagement to a Black man, Olivia’s father continued to warn her in private that her fiancé was going to cheat on her, while Annalise’s brother continued to be sceptical about her having Non-White babies. He would say to her, “What am I going to do with a Black baby?” And he would insist that her children would be ridiculed by people in public because of their race. When Annalise’s brother would ask these questions or say these comments about biracial children, he was reinforcing the belief that racial difference is absolute and that black and white communities are distinct entities from one another, insomuch that even Black and White babies are parented differently, or that a biracial child would be so inevitably defective that he would not know what to do with it. By speaking about her biracial child as a victim, he is again reproducing the idea that interracial sex is wrong or sinful, and that conversely, only monoracial sex is healthy and acceptable. Furthermore, by insisting that her children would be made fun of, Annalise’s brother has attempted to place the blame of racism on society, instead of his personal racist views. These experiences highlight how the family home can continually reproduce white superiority, in a variety of contexts and time periods throughout White women’s lives. Overall, when the White family is threatened by the presence of a racial Other, family members will often challenge the family member who has crossed the colourline, and

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397 Annalise did not describe who her peers were – their age, race, or gender – when she made this comment, nor the context of how this comment was made. As well, as an interviewer, I did not pry further into why one of her peers made this comment to her.
398 Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
399 Annalise (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
402 Frankenberg, 126.
404 Moon, 183.
identify them as a race traitor. Although White women may initially learn about whiteness in their natal family home, they do continue to learn about race in Non-White spaces throughout their lives too.

**Learning about Otherness in the Non-White Family Home**

As mentioned in chapter three, although my interviewees grew up in predominantly-white areas, they still knew people – neighbours, friends at school – who were racial minorities, and they had access to these Non-White spaces through their friendships with Non-White people. Jennifer recalled fond memories of being in Spanish and Italian households as a child:

> I’ve always been very intrigued with Spanish culture…I loved the language…the smell of the food whenever we’d go to their house was just phenomenal! My best friend growing up was Italian and her parents took me in as one of their own kids. And I have fond memories of going to their house, and their grandmother lived in the house next door, and they’d be making the fresh pasta and rolling it out, and they always sat at the table. Because my family was so big, we hardly ever ate together except for on holidays…basically food was put on the stove and we’d just eat when we got home. We all had different schedules, but with my friend it was like a set thing. You’d sit down and eat a certain time, you’d have a glass of water with a plate of food, and then you’d have dessert, and then you’d watch TV. I never really had that kind of structure… I was always intrigued by their differences, their foods and the way they raised their children.  

Annalise shared similar sentiments about her upbringing and her opinion regarding Non-White families. When I asked her “What sort of values did your family try to instil in you as a child?” She responded:

> My mom always said that family was important. Having meal time was important, but unfortunately she couldn’t do that because of her hours of work. It was always important to have a sit-down dinner…I’ve always dated men from other cultures because of their families. All of the men that I’ve dated have been [from] close-knit [families], and that was really important for me because I didn’t have that as a kid. I always wanted

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405 As discussed in chapter one, some European ethnic groups have been welcomed into whiteness; they were not always identified as white. Even though Jennifer lived in a segregated neighbourhood, it is possible that she had access to these spaces because the racial status of these Italian and Spanish neighbours was ambiguous at the time. For more details, see chapter one’s outline of Matthew Frye Jacobson’s work.

406 Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
a big family and a family that was close and talked together. For both Annalise and Jennifer, then, it is apparent that they shared similar family values in their youth, but were not able to experience these values acted out in their childhood homes. Instead, they experienced these family values in Non-White spaces. This admiration of Non-White cultures and family values during their youth could be one of the reasons why both of these women chose to have large families as adults, and are open to adopting Non-White cultures in their households. When I asked Annalise, “Whose culture is more dominant in your household?” She replied “His [Jamaican culture] because I’ve adapted the culture, but I’ve adapted multiple cultures as far as food goes. We eat a lot of food from around the world, but we listen to reggae music, hip-hop, R&B, jazz, blues, 60s and 70s.” Similarly, Jennifer also felt that her husband’s culture was more dominant in their household. Both of these women were intrigued with Otherness as children, and both of them learned the value of having a large family by seeing how Non-Whites live in their private spaces. As women in interracial families, they are reproducing what they valued as children, but did not experience in their White family homes.

