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Tales of Forbidden Love: A Sociological Analysis of Interracial Intimacy

Candice L. Bryant
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TALES OF FORBIDDEN LOVE: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
OF INTERRACIAL INTIMACY

by

Candice L. Bryant

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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Western Michigan University
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Candice L. Bryant
TALES OF FORBIDDEN LOVE: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERRACIAL INTIMACY

Candice L. Bryant, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 2002

The purpose of this study is to explore the constructions of race, marriage, and love insofar as these components promote the exclusion of interracial intimacy and marriage from the dominant discourse. The study focuses on the ways in which the social sciences have polarized “blacks” and “whites” (linguistically, socially, and economically) thus, making it difficult for persons living in black and white skin to experience social affirmation through literature, media, and agents in everyday life.

A qualitative content analysis of historical and contemporary literature regarding interracial marriage and intimacy were conducted in conjunction with an auto ethnography of the author’s own experiences in an interracial relationship. A metatheoretical approach was employed to analyze the literature. The study focused on three primary questions (1) How have sociologists problematized love beyond the color lines? (2) How does language reinforce racial essentialism? (3) How have social researchers silenced positive components of race relations? Results indicated that (a) Sociologists have studied interracial marriage from the assumption of a social pathology; (b) language reinforces racial essentialism and relegates persons with black skin into a subordinate position compared to persons with white skin; and (c) Black and White scholars negate positive tales of racial harmony. Implications of these results are discussed.
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There’re no words to say
No words to convey
This feeling inside I have for you
Deep in my heart
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Of intellect and reason
Leaving me at loss
For words to express my feelings
Deep in my heart
Look at me losing control
Thinking I had a hold
But with feelings this strong
I’m no longer the master of my emotions.........

Tracey Chapman
INTRODUCTION

Tales of Forbidden Love

Keene leaned over and said, “This moment will define our relationship, if my parents don’t like you I can never marry you.” He winked and patted my knee as he often does to soothe me after a morbid joke. Usually this would console me; yet, at this moment I could feel the loud rhythm of my beating heart, the saliva exiting my mouth coupled with increasingly sweaty palms. As I sat in the terminal of Los Angeles International Airport, PA system blaring, planes departing, passengers busily moving about: I knew this moment would determine or drastically affect my future with Keene despite the bond we had created over the past four years—I felt it in my gut, marriage changes things. I was no longer just someone he was dating. I am his potential life partner. Would they like me now? They had always been warm and welcoming to me in the past but I had never been presented to them this way—as a potential daughter-in-law, the wife of their only son, and the mother of their future grandchildren.

I am completely affirmed in our relationship. Keene and I are best friends and share a love so deep that my heart sings and smiles at the mere mention of his name. We love each other: this should be enough. So why was I reacting this way? After all, I was raised in a family in which integration is a tangible reality rather than a conceptual goal. Mom and Dad are wonderful; they didn’t poison my siblings and me with a racialist view of the world. I can still hear them, sitting in the kitchen on a Sunday morning, sipping warm cups of coffee, using their code words for “racial” categories while discussing events of the world. They carefully spoke never referring to race, nationality, or ethnicity to insure a “colorblind” world in the mind of their four innocent children.

One day Camille and I marched into our parent’s room and told them that we liked Malcolm X more than Martin and we no longer agreed with the canon of Martin’s dream. I
didn’t know exactly what was going on but Camille was my older sister and I admired her—she was brave but she would never challenge my parents unless her own values were in conflict with theirs. I can recall the tears in my Mother’s eyes as she replied, “While I appreciate your desire to understand the ideological variations of the Civil Rights Movement, separatist thinking and racist rhetoric WILL NEVER BE TOLERATED IN THIS HOME! I don’t care who it’s directed at or how justified it may seem. I’ve tried to live my life in the glow of Dr. King’s vision, one that represents equality, love, and forgiveness. So, while you two are living under my roof you will not desecrate his memory!” She invoked these words with divine fervor as if the 11th commandment had been sent down from God. Dad didn’t have to supplement her statement. We knew we had crossed an unspoken boundary that insulted the essence of my parent’s belief system. I ran into my Mother’s arms, tears streaming down my face. “I’m sorry Mommy, I didn’t know you would get so upset.”

Yes, I thought, as I sat in the terminal, I was raised with exceptional love and care; this love would conquer my fears. I must calm myself down and concentrate on our love. His parents couldn’t be that different from the wonderful man I had grown to adore. Yet, my mind continued to reel and consider the varied cautions I had received from peers, movies, and books regarding interracial relationships. Into my consciousness leaked the advice of an old friend in which he warned, “white men date black women but their parents don’t allow them to marry them—you better watch out.”

What if they didn’t approve of me? I was suddenly confronted with an array of questions tangled with morbid levels of fear and insecurity. What if his parents didn’t like me? How could he be so calm? The future of our entire relationship was hanging in the beams! I looked down at our entwined fingers—they seemed to represent the simplicity of our love. Just two kids, in love, holding hands. Certainly, there is nothing extraordinary about us. Yet, sitting beside Keene at this moment, I was suddenly aware that I am a Black woman in love with a white man.
course, I had noticed the difference in our skin tones prior to this event; his skin is significantly lighter than mine, it’s that simple. Nothing more; nothing less. But I was feeling less.

At this moment, I was painfully aware that the color of my skin could alter the perception of our love. His skin now appeared oppressive and superior to my own. His translucent exterior seemed WHITER against my brown complexion. In the past, I had ignored comments from peers that questioned Keene’s capacity to love a black woman. To these inquiries I replied proudly, “He loves me because I am worth loving!” But at this moment affirmation felt far and unforgiving. Instead, I felt like a small girl afraid, devalued, and consumed with the legacy of slavery and racial inferiority. I could feel myself shrinking in stature as the stigma of “blackness” invaded my body. Suddenly, the terrain of passengers exiting plane 227 from San Francisco interrupted my fears. I stood to greet Mrs. and Mr. Simonds, smiling to mask my anxiety. Mr. Simonds embraced me and kissed my cheeks coupled with a warm smile from Mrs. Simonds. “Hello Candice,” Mr. Simonds said warmly, “I’m so glad you could join us, you look lovely!” I had passed the test: my confidence had returned my being was restored.

“Interracial” Love & Public Discourse

This research is in part a byproduct of the feelings that arose on that warm afternoon in Southern California. How and why did slavery and the stigma of blackness serve as a backdrop to the natural feelings of anxiety and fear that arise when meeting the parents of a significant other? Why wasn’t our love enough to secure my anxiety in the face of a potentially adversarial encounter? More importantly, why had Keene become an objectified white male and I an objectified black female? My research is aimed at revealing how the negation of interracial relationships contributed to my feelings of fear and isolation at one of the busiest airports in the country.
More importantly, I began an inquiry into these questions as a consequence of my lived experiences in everyday life. I draw from Smith insofar as this research is not solely about racism or social inequality, “We are talking about the consequences of interracial exclusion particularly those unions that affirm the worth, value, beauty, and intelligence of black women from a full share in the making of what becomes treated as culture” (Smith, 1987, p. 20). “A silence, an absence, a nonpresence. What is there—spoken, sung, written made emblematic in art-and treated as general, universal unrelated is a particular position or a particular racialist conception of love and marriage”(Smith, 1987, p. 20).

Despite the growth of interracial marriages the public sphere continues to exclude these relationships from the dominant discourse. Take for example, the media and current television programming. How often do you see families in which the parents’ skin tones are significantly different? By this I mean a black mother and a white father raising a multicultural child in the suburbs? Does this plot sound familiar, probably not?

In fact, I can remember Camille, my older sister, calling me one morning in complete distress. Stephen, her six year-old son, had asked his first racialized question. “Why doesn’t anyone’s family look like ours? No one looks like me,” he said sadly. To this she replied, “Of course there are lots of kids that look like you but you are right, there are few kids that are as special as you.” He seemed to be consoled by her reply but Camille knew his concern was deeper than her response and grander in its solutions. In other words, she knew he was becoming aware of the unique composition of his family and beginning to perceive it as problematic.

Later that night Camille, Mom, and I discussed Steve’s concern. “It’s so difficult to raise him in a society that doesn’t reflect our household in any way. I can tell he is starting to feel

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1 Over the past three decades, inter-racial marriages have increased rapidly from 310,000 to more than 1.1 million and over the past three decades, inter-racial marriages have increased rapidly from 310,000 to more than 1.1 million and their proportion among all marriages grew from 0.7% in 1970 to over 2.2% in the mid-1990s (Qian, 1999).
different, isolated, and marginalized. When Todd picks him up from school, kids suspiciously ask how that red haired man is related to him? He is continually telling his school mates that his Father is that red haired man and I am his mother—the kids are not being mean, they are confused. They’ve never seen an “interracial” couple. They don’t understand how Stephen can be the product of our marriage.” “After all,” I chimed in, “we don’t appear in movies, books, magazines, or commercials. Kids have no way of knowing that we are not freaks of nature.”

Mom sat calmly, trying to figure out the best way to insure the healthy development of Steve’s esteem. She spoke carefully as she had when we were children. “The next time he asks about himself, and there will be a next time, you tell him that all kids look the same—they have two eyes, two arms, two legs, and two ears. You must emphasize the human commonalities between him and his school mates.”

But would not this be an easier task if we had help? Would it not be simpler if Stephen could open a book or watch a cartoon and see a family that looked like his own? A red-haired, blue-eyed, pale-skinned man in love with a beautiful dark-skinned woman. Close your eyes and imagine that as a plot for Hollywood’s next blockbuster! I know: it’s difficult to visualize.

Moreover, a genealogy of relationships in the United States may suggest that marriage and love are discussed and described using adjectives that affirm the standpoints of white heterosexual men and women. When asked by a reporter if black-white marriage would increase, for instance, former President Harry S. Truman responded, “Would you want your daughter to marry a Negro?” (Washington, 1993, p. 33). Implicit in his statement is the notion that his daughter is superior to a black man not as a consequence of her Father holding the most prestigious office in the world. Instead, his daughter is a member of a superordinate class by virtue of her white skin. Indeed, by examining the ways in which “intraracial” marriage is perpetuated and legitimated in science, law, and government, I hope to expose the cover that negates interracial love.
More importantly, love is written out of the text as a formidable force that brings two people together despite their class, sexuality, or age. To the contrary love is replaced with numerous concepts as if to say that catastrophic conditions in the environment must change in order to explain the reason a white person would marry a non-white. Breger & Hill (1998) assert,

The absence of “love” in anthropological description is partly due to a clear tendency for ethnographers to problematize social institutions like marriage—especially intermarriage—to search for rules and meaningful patterns in social unions to the exclusion of all else (p. 69).

Examine, for example, Merton’s hypothesis regarding interracial marriage. Merton proposed an exchange theory explaining sex differences in interracial marriage. Merton postulated that the African-American male who intermarries exchanges his higher achieved socioeconomic position for the white females’ higher ascribed status. His argument about racial differences in status implies that interracial marriage should occur between higher class black men and lower class white women. As a footnote Merton suggests that two processes enable interracial marriage to survive despite the stigma and taboo against them. One is love, which persists and can thrive in the direst conditions. Love, in conjunction with democratic ideas in which every person is supposed to have the right to pursue life, liberty, and happiness, offers these relationships a chance to thrive.