As women in interracial families, they continued to learn about blackness from their Black relatives in their homes. Jennifer stated that “I know a lot more about what Black people have gone through in history and just from listening to my mother-in-law and to hear her talk about some things that happened to her life. Not only history, but also it’s opened up a lot of knowledge as far as what Blacks had to go through.” Olivia said that as a young woman, she would learn about different cultures by going to friends’ houses, and as an adult, being in an interracial marriage continues to teach her about Jamaican culture. She described that her in-laws make West Indian food, and they discuss what it’s like to be home in Jamaica and their experiences with immigrating into Canada. Therefore, black private

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407 Annalise (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
408 Ibid.
409 Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
410 As described in chapter one, blackness refers to the culture, representations, lifestyles, attitudes, history, and spaces associated with black people. In general, this may have both positive and negative connotations. While blackness may refer to black pride or black nationalism, blackness is also associated with being emotional, violent, irrational, backward, and sexual. See chapter one for more details.
411 Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
412 Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
413 Ibid.
spaces that these White women have access to provide ongoing learning spheres for White women who are involved in interracial networks or families. It is within the privacy of the home that their cultural training and understanding of racism continues.

While Annalise and Jennifer learned about Non-White cultures and admired people of colour, Olivia had a difficult time learning about raced spaces and the meaning of her white body in these spaces. At the beginning of her relationship with her husband, she learned that his father disapproved of interracial relationships and rejected her as a new member of the family because she was White. When they began dating, she was not allowed in the family’s house, and when she was eventually allowed inside, his father would leave the house. Eventually he would be in the house with her but would not speak to her, and only after a year and a half of dating did he eventually accept her into the family. Although most people would attest that her father-in-law’s actions were racist, Olivia noted that his reasoning was that “I was White, and, he didn’t want his son to be with a White lady because his views were that White women call the cops on Black guys, they get [Black men] into trouble, and they’re just up to no good and stuff like that.” Therefore, his actions were not based on racism. They were born out of the system of white supremacy that taught her father-in-law to associate White women with law enforcement, persecution of Black men, and other forms of racial violence that were discussed in chapter one. Through this experience, Olivia learned that White people are not accepted in all spaces. In spite of the emotional pain that she may have endured throughout this experience of racial exclusion, it was a major part of her critical race consciousness development.

Teaching about Race in the Interracial Home

White women in interracial families use their knowledge of whiteness and blackness – which has been learned through both public and private spaces – to teach their children about race in their family home. It is important for scholars to focus on the relationships between mothers and children specifically in Black-White interracial families because “race training” and cultural transmission is typically believed to be the mother’s responsibility.

414 Ibid.
At the beginning of this chapter, I explained how the family home is a site of racial inculcation for White women. However, Moon also argues that “As primary socialization agents…White women can build ‘home’ as anti-hegemonic spaces in which engagement with the movement against white supremacy is made a cultural norm.” This is precisely what I found in the narratives of my interviewees; that all of the White women I interviewed use their homes to teach their children about equity issues, race and anti-racism.

Since White women learn that their families may face racism in public spaces, as discussed in the last chapter, it is reasonable that White mothers of Black-White biracial children would ideally hope to teach their children about race in private spaces, such as their household. This is how the private and public spaces are connected. When White women encounter hostility and discrimination in public spaces, they are able to utilize these racist learning experiences to develop anti-racist strategies in the home. Unlike public spaces, which provide spontaneous racial experiences, private spaces can be controlled, and provide a comfortable environment for mothers to teach their children about race. For example, Jennifer noted that she would hope to teach her children about race at home because that is where she feels the safest, and the most sheltered from racism. Olivia and Darcy also identified the home as the first place that biracial children should learn about race and anti-racism too.

Mothers of biracial children have a unique task. They are in the vulnerable position of doing what many mothers do not have to do, which is to teach their children about somebody else’s race and ethnic identity. Teaching about another race and culture involves what critical race scholar France Twine calls “racial literacy”, which is a concept that I will be borrowing throughout this chapter. She defines racial literacy as:

a reading practice, a way of perceiving and responding to the racial climate and racial structures that individuals encounter daily…Racial literacy includes discursive, material, and cultural practices in which parents train themselves and their children to recognize, name, challenge, and manage various forms of everyday racism.

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416 Moon, 196.
417 Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
418 Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011, and Darcy (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011.
419 Twine, A White Side of Black Britain, 8.
Some of my interviewee’s racial literacy has already been explained in the previous chapter. For example, many of the women I interviewed could detect when people were staring at their family’s race difference, or they could ‘read’ people’s body language that showed their disapproval for interracial relationships. In this chapter, my interviewee’s racial literacy will become apparent in the way that they teach anti-racism to their children, and in the ways in which they learn and teach about ethnic capital. Twine borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu’s theories about the four different types of capital to create what she calls “ethnic capital,” which is:

a variant of cultural capital that is highly valued by members of racial and ethnic minorities. I conceptualize ethnic capital as a form of currency, a resource rather than a liability, employed by members of ethnic minority communities to secure their belonging, while also reinforcing their cultural ties in the face of racism.