Gordon (1964) postulated interracial marriage as the final stage of acculturation and assimilation. Thus, foreign-born minorities are less likely to intermarry than their native born counterparts as the former are often reared in communities that limit access to culturally integrated interactions. Porterfield (1982) summarized three psychoanalytic explanations for black-white marriage that prevailed for generations. Primarily, his theories were based on the assumptions that intermarriage exemplified a social pathology. Specifically, his paradigm assumed intermarriage was rooted in a person’s desire to rebel against parental control or have
access to that which has been historically forbidden. The former is a description of the primary reason a white woman desires to commit to a black man while the latter describes the motivations of black men intimately interacting with non-blacks (Root, 2001). More disturbing still, Porterfield claimed that one intermarries as a consequence of self-loathing and a wish for self-punishment: his theories were not substantiated by any significant data.

Blau (1977) hypothesized that whites should have the greatest opportunity for interracial marriage in the West but the fewest opportunities for interracial marriage if their share in the region is small. Goodman’s (1991) research found that levels of conflict are expected to be higher in interracial relationships; conversely, cultural homogamy plays an important role in marital happiness and culturally homogenous marriages are generally more “successful” whether success is defined by lack of divorce or by measures of marital happiness.

Qian (1999) explored education, nativity, region, and interracial marriage by analyzing 1980 and 1990 census data. His study concluded that the odds of interracial marriage with whites for both African-Americans and Hispanics increase with the improvement of educational attainment.

Foeman & Nance (1999) distinguish five theoretical myths surrounding black/white relationships: (1) black sexual acting out, (2) black status seeking, (3) white neurotic acting out, (4) negative genetic outcomes of interracial coupling, and (5) psychological shortcomings of biracial children.

Accordingly, Gail Mathabane, wife and accomplished novelist of human rights activist Mark Mathabane, was immobilized by social taboos regarding her love for Mark; thus, she decided to research interracial marriage before her ceremony to Mark. She asserts:

I did not find much, and most of what I found was negative. So-called experts on interracial marriage had a plethora of absurd theories and explanations about white woman-black man marriages. The woman was too fat and ugly to get a white man, was acting out against a racist parent, had already been ostracized by white society, or had such a low self-esteem that she like trash that belonged in a black ghetto. (Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992, p. 116)
Undeniably, these researchers negate the significance of love as a causal explanation for interracial and intercultural relationships. Instead, they employ numerous conceptualizations to explain one of the most intimate events in the social world. Moreover, the quintessential measure for acculturation or social normality is the extent to which a non-white or “foreigner” assimilates into the dominant sphere, one that is ruled and constructed by white men.

Accordingly, Mark Mathabane, a famous author married to a white woman asked the following questions:

What does it mean to be an interracial couple in America? For many years, decades, it had meant being analyzed, studied, categorized, labeled, and collected into statistics and theories—some bizarre and others outright ridiculous—aimed at understanding a question at once simple and complex: Why do humans beings fall in love?” (Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992, p. 1)

Clearly, contemporary studies extend the Durkheimian tradition insofar as interracial marriages are explained in a causal fashion. X causes Y; thus, black-white marriage is dependent on the exchange of cultural capital. These grand theories fail to appreciate more intimate and natural interpretations of love. Mills (1959) contends, “Claiming to set forth ‘a general sociology’ the grand theorist in fact sets forth a realm of concepts from which are excluded many structural features of human society, features long and accurately recognized as fundamental to its understanding” (p. 35). Grand theories fail to examine how it feels to be in love. They ignore the significance of emotions, interdependence, and the sheer vulnerability that accompanies loving someone completely.

Furthermore, as do most sociologists, they exclude the existence of love unions between white men and black women. Yet, according to Qian (1999) white men are 82% more likely to be married to a black woman in 1990 than 1980. Researchers have played a pivotal role in the construction of negative images of interracial marriages. Primarily by bypassing an extensive discourse with regard to love, kindness, interdependency, chaos, and intercultural interaction. Sociologists continue to problematize the love unions and interactions between blacks and whites.
Root (2001) asserts, “Interrace marriage has been studied from an assumption of abnormality and pathology. In this way the social sciences have sanctioned opposition to interracial marriage the same way they have opposed same-sex marriage” (p. 63). Indeed “jungle fever” a term used to describe a person dating a man or woman of a different skin tone implicates a disease that one acquires from dating outside of her or his race.

Essentialism, Language & Agency

Certainly, racialist constructions of marriage are legitimated and given agency through actors. When a woman, for example, decides to marry a person of the same racial background she instantiates the normative behavior of marrying “within the race.” Conversely, an individual who decides to date a person of a different racial background may experience social tension and disapproval and decide to terminate the relationship and thereby instantiates the norm. This creates the reality that society functions best when interracial marrying is limited as evident by the minuscule number of interracial marriages in the United States. Clearly, reality is constructed in social interaction as humans attempt to draw on and act in terms of available interpretations and expectations. In the broadest sense, actors, in their daily lives, activate the very laws that harbor racism and inequality. Moreover, it is important to examine the constructs of language and human interaction as the very words we use in our everyday lives contribute to the reproduction of inequality and subjugation.

For instance, I struggle throughout this thesis to find a word that describes the interaction between members assigned to different racial categories—interracial is inadequate as it implies that two distinct species (races) coexist. By using the word “interracial,” I am reproducing and legitimating the existence of racial essentialism. Examine, for instance, the definition of interracial as found in the Webster’s New World dictionary (1990), “between, among, or for
members of different races” (p. 311). The very meaning of the word excludes interaction, interdependence or harmony.