Twine identifies grooming practices, music, speech, and food as ethnic markers, and argues that when White women transfer this ethnic capital to their children, they enable their children “to gain respect in their families and local communities by promoting social cohesion and securing their children’s cultural belonging.”

The five women I interviewed identified many ways that they teach about equity issues and anti-racism to their children. One of the most common ways was speaking about, and modeling the language of equity for their children. Knowing that these mothers are aware of the racial hostility that exists outside of the family home, as discussed in earlier chapters, it is not surprising that they chose to use their home as a safe space to instil confidence and self-esteem in their children. Olivia spoke to her daughter about accepting others, and how she and her husband refused to say anything derogatory about any group of people because they wanted their daughter to know that it was unacceptable to discriminate against others. This equity training extended to all types of minority groups. Olivia spoke about how she also wanted to teach her daughter to accept gay marriage, and even hoped that she could bring her daughter to Toronto’s Pride Parade in the future.

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421 Twine, A White Side of Black Britain, 8.
422 Ibid., 9.
423 Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
Another common strategy used to teach about race and culture in the family home is through the décor of their houses. Annalise described how she had Canadian and Jamaican flags hung proudly beside each other in her backyard. Olivia had artifacts in her home that represented both her’s and her husband’s ancestry, she gave her daughter black dolls to play with, and she intentionally decorated her daughter’s nursery in the theme of Disney’s The Princess and the Frog because it was the only Black princess available. Twine notes that White mothers in interracial families use the material and visual culture of their homes to counteract the impoverished visual representations of Black people outside of the home. These material practices not only facilitate children’s identification with Blackness and the Black diasporic community, but also provide positive models of black achievement that counter the racism their children may learn about in public. While none of the interviewees spoke about the importance of family photographs in their homes, many of them showed me pictures of their children and family before and during the interview. Twine argues that family photographs counter the social stigma and racism that interracial families encounter by projecting the family’s middle-class respectability. During my interviews, the photographs shown to me were professional photographs of their family union, or photographs of the family on vacation in tropical destinations. These photographs conceal the suffering the family may have experienced because of racism, and instead, they show happier versions of their family life. Therefore, all of the material culture in these private spaces – from furniture, photographs, to children’s toys – were utilized by White women to teach their children and visitors about their family’s racial identity.

In addition to representations of blackness in the visual culture of their home, White mothers of biracial children also teach their children about how to adopt blackness in an embodied way through hair care rituals. Hair care is one form of ethnic capital that White women can pass on to their children. Unlike Twine’s interviewees, the women I interviewed did not learn hair care from their Black in-laws or Black women. Olivia self-taught herself about black hair care by watching online tutorials, Darcy self-taught herself through trial and

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424 Annalise (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.  
425 Olivia (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.  
426 Twine, A White Side of Black Britain , 125.  
427 Ibid., 125-128.  
428 Ibid., 171-173.  
429 Ibid., 183.
error, and Tatiana continues to take her boys to the barber shop to get their hair groomed by Black men. Nonetheless, the end result is still the same. These White mothers of biracial children have their children’s hair braided and styled to secure their “sense of belonging by conforming to popular and commercialized versions of blackness.” Twine states that by maintaining these hairstyles, the children are able to demonstrate that they are living an ‘authentic’ black life, in spite of having a White mother.

Another form of ethnic capital that my interviewees taught their children was Caribbean meals and music. Both Annalise and Tatiana regularly listen to reggae music in their homes, as well as prepare and/or order Caribbean food. Again, unlike Twine’s interviewees, who often learned to prepare Caribbean food from their female in-laws, both Tatiana and Annalise learned about Jamaican music and food from their Black partners. These cultural practices add to the racialized lifestyles that their children will live, which if desired, will demonstrate their participation and inclusion in Afro-Caribbean communities throughout their lives.

Finally, White women who are racially aware use their knowledge of race and racism to teach their children how to resist racism in various ways. Olivia planned to speak regularly to her daughter about race when her daughter is older, in order to teach her anti-racist vocabulary, and so that Olivia can ask her questions about her life and learn to interpret racial incidents that her daughter experiences outside of their home. Other White mothers warn their children about their hypervisibility in public, and teach them how to respond to racial incidents when they are together at home. One White mother of Black-White biracial children warned her children that when they were in groups of friends, “…if there was anybody doing anything wrong, they would be the ones to be singled out [by the police] because they were [racially] different.” Other parents understand that racism is gendered and would focus on preparing their sons to interact with police officers. For example, they would teach their biracial sons to address police officers politely, to document any police

430 Ibid., 154.
431 Ibid.
432 Ibid., 169.
abuse or racial harassment they confronted, and to get their White friends involved by being witnesses and to report any incidents they were involved in.\textsuperscript{434}

Most of the examples of teaching about race that my interviewees spoke of involved teaching their children in private spaces, such as their home. This is because the home is believed to be a safe space. It can also be an anti-hegemonic space where these White mothers can use their racial literacy and experiences with race and racism to teach their children about navigating the colourline. However, the home is more than a place in which racial inculcation, racial learning and racial teaching takes place. It is also a site that is fraught with racial tensions for interracial families. The home is a space where tensions and clashes occur over race between parents, and over who should be teaching their children about race and racism.

**Racial Tensions in the Interracial Home**

Jennifer was able to speak about some of the racial tensions that exist in her family home, perhaps because she had been in an interracial relationship and marriage for much longer than the rest of the interviewees, and her sons and daughters were all adults. Throughout the interview, Jennifer spoke about how she often feels disadvantaged in her family home as a parent, and she attributed this feeling to the racial tensions that exist between her and her husband inside the home. Her narratives revealed that she believes her husband’s racial background dominates within the family household. For example, she feels that her partner’s stories about black history and black culture take precedence in their household, while her stories about race are deemed as trivial and are therefore not worth mentioning. She has also accepted that her partner wants to do the racial teaching in their household. Even though Jennifer had accepted these circumstances for many years, she still spoke about her discomfort with these situations nonetheless. When I asked her, “Did you ever feel that any part of your identity was ever threatened as a result of being in an interracial relationship? For example, your White racial identity, your femininity, or whatnot? Did you ever feel like your identity was threatened?” She replied:

Yes, I think so. I don’t know the right way to say this, but I feel

\textsuperscript{434} Ibid., 202.
that I am not a very strong personality, and I think that a lot of Black people are because they’ve had to fight for every accomplishment that they get. So I find that because I’m not outspoken, and he is – and I don’t know if it’s a race thing or a personality thing - but often I would withhold my feelings inside. So I think that maybe there was some, I don’t want to say fear, but some trepidation about expressing my feelings just because I wasn’t quite sure to what level it would go to if I tried to be myself.  

While my other interviewees seemed to accept the fact that Afro-Caribbean culture dominated in their household, Jennifer felt that her white presence had been “washed away” in the family home and from her children’s lives. Following Katerina Deliovsky’s narrative about her own “realization of whiteness,” in her book *White Femininity: Race, Gender, and Power*, I explained Deliovsky’s narrative to Jennifer and asked her whether she could recall any moments in which she “realized her own whiteness.” She replied:

No. I guess that I was hoping that my kids would realize their [white racial identity and history]. I think the emphasis is always put on [their Black racial background]. But I’m thinking that I’ve got a little bit of something in there too, right? And I think that it really bothers me because...the emphasis is always on the black part of them and the black part of the family, and somehow my [white racial identity and history] has been washed away from my children.

In the above statement, Jennifer was not referring to white pride or racism that is associated with White people. Instead, she was speaking about her family history. She later explained:

There’s very little [known about] my family background because my parents were not story-tellers, unlike my mother-in-law. So I think that a lot of that gets lost. Other than social gatherings, when we tell stories and jokes, my family isn’t spoken about in our home. I think unfortunately with my dad having memory loss and my oldest sister having memory loss, a lot of [my family history] is lost.

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435 Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
436 Katerina Deliovsky, author of *White Femininity: Race, Gender & Power* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2010), is also a mother of Black-White biracial children. On page 2 of this book, Deliovsky writes about her own “realization of whiteness”. She says that this moment is when, “a European’s ‘white’ sense of self, which for the most part is unexamined and taken for granted, undergoes a radical transformation. Whiteness becomes visible to the ‘white’ self, which alters one’s mind and life.” This part of her book inspired me to ask my interviewees if they had ever realized their own whiteness.
437 Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
Therefore, when Jennifer’s husband’s history and culture are constantly spoken about in their family home, while her family history is not, she is reminded about how her family history is being lost in her generation and the next.

Furthermore, Jennifer also indicated that during discussions of race and racism that occurred in her household, she was often excluded from the conversation by her husband because he believed that she could not understand these concepts because she was not a person of colour. In France Twine’s “Bearing Blackness in Britain” essay, she also found that Black men in Britain undermined their White spouse’s maternal status in the family home because they believed that White mothers of biracial children are incompetent when it comes to teaching about race, or are less prepared to handle racism than Black parents would be.\textsuperscript{438} When Black partners think that these White mothers cannot “feel” the pain of racism their children go through, they don’t consider the social ostracism that these White women have experienced as a form of racial abuse that may have prepared them to parent about racism.\textsuperscript{439}

What Jennifer is experiencing is the struggle between what she knew – which is that whiteness dominates everywhere, and that the home space is a woman’s space according to the gender role that she learned – and what she is experiencing in her interracial family – which is that blackness and patriarchy dominates inside of her interracial family home. This presents a challenge for her because she must learn to negotiate between what she knew from living in a white supremacist society, and what she now experiences as a mother and a spouse in an interracial family. The above situations deserve to be deconstructed because they are examples of how racial and gender subordination interlock\textsuperscript{440}, and they illustrate the complexity of how white supremacy affects family life inside and outside of the home.