Similarly, Giddens and Bourdieu realized the conceptual boundaries (created by language) that limit the experiences of actors in their everyday lives. In other words, language is created to reflect the reality of positioned actors in which those placed at the top of the hierarchy are affirmed and validated. Certainly, language limits normative behavior to white heterosexual masculinity. The categories heterosexual, white, and male have constructed meanings that reflect normative descriptors of identity. McClelland (1975) asserts,

It is difficult to say “different” without saying “better” or “worse,” since there is a tendency to construct a single scale of measurement and since that scale has generally been derived from and standardized on the basis of men’s interpretations of research, research data drawn predominantly or exclusively from studies of males, psychologists have tended to regard male behavior as “norm” and female behavior as some kind of deviation from that norm. (p. 81)

Thusly, homosexual, black, “interracial,” and female have socially constructed meanings that deviate from the norm.

Accordingly, the word “biracial” implies that 50% of a pure substance (human blood) is combined with 50% of another element to create a “mixed” or biracial person. Dawson affirms this stance stating, “Miscegenation derives from two Latin words, miscere (to mix) and genus (race) to denote the abstract idea of the mixture of two or more races” (Hubbard, 1997, p. 4). The constructed definitions of these words implicate racial essentialism. I am ardently opposed to employing this term, yet, what can I do? Currently, there is not a discourse that adequately details the intimate relationship between two persons with different skin tones. Consequently, I am limited to using the word interracial or biracial in an attempt to describe exceptional persons.

Likewise, while at LAX with Keene, my mind, body, and soul were consumed with insecurity as there is not a positive discourse for intercultural interactions for me to draw from. Therefore, I used the only discursive method available to understand my situation, one that restricts blacks and whites into a dichotomous relationship of inequality. The entire history of the
two groups has been constructed to perpetuate racial essentialism, separatism, and antagonism in which the “white agent” gets the last affirming word.

Therefore, upon meeting Keene’s parents as his potential life partner, I retreated to a historical context of racism, slavery, and degradation to interpret my fear. Yet, I have not experienced racism, slavery, or degradation from Keene or any member of his family. What is going on? How can I explain this? We love each other; yet, something of which I cannot name feels right and wrong. While I know that my relationship with Keene is one in which love is abundant, I don’t have the language to adequately describe the roots of my contradictory feelings. In other words, while both groups are exposed to social meanings that may differ from their lived experiences, agents from different racial categories draw on the dominant discourse to interpret situated experiences.

The lived experiences of interracial couples have several disjunctures from the ways they have been conceptualized. Bourdieu (1977) established this point well, “The relationship between language and experience never appears more clearly than in crisis situations in which everyday order is challenged, and with it the language of order, situations which call for an extraordinary discourse” (p. 170). We must start with the actual situations I have encountered as a point of departure from which to begin a genealogy of interracial marriage. By critiquing the literature of interracial marriage specifically with regards to black women and white men, I hope to create a discourse by which persons involved in exceptional relationships can begin to celebrate the love and positive aspects of race relations that exist in daily life.

Consequently, my task as a member of the academic community and the social world is to reveal a word, a language, an embodied discourse that appreciates the complex and stratified nature of interactions between Blacks and Whites: a paradigm that explicitly acknowledges the extent to which I wield a certain degree of power and authority over Keene despite my inferior
social location as a woman of color. This will not be a simple endeavor as I am constantly changing my station in this paper.

Giddens (1984) provides a unique perspective from which to analyze the aforementioned endeavor. The dialectic of control concerns:

The two-way character of the distributive aspect of power (power as control) how the less powerful manage resources in such a way as to exert control over the more powerful in established power relationships. (p. 374)

Put another way, how would this narrative appear differently if we started from the beginning and switched the lens a bit? Instead of beginning with my own fears and insecurities I could have begun with Keene’s feelings. Perhaps he was nervous as well, worried that his parent’s reaction to our union would cost him the love of his future wife. Maybe he was feeling a degree of trepidation too. After all, he was unusually silent during the interval of waiting for their arrival. Was he just being pensive or was he concerned? Perhaps he was hoping they would “pass the test.” Indeed, power is rarely experienced as a static force; instead, it is porous and constantly changing between actors in their everyday lives. Thus, by creating a text that reveals the extent to which I belong to and engage in the social world and the degree to which my social location influences my sociological method; I am attempting to create a text that is fluid and contextual.

Mathabane & Mathabane (1992) contends:

A writer uses everything she’s ever known, seen thought, felt, believed, experienced. Nothing lived is wasted. In any other career the past is only important in so far as it helped you get to your current position. But not for a writer. Everything in the past and present is vital in creating the future and all its amazing possibilities, every detail, gesture and memory. (p. 166)

Indeed, this text should reflect complicated intersections of fear, love, insecurity, and vulnerability as the matrix from which I examine interracial marriage. Moreover, I employ poststructuralist paradigms to exemplify the ways in which individuals activate language, media, and other social systems into mediums that generate a distinct social reality. In other words, I am
attempting to minimize or deconstruct the gap between structure and agency as the dichotomous relationship between the former and latter are too simplistic to explain or interpret the complexities of individuals in the social world.

Certainly, the reporter’s response to Truman’s inquiry (regarding black-white marriage) in which he proclaims, “I want my daughter to marry the man she loves whoever he may be” is the guiding force of this thesis (Washington, 1993, p. 33). Love in the absence of affirmation or a concise scholarly definition is love nonetheless. Love exists beyond the grasp of sociological explanations: it can empower, transform, and transcend societal stigmas and conventions. Dawson contends, “In spite of state-sanctioned opposition, the democratic impulse of love transcends the socially constructed barriers of class and caste” (Hubbard, 1997, p. 3).

Clearly, I reject the Weberian tradition that calls for a neutral, objective, static sociological method. Sociologists have employed this method and by doing so they have extracted love from the discourse of interracial marriage. I do not purport this text to be one in which a “canonical truth” is revealed. By creating a reflexive thesis, I am hoping to achieve what Gloria Anzaldua articulated so well, “Don’t give me your laws and your tenets. Don’t give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultural worldviews—European, African, and European and African” (p. 44).

I am solely suggesting that we analyze these unions with the added ingredients of love, fluidity, and uncertainty. These supplemental components add an undeniable level of complexity and will create a different type of thesis: a thesis that acknowledges the subjective, intuitive, eclectic dimensions of the author.

In sum, my goal is to localize the “extralocal” components of interracial marriage as persons in their everyday roles as mother, fathers, sisters and sons; perpetuate and legitimate a particular normative convention of marriage. Lena Horne, for instance, experienced social sanctions by her family when she married a white bandleader: they simply stopped speaking to
her. Likewise, shortly after Brown v. Board of Education (1954) became law resulting in the desegregation of schools, a black college president expelled a student for dating a new white student (Korgen, 1998).

Essentially, I hope to discover the ways in which agents and structures reinforce one another. More importantly, I recognize the extent to which I need to generate a new discourse to describe the multidimensional aspects of race relations. Moreover, my own experiences enrich the data and allow for a more meaningful research process.
Keene and I drove up the Trail to St. Helena. It was a hot day and I could feel beads of sweat gathering in the small of my back as unrelenting sunrays entered my body.

"Honey, it’s so hot and it’s only the second week of May. It’s hard to imagine what the temperature will be like by July," I whined as I rolled down my window.

"Candice, you have to remember: extreme heat fosters productive grapes: ripe for wine," Keene replied as we passed the Mondavi winery.

"This may be true but I am not a grape and it’s too hot!" I griped.

We were expected at the River House for a Mother’s Day brunch. This would be my first Mother’s Day celebration with my soon to be mother-in-law. I was not nervous for Mrs. Simonds and I had become dear friends. She compliments and affirms me just as a mother should.

Raised by a prominent surgeon in an affluent suburb in Piedmont, California, fluent in Italian, Latin, and French, Mrs. Simonds is the epitome of eclectic style and refinement. She stood 5’5” tall with a stylish haircut to compliment her dark brown hair and luminous eyes. Most importantly, she always flaunted a wonderful smile that brightened the entire room surrounding her petite frame: this is how she always appeared. Indeed, I am lucky to have met a terrific man who belongs to such a kind and interesting family. Yet, today I missed my own mother a great deal. I always enjoy celebrating Mother’s Day with my siblings as we all present gifts of gratitude to our matriarch. This year I sent her a book of poetry by Langston Hughes. I sent Mrs. Simonds a book regarding the language of flowers. I now have two mothers, two sources of affection and comfort, I thought as I patted my moist forehead.

"I know it’s hot Candice, try and relax. We can swim when we get to the house if you want.” Keene gathered my thin hand into his own.

We pulled into the large circular driveway of the River House and exited the car. Keene and I walked around to the pool deck and into the kitchen to greet the Simonds clan.
“Happy Mother’s Day Mrs. Simonds: you look so pretty!” I said as I opened my arms to embrace her.

“So do you,” she replied warmly as she kissed my cheeks.

I moved around the table to hug Jen, Keene’s older sister.

Jennifer Simonds is charming and pensive. When I first met her, I was very uneasy. I had heard so many stories about the temper of this 5’9” woman standing before me. “Jen is a nice person,” Keene warned, “just don’t want to get on her bad side because she can be brutal.” Currently, she lived in Atlanta, Georgia working as a journalist at the Atlanta Journal Constitution. Educated at Boston University she possessed a cosmopolitan grace similar to that of her younger brother and mother. Newly engaged to Jim Moseley, Project Coordinator of the International Human Rights Project at the Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham, Alabama, Jennifer Simonds and I had a good deal in common.

“Can I get you some wine or something else to drink?” Mr. Simonds asked.

Among his other gracious qualities, Mr. Simonds is always concerned with making sure everyone has a full glass of wine especially cultivated within the vineyards of Napa Valley.

“I’ll just have water, it’s so hot today!” I replied.

Mr. Simonds served the group with drinks.

“Why don’t we head out to the deck for a toast,” Mr. Simonds suggested.

We all settled down on the deck and toasted to Mrs. Simonds and the occasion that brought us together. Soon after we began to chatter about Jen’s recent engagement to Jim Mosely.

“How did he propose?” I squealed.

“Well, it happened on our vacation in New York. We were walking through Central Park and he asked me to be his wife” Jen replied calmly; yet, with a big smile.

Suddenly, cotton began to blow in the wind.
"My allergies are going to go crazy with all the pollen and cotton in the air," Keene predicted, "Where is that cotton coming from?" he asked in an exasperated tone.

"That tree over there," Jen pointed to a tree three feet away, "you see it—look at all the cotton blowing toward us."