\textsuperscript{438} Twine, “Bearing Blackness in Britain”, 202.
\textsuperscript{439} Ibid., 194.
\textsuperscript{440} Patricia Hill Collins was one of the first scholars to use the term “interlocking” in the context that I am referring to here, in her book \textit{Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment} (Boston: Uwin Hyman, 1990) on page 225-226. She said that rather than privileging models of oppression such as racism, sexism, and patriarchy in the additive model of oppression, we must understand how race, class, and gender are interlocked in one matrix of domination. Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack then take up the same argument in their essay “The Race to Innocence: Confronting Hierarchical Relations among Women,” in \textit{HeinOnline, Gender, Race & Just.} (335, 1997-1998). They explain on page 335-336 that “This ‘interlocking’ effect means that the systems of oppression come into existence in and through one another so that class exploitation could not be accomplished without gender and racial hierarchies; imperialism could not function without class exploitation, sexism, heterosexism, and so on. Because the systems rely on one another in these complex ways, it is ultimately futile to attempt to disrupt one system without simultaneously disrupting others.” These two explanations describe how I am using the term above.
Jennifer’s feeling that she has lost authority in her household could be because of patriarchy. bell hooks reminds us that:

Unlike other forms of domination, sexism directly shapes and determines relations of power in our private lives, in familiar social spaces, in the most intimate context – home – and in that most intimate sphere of relations – family. Usually, it is within the family that we witness coercive domination and learn to accept it, whether it be domination of parent over child, or male over female …family relations may be, and most often are, informed by acceptance of a politic of domination…441

Jennifer could be experiencing patriarchy in her family home because her husband is wielding more control in the household, and for Jennifer, this includes racial discussions as well.

On the other hand, the home is also a site where white supremacy can be contested. In private spaces - where family members are able to address each other more explicitly, and say things they may not say in public spaces – Black spouses are able to challenge their white spouses, and demand that their black narratives be heard. While whiteness is continuously privileged in public spaces, as demonstrated in the last chapter, Black fathers make their voices heard in private spaces. As well, because Black fathers see white supremacy everywhere outside of the household, they may feel that they must make extra effort inside the home to teach race.442

This practice of using the family home to contest and resist white supremacy is not new. In hook’s essay “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance,” she discusses how people of African descent have traditionally used the family home to resist racism. Although she demonstrates how Black women laboured to make the home a safe space for their family, her descriptions of the home still applies here:

Historically, African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace…had a radical political dimension…one’s homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist…it was about the construction of a safe place where Black people could affirm one another and by doing so heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination. We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in that ‘homplace,’ most often created and kept by Black women, that we

442 Frankenberg, 130.
had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits.\textsuperscript{443}

Without the presence of a Black woman to affirm Black people’s being and love for one another in the family home,\textsuperscript{444} Jennifer’s husband may have taken on that parental role because he is the lone Black parent, and feels it is his responsibility to resist white supremacy in the home.

Moreover, in white supremacist societies, the subordinate identity (in this case, blackness) has to be asserted in the home in the interests of racial equality, because whiteness is everywhere else. Jennifer’s husband knows that his children will not learn about black culture when they leave the family household, so he may feel that he needs to assert black culture within the family household, or else it will disappear from his children’s lives. In white supremacy, the choices are narrow. If he does not insist on producing black culture in the home, then it will disappear, whereas Jennifer and White people can find their identity when they leave the private space. This is how white supremacy structures what is in the home. It is white supremacy doing the structuring, not them, and they are making decisions based on this system. According to how the system of white supremacy works, and the limited choices it offers to people living with the system in this intimate way, choosing to highlight black culture in the household is a reasonable decision to make.