Looking at the cotton tree, I sat back on the deck and with one hand put a large ice cube in my mouth, snugly holding Keene’s hand in the other. We are lucky I thought to myself, to be living together this way, loving each other without fear or threat of harm from the world around us. I reached over and affectionately removed a piece of cotton from Keene’s fine hair. Sitting on the deck I am cognizant of the adoration I feel for my fiancé and his family. As importantly, I know the feeling is mutual. Blowing through the wind, nonetheless, entering our hair, nostrils, and clothes: this cotton appeared to float through time and space. On this day, it arrived to taunt and remind me of our shared past; one in which this delicate material represented an economic system that would forever brand our relationship as evil, unequal, and wrong.

But our relationship is not immoral or sadistic. I was never a slave nor was Keene a slave owner. Yet, the residue of a splintered historical past teases my senses and provides a point of departure for an investigation of coetaneous race relations and the extent to which they inform and define our current love affair in public discourse.

**Historical Symbols of Polarization**

White (skin) can implicate superiority or privilege while cotton can serve as an artifact of racial inferiority and degradation. Through time and space, these innocent symbols of culture and tradition such as skin color, literature, language, and knowledge are activated into divisive tools employed by individuals in their everyday lives. Moreover, these symbols begin to limit the ways in which we perceive our social environment. Similarly, Lillian Smith recalls in her autobiography *Killers of the Dream*:
My skin gave me certain privileges which I began to see as limitations to my freedom. It dictated what entrances I used, where I could sit and stand, what part of town I lived in, where I ate, what theaters I attended, what swimming pools, I used and whom I could love.” (Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992, p. 184)

Likewise, the word black has the constructed meaning of that which is dark, evil, sadistic, and dirty. In fact, the Webster’s New World dictionary (1990) defines black as “opposite of white, of the color of coal, without light, dark, dirty, evil, wicked, sad, dismal, and producing or reflecting little light, dirty” (p. 63). It is not uncommon for one to hear the word black associated with negative behaviors or events. For example, black mail reflects an illegal business deal, black magic is evil and sadistic, the black market refers to illegitimate business practices, and black humor refers to a crude or inappropriate comedic style. A parallel meaning is often attached and limited to persons with dark or black skin.

To the contrary, there are relatively few symbols of positive descriptions for the word “black” and persons restricted to living within this racial category. More importantly, these negative perceptions are given agency or “made real” by persons in their everyday life as they activate these meanings into their interactions with persons living in black skin. In 1990, for instance, the General Social Survey researched the perceptions Whites have of African-Americans and other minorities. Twenty-nine percent of whites viewed most Blacks as unintelligent, 44% believed that most Blacks are lazy, 56% endorsed the idea that most blacks prefer to live off welfare, and 51% indicated that most Blacks are prone to violence. Similarly, only small percentages of Whites were willing to endorse positive images of Blacks. Only 20% of Whites believed that most Blacks are intelligent, 17% that most Blacks are hard working, 13% that most Blacks prefer to be economically autonomous, and 15% that most Blacks are not prone to violence (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000).

In other words, the (socially perceived) abnormality of my relationship with Keene is a consequence of a historical and contemporary rift constructed (through legitimate sources of knowledge and activated through language) between blacks and whites, masters and slaves, and
men and women. Generally, we cannot watch a television sitcom, read a novel, or eyewitness a magazine ad in which love expressed by persons with significantly different skin tones is displayed. To a certain degree, in the rare event that our type of coupling is acknowledged in the public sphere, the characters are portrayed as ominous, tragic, or abnormal. Thusly, discussions and constructions of marriage are restricted to persons in same race, opposite gender relationships. Ruling against the Lovings, for example, (an interracial couple seeking to legitimize their love through marriage), in 1959, Judge Leon Bazile ruled:

The almighty God created white, black, yellow, malay, and red and he placed them on separate continents. And but for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix. (Root, 2001, p. 30)

Teachers, sociologists, lawyers, judges, doctors, mothers, sons, daughters, husbands, and wives in the local sphere of daily interactions use God or divine reinforcement as the quintessential justification to legitimate normalized constructions of marriage. Root asserts,

In one of my focus groups in Seattle a white man talked about how a churchgoing member of his extended family had quoted a biblical passage about the “mixing of seeds” to show that his engagement to an Asian-American woman was “unnatural.” Another member of her study talked about the curse of Ham, one of Noah’s three sons, the biblical passage many slave owners have used to legitimate slavery in the South and used by bigots even today to discourage interracial marriage. (p. 30)

Korgen (1998) asserts, “Slavery was inseparable from the evil in men; it was God’s punishment upon Ham’s prurient disobedience. Slaves were infidels or heathens. On every count, the Negro qualified” (p. 10).

In fact, Root (2001) contends, “within two decades of the arrival in North America of the first African slaves, Virginia developed the first law against black-white marriages and sexual contact in 1661, the same year that the first American Bible was printed” (p. 34). Former President Truman used biblical teachings to legitimate his opposition to love beyond the color line (Washington, 1993). Clearly, individuals activate or transform innocuous symbols of culture such as religion into racialist arrangements that may constrain some while enabling others to live
the way they please. More importantly, anti-miscegenation laws as early as 1661 indicate that Blacks and Whites wanted to legally legitimize their existing relationships and insofar as love was the basis of any marriage we can assume that love was a basis in them as well.

To a certain degree, dichotomous relationships are close-ended—leaving little room for investigation or critique. Gunner Myrdal contends, “The boundary between Negro and white is not simply a class line which can be successfully crossed by education, integration into the national culture, and individual economic advancement. The boundary is fixed” (Washington, 1993, p. 6). Simply put, Blacks are inferior to whites; whites are superordinate to Blacks as represented by historical and contemporary constructs of human interactions between the two groups. Hence, there is no reflection of our love in the public sphere.

Yet, this repudiation does not stop Keene and I from loving each other. In fact, our love seems to protect me from incorporating a divisive past into the fabric of our relationship. Our love transforms the past and offers me a unique set of tools from which to analyze our polarized and interconnected histories. Our love enables and empowers me to see the beauty of his being, to see the “holes” in social and historical narratives of race relations, and to write from the perspective that love was and is a fundamental possibility.

Lovers or Foes?

To a certain extent I am contemplating the existence of two diametrically opposed positions at once. On one hand, this chapter and text exposes the degree to which I am fervently requesting social actors to acknowledge the complexity of race relations by incorporating love and affection as measures to evaluate interracial marriage and interactions. On the other, I appreciate and promote the degree to which love unions between blacks and whites have and continue to burgeon despite attempts to silence their existence. Surely, this is a tumultuous task as human interactions are complex and mobile. Accordingly, Parks notes:
Race relations, like many if not most other relations among human beings, must be conceived as existing in three dimensions rather than, as we ordinarily conceive it, in two...between individuals and between groups of individuals... (Adams, 1937, p. xiii-xiv)

This quote would suggest that Robert Park would disagree with the ways in which interracial marriages have been conceptualized, for the aforementioned statement allows no space for a binary relationship but appreciates the degree to which interactions between humans is a multifaceted affair. Thus, the answer to my question, “lovers or foes?” can be addressed in a multitude of ways. Take for example, the life of Sally Hemings. As the daughter of a white man and a “mixed” woman (her Mother was of African and European descent) Sally Hemings’ racial classification was a quadroon. She was described as being nearly white and having “straight hair down her back.” Despite her “nearly white appearance” she was considered a black slave. According to all accounts from slaves who lived on the plantation, Sally possessed an extraordinary shield of beauty. In fact, those who knew her referred to her as Dashing Sally! Indeed, her beauty caught the eye of Thomas Jefferson and the two carried on a love affair for many years (Gordon-Reed, 1997).

Nevertheless, one may dispute this information insofar as Sally Hemings was a slave. Thomas Jefferson was her master! Many historians and laypersons have questioned the capacity for love to be a component of human interactions that were rooted in inequality and degradation. Millet (1971) asserts, “Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children, including the powers of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale. Classically, as head of the family the father is both begetter and owner in a system in which kinship is property” (p. 33). Quoting Sir Henry Maine, she writes,

The eldest male parent is absolutely supreme in his household. His dominion extends to life and death and is as unqualified over his children and their houses as over his slaves...the group consists of animate and inanimate property, of wife, children, slaves, land and goods, all held together by subjection to the despotic authority of the eldest male. (Millet, 1971, p. 34).
Subsequently, social researchers have restricted the intimacies between white men and black women to rape. Historian Garry Wills has written that it was “psychologically implausible” for Jefferson to have had a “love affair with one of his slaves in part because Jefferson was dedicated to beauty and refinement and had no desire to hover above the squalor and horror of the slavery that existed below him on the mountain top.” While completely denying the existence of a relationship based in consent and love Wills instead, suggests that “Hemings was like a healthy and obliging prostitute, who could be suitably rewarded, but would make no importunate demands. Her lot was improved, not harmed, by the liaison” (Gordon-Reed, 1997, p. 169).

Lewis & Onuf (1999) describe a certain “easy going, promiscuous behavior” on the part of white men that was taken for granted. Young white men were expected and encouraged to sow their oats in the slave quarters. Eighteen year-old Ben Carter reportedly took a young maid named Sukey into the stable and “there for a considerable time lock’d themselves together.” Six months later the Carter family “whispered” with rumors that Ben broke into the nursery to commit fornication with Sukey, a plump, sleek Negro girl approximately 16 years of age (Lewis & Onuf, 1999, p. 63). Similarly, hooks (1981) contends:

White male slave owners usually tried to bribe black women as preparation for sexual overtures so as to place them in the role of prostitute. As long as the white slave owner paid for the sexual services of his black female slave he felt absolved of responsibility of such acts. Given the harsh conditions of the slave life, any suggestion that enslaved black women had a choice as to their sexual partner is ludicrous.” (p. 25)

Angela Davis reminds us, “the alleged benefits of the ideology of femininity did not accrue to the Black female slave—she was expected to toil in the fields for just as long and hard as the Black male was” (Spelman, 1988, p, 122). Gerda Lerner’s analysis of the Black woman under slavery asserts that childrearing was just another burden under a morbidly oppressive economic system. Lerner insists, “Their work and duties were the same as that of the men while childbearing and rearing fell upon them as an added burden” (Lerner, 1973, p. 15). Ironically, Spelman censures feminist theorist for their inability to incorporate the standpoint of Black women into their
paradigms; yet, she continually relegates Black women into a position of static subordination compared to their white counterparts. Spelman contends, “The description of women as being put on a pedestal, or being dependent, never generally applied to the Black woman in the United States and was never meant to apply to them” (p. 120). Moreover, Spelman (1988) concludes:

> It is of course difficult to explain how claims about roles are established, but the history of race relations in the United States surely makes ludicrous the idea that the role of white men is to be the benefactors of Black women—to protect them and to provide them with the comforts of life. This neither describes what white men have done, nor what they have been told they ought to have done, with respect to Black women. (p. 120)

Accordingly, hooks (1981) asserts:

> Black female slaves were usually sexually assaulted when they were between the ages of thirteen and sixteen. When she is fourteen or fifteen, her owner or his sons, or the overseer or perhaps all of them begin to bribe her with presents. If these fail to accomplish their purpose, she is whipped or starved into submission to their will. (p. 25)