The tensions that exist in the household around race likely come from her husband being anxious about having his biracial children not learn about race and racism adequately, so he may feel the need to do himself, to ensure it is done. This results in Jennifer feeling sidelined because her husband and her children are not honouring what she knows about race and racism, as a White woman in an interracial family. Her husband continues to see Jennifer as a privileged White person that, in spite of her experiences with second-hand racism\textsuperscript{445}. Jennifer’s narratives reveal how difficult it is to live with white supremacy and interracial race relations everyday, both inside and outside the home, and that she too loses in the system. This situation also highlights the slippages that occur for White women in interracial

\textsuperscript{443} bell hooks, “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance,” in \textit{Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics} (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 42.
\textsuperscript{444} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{445} Ruth Frankenberg notes that second-hand racism or “rebound racism” may be based on the presence of a black person, and that it is not the same racism that black people would experience, but that white women still are negatively affected by this rebound racism nonetheless. See Ruth Frankenberg, \textit{The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 112.
relationships. Even though Jennifer is a racially-aware woman who has been in an interracial marriage for several years and raised six biracial children, there are still moments such as these in which she either forgets or does not understand the enormity of white supremacy and how it structures her household and her relationship with family members. Although she feels silenced by her husband’s assertion of black culture in her household and his teachings about race, she does not acknowledge the fact that whiteness is everywhere else outside of their home, in spite of her years of race-training in both public and private spaces.

Furthermore, the White women I interviewed demonstrated that they too resist racism within the family household. Jennifer’s husband, who was adamant that blackness be present in their household, also reproduced racism inside the family home. Jennifer spoke about how when her husband is in verbal arguments with her children, she has had to intervene to demand that her husband stop using the ‘N’ word against their children. This example highlights Twine’s research that Black people raised in all-Black families are not always prepared to deal with racism. Experiencing racism does not guarantee that Black adults will be able to address racism as parents. Annalise also spoke about how in her household, she has turned off movies that espouse racism because she does not accept that form of entertainment in her household.

Overall, the above examples highlight that White women in interracial families do experience tensions in the family home. After more than thirty years of marriage, Jennifer even questions whether she made the right choice to be an in interracial family, and whether her children will suffer the consequences of her decisions:

I ask, did I make the right choice here? I see people who are of the same race, I see them all the time. You know, Chinese people that marry Chinese people and Arabic people that marry Arabic people, and I wonder – are they happy? Do they do better because they don’t have that type of conflict? And plus I was raised Catholic, he was raised Protestant. So we’re two opposites that meshed and had children. And we’re still trying to figure out – did we do the right thing here?

Jennifer understands how racially charged the familial site is. She knows that the colourline is an extremely fraught political field, and that people have to negotiate it every minute of the

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446 Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
448 Annalise (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
449 Jennifer (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011.
day and live with the consequences of their decisions. Jennifer is asking these questions because she knows how difficult it is for White women in interracial families to negotiate white supremacy on a daily basis, both inside and outside of the home.

**Coping with the Colourline**

Knowing that White women in interracial families must live with white supremacy in both their public and private lives, and must experience crossing the colourline in their regular daily practices, it is not surprising that they develop strategies for coping with the colourline. These strategies are another part of their racial literacy. For example, throughout all of the interviews I conducted for this thesis, I noticed that my interviewees would use the vocabulary “culture” instead of “race”, and “prejudiced” instead of explicitly saying “racist”. There are many possible reasons that my interviewees would choose to use this type of vocabulary when speaking about race. As previously discussed, White people have been taught to not speak about race and racism. Therefore, if they need to speak about race and racism, they use non-raced vocabulary to avoid an outright declaration that race matters. This is an example of how white supremacy organizes even how one speaks about race. Moon argues that this type of language “allows White people to engage in disengaged discussions of race and racism in ways that clearly communicate that these topics have little to do with them. This disengagement allows White people to deny their own complicity in relations of racial dominations as well as any awareness or understanding of the historical legacy of white supremacy.”\(^{450}\) In her book *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*, Philomena Essed found that Black people also avoid using the word “racist,” and instead her interviewees would say “something” or “it” to describe racist incidents.\(^{451}\) Essed found that in the Netherlands where she conducted some of her interviews, there was a denial that racism existed. Therefore, racism was a taboo topic and people were discouraged from speaking about it. The result was that Black women could not accuse somebody of being racist without being further victimized themselves for challenging the racist incident.\(^{452}\)

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\(^{450}\) Moon, 189.  
\(^{452}\) Ibid., 107.
Essed also found that in both the United States and the Netherlands, Black people are sometimes accused of being paranoid and oversensitive for identifying racist incidents.\textsuperscript{453} Therefore, in spite of my interviewee’s racial awareness, their language indicates that they are still somewhat anxious about the effects of their language. Essed’s work indicates that people on both sides of the colourline are apprehensive about using race-language because of the negative effects that these conversations could have on either the victim or the perpetrator of racism.

I also found that my interviewees spoke about racism as if it’s something that happens to other people, not them. They acknowledge their experience with racism is limited as a White person, or is limited to when they’re with their family. This is another aspect of their racial literacy. For example, even though both Annalise and Tatiana shared their stories of racism with me, they also spoke about how racism is something that other people had to experience. When Annalise spoke about her family, she said that:

I feel hurt that \textit{they have to experience that}, because unless it’s a group of one race, and I’m the only White person, then that’s the only time that I would experience it…it hurts me because I know it still exists, and I don’t want it to exist \textit{for my children’s sake}. I don’t want \textit{them to go through it}…See me as a White person, I don’t see that discrimination as much, unless I’m with a Black person. That’s the only time I’ve ever experienced discrimination.\textsuperscript{454}

Similarly, Tatiana’s narratives revealed the same sentiment:

I have heard [my partner] specifically talk about race a couple times…but I can’t relate. I can’t understand where he’s coming from because \textit{I don’t know the way that it feels}, because \textit{I have never experienced something like that}. So he had incidences that he shared with me about being Black and people picking on him, or judging him…but it’s hard for me to understand…I don’t understand, like I can’t \textit{get it}…I feel sad \textit{for them}.\textsuperscript{455}

Ruth Frankenberg, author of \textit{White Women, Race Matters}, suggests that White women are often more aware of how racial oppression affects Black people then they are of how race privilege affects their own life.\textsuperscript{456} While my interviewee’s narratives support her claims overall, the above narratives reveal that the women I interviewed are aware of their privilege

\textsuperscript{453} Ibid., 115.
\textsuperscript{454} Annalise (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 19 June 2011, italics added.
\textsuperscript{455} Tatiana (pseudonym), interviewed by Melissa Wilson, 18 June 2011, italics added.
\textsuperscript{456} Frankenberg, 49.
because they can differentiate between the temporary racism that they experience when they are with their families, and the everyday racism that their Black families may experience.

Finally, in addition to euphemizing the vocabulary they use to discuss race, and believing that racism is something that other people are victims of, sometimes White women question the racist incidents that they encounter too. Rather than identifying a racist incident as racism, instead they will question whether they misinterpreted the situation, or whether the discrimination was based on race. Essed explains in *Understanding Everyday Racism* that people comprehend racist events through a series of steps because they know the psychic and social consequences of claiming racism.\(^{457}\) People go through extremes to prove an incident was not racist. She says that first the victim of racism will ask themselves whether the behaviour they encountered is socially acceptable, and if it is not, then they will continue to ask themselves if there are any reasons as to why the perpetrator’s behaviour may be excusable. Then if there are not any plausible excuses for the perpetrator’s behaviour, then the victim will question whether the perpetrator’s behaviour was because of the victim’s racial or ethnic background. If the victim concludes that it is, then the victim will again question if the specific incident is excusable. If the incident is not excusable, then the victim will consider whether the incident was personally aimed at them, or based on discrimination in general. Therefore, Essed demonstrates that questioning racist incidents is normal. This is part of the complexity of understanding racism, so it is not surprising that my interviewees had so many ways in interpreting and coping with incidents of racism. Essed also states that “Knowledge of racism is a process of constant intake, testing, and interpretation of new information and remodelling of previous representation,”\(^{458}\) which is likely why my interviewees have several strategies for dealing with racism. These are strategies that they employ in their everyday lives as White women in interracial families who must constantly deal with race inside and outside of their home. In this sense, the White women I interviewed had similar responses to incidents of racism that the Black subjects Essed interviewed had. Each treaded carefully when on racist ground.

\(^{457}\) Essed, 79-89.
\(^{458}\) Ibid., 74.
Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that the family home is another important site for racial learning because it is a learning sphere that continues to develop a White woman’s racial consciousness throughout different stages of her life. As White women in monoracial families, they learned about whiteness and were identified as race traitors in their family home when they expressed romantic interest for Non-White men. Private spaces also provided them with their first encounters with racial Others. Through their childhood friendships, they experienced Non-White cultures in their friend’s homes, and began to develop their racial literacy. As partners of Black men and mothers of Black-White children, their racial literacy continued to develop and they used their households to teach their children about the ethnic capital that they learned about. The family home is also a site of racial tensions. For two-parent households with one White parent and one Black parent, racial problems and gender conflicts coalesce as interracial couples learn to navigate the white supremacy in their household. Although Black people have traditionally used the family home to resist racism, this chapter also showed that White women in interracial families can use their homes to resist racism too. Overall, the family home provides a space for racial learning and cultural teaching for White women in interracial families.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Another academic area that explores race, interracial families and parenting across the colourline is transracial adoption theory. In much of the adoption literature that addresses White adults adopting Non-White children, one of the main concern is whether these White parents – who are racially unmarked, privileged, and part of the social norm (refer to chapter one’s analysis of whiteness for more details) – are capable of adequately parenting Non-White children. Many scholars and professionals in this field question whether these White adults are equipped to teach Non-White children to resist racist stereotypes and ideologies. It is often believed that White people have not experienced racism or any form of race discrimination, and that they therefore lack the knowledge or experience to teach and parent Non-White children about anti-racism. It could be suggested that much of this sentiment about transracial parenting and interracial families extends beyond adoptive parents and includes all White parents who have Non-White children. My study, however, focuses on a similar albeit different demographic group.

The women that I studied did not adopt their children. They are White women who have experienced being in a long-term intimate relationship with Afro-Caribbean men, and then gave birth to one or more of their own biological Black-White biracial children. As members of interracial families, these women have navigated Non-White spaces, they have experienced being the racial minority in various setting, and they have expanded their racial literacy due to these experiences. My interviewee’s narratives also suggest that these women know what it feels like to be racially discriminated against, that they have experienced ostracism within their communities because of their association with blackness, and that they have an overall heightened awareness about racial divisions in society. As mothers of biracial children, they use this knowledge of race and racism to foster anti-racism in their homes. I believe that there are lessons to be learned by studying these women’s lives and narratives, that can extend beyond the family home and into the classroom. For educators, much can be learned from this study and used in an anti-racist education.

The Connection to Anti-racist Education

Many conclusions can be drawn from this thesis that may be utilized by anti-racist educators. To begin with, White women who are in intimate relationships with Black men and/or have Black-White biracial children do expand their racial consciousness over time. This suggests that educators need a pedagogy that allows students to learn, unlearn, and re-learn racial knowledge because people’s racial consciousness can change, even if they are part of the dominant group in society. My interviewees demonstrated that even though they learned to live privileged White lives in their youth, they also understood that their status in the racial hierarchy had changed once they had a Black spouse and/or biracial children. Instead of being perceived as White women, they became identified as race traitors and sexually transgressive women when their family’s identity was known. These women learned to negotiate their changing racial status in society by sometimes concealing their association to blackness, by becoming defensive about their families and resisting racism, and by interpreting and reacting to various forms of racism that they and their families encountered in their daily lives.

Anti-racist students can learn from White women with biracial children about how we come to learn our place in society, and how we may contest it. It is important for anti-racist students to value this experiential knowledge that these women have. None of the interviewees were university educated or socially active. They were ordinary lower-to-middle class women, yet they had well-articulated and comprehensive knowledge about race and racism, based on their various experiences as a spouse and/or mother. Therefore, this suggests that race is not something that can only be learned about in an institutionalized classroom. A student may read several accounts about racism from race literature, but reading about racism is not the same as intimately experiencing the pain of being a mother who learns that her child has been the victim of race discrimination, or being a woman who is ostracized by her white community for loving a Black man and mothering her Black-White child. These experiences are much more powerful than reading academic literature on race and racism. This is what the academic community needs to know – that there are many ways to learn about race. The women interviewed for this study are learning about race because they live with race, racism, and white supremacy everyday, and are constantly negotiating
these in different contexts of their lives. Even though they are not academics, they have much to contribute to critical race theory. Students of critical race theory need to begin speaking to, and studying the lives of White women who are in interracial families, so that students may learn from these women about the nature of negotiation and how one’s racial consciousness may change.

Finally, the spatial analysis used in this study revealed that a lot of these women’s learning took place as they navigated various White and Non-White spaces. They learned about different cultures when they travelled into Non-White spaces and experienced being the racial minority. They learned that their white body signified different meanings in Non-White spaces, and that their children’s bodies were interpreted differently depending on their location too. Perhaps the lesson to be learned from this for anti-racist educators is that learning spheres can only go so far when the spaces are not racially diverse, and that there is something to be learned and valued from having racially diverse learning spaces.

**Returning to White Supremacy**

The continuous theme throughout the chapters of this thesis is that there is a significant lesson to be learned from exploring the colourline and what happens when it is crossed, from examining the media and the consistent messages about interracial couples, and from researching the tensions that exist in interracial homes. The lesson is that white supremacy is so powerful that it is everywhere for White women in interracial families, including in their mundane daily practices. They live with it all of the time, insomuch that they develop strategies to negotiate with it in their daily lives in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. Their experiences are instructive in terms of teaching us about race. Both anti-racist students and educators have more of a chance to combat white supremacy by studying the lives of White women in interracial families. Furthermore, this study has shown that no matter how anti-racist these mothers are, they still need to confront and deal with the colourline. They cannot escape the reality that white supremacy is a pervasive system that continues to construct the lives of White women today.
References