Given that these scholars only examine and articulate forced, violent sexual terror, they suggest that American slavery represented an institution in which all black women were at the mercy of white male assaults teemed with mental and sexual terror. Certainly, the black woman was categorized as a slave. However, this refers to an economic relationship between her person and a capitalist system. While this may be an accurate description of the economic climate of the early eight and 19th century, it is plausible that slavery also provided grounds for encounters based in love and mutual affection. Lewis & Onuf (1999) confirm this stance asserting,

> Interracial sex took many forms in British America. In those cases where the male partner was white and the female black—the typical pattern for most of the eighteenth century—it ranged from deep commitment on the part of the white man to his black partner and mulatto children to the most outrageous forms of sexual abuse. (p. 75)

Breger & Hill (1998) employed the following statement to describe the practices of “non-whites,” however, I think it is instructive in relation and context to white slave-owners:

> There are a range and diversity of norms and customs within an ethnic community, as there are outside of it, some of which form a time a central core of
dominant practices, and others which form a changing continuum of decreasing acceptability a ‘periphery’ of more or less tolerated divergences. (p. 10)

In other words despite the prevalence of cruelty and sexual degradation in the slave/master nexus, it is plausible that some slave owners behaved kindly toward their “property” and treated them as human beings.

Restricted to Prodigal Love

In certain cases, the black female slave had the ability to make personal and intimate choices with regards to her lover(s) that have remained unexamined by scholars and laypersons. At best, these relationships have been restricted to prodigal love. Lewis & Onuf (1999) contend, “Love and cruelty, affection and callousness, composure and frenzy—such were the contradictory strands that bound blacks and whites together sexually” (p. 76).

For example, George Calvert, a notable Maryland figure formed a relationship with a slave of Native American and African ancestry named Eleanor Beckett. She was classified as a black slave. The two had five children together but never married. George married a white woman and Eleanor chose to marry an Englishman; yet, Eleanor continued to have children with George. Eleanor’s legitimate white husband is believed to have died from a broken heart as a consequence of her emotional and physical attachment to George. A few of George and Eleanor’s children continued to love beyond color lines. Caroline Calvert chose to live with Thomas Cramplin, Jr., a 72-year old landholder who had served three terms in the Maryland legislature (Lewis & Onuf, 1999). They never married but Cramplin acknowledged Caroline as his common law wife. Contrary to Spelman’s assumptions, Cramplin chose to provide handsomely for Caroline and her children and designated his “confidential friend George Calvert” the trustee for the support of and education for “Caroline’s children” (Lewis & Onuf, 1999).

Thomas Wright of Campbell County adored his “very black” lover. His lover Sylvee bore him four children between 1780 and 1793. Wright provided handsomely for Sylvee and
their four children. In fact, his oldest son Robert usually described as a light or bright mulatto was freed and inherited his father’s plantation along with six adult slaves. Later he married a white woman in the absence of controversy or ridicule from his neighbors (Lewis & Onuf, 1999). Similarly, when Thomas Bell died he chose to will most of his estate to his wife and their children. Sally Hemings chose to name her children after Jefferson’s relatives and close friends.

Furthermore, I want to bring your attention to the employment of the word bribery. Examine, the definition of bribery as found in the New Webster’s dictionary, “anything given or serving to persuade or induce” (p. 83). hooks, Davis, Spelman, Wills, and Lerner have explicitly declared that black women were completely powerless in the slave system. hooks proclaims, “The white male could rape the black female who did not willingly respond to his advances” (p. 25). Davis asserts, “the master would be subjecting her to the most elemental form of terrorism distinctly suited for the female: rape” (p. 123). But why would a “master” need to bribe or persuade a docile extension of his own authority?

Perhaps in certain circumstances, both persons made loving decisions within a structural context (a structure constructed by mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters) that relegated their affection into a master/slave dichotomy. Thomas Bell and Mary Hemings, for instance, a white man and black woman, lived together as husband and wife but had the legal relationship of master and slave.

Gordon-Reed (1997) contends:

The situation of Thomas Bell and Mary Hemings lays bare the dilemma. Those two people wanted to have a relationship, but the law of their state made that relationship criminal. The only way they could live together and remain near their families was to exist in the one legal relationship that gave them an excuse to live together—that of master and slave. (p. 168)

Put another way, there was no legal avenue for Blacks and Whites to live together in loving relationships as social norms reinforced homogenous marriages, friendships, and intimate relationships. Yet, this did not inhibit the “cultural blending” of blacks and whites, racism simply
silenced the public discourse surrounding intimate interactions between persons living in black and white skin.

Accordingly, some prominent planters flaunted their slave mistresses and mulatto children. David Dickson of Georgia, for example, took a mistress after the death of his wife and accepted an ineffectual degree of social disapproval to live openly with her and their children. The first mayor of Memphis, Marcus Winchester had a beautiful black mistress whom he married and took to Louisiana. His successor Ike Rawlins lived with a slave woman; they were not married (hooks, 1981).

Nevertheless, these relationships have been recorded within a slave/master context. Mediated through language the word “black” combined with “slave” has limited the conceptual boundaries for scholars and individuals in their everyday lives to explore the totality of race relations. Anzaldua (1999) reports, “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic—I am my language” (p. 81). In other words, language has limited the capacity for ordinary people and social scientists to question the relationships of persons living in white and black skin in the context of slavery. The words slavery, slave, and black preclude love and affection to be considered while analyzing historical and contemporary race relations. Essentially, these words sedate the skills needed to critically assess the tales of interracial interactions.

Moreover, in the nineteenth century 38 states enacted anti-miscegenation laws outlawing black-white marriages. Alabama drafted laws to thoroughly discourage intimacy across the color lines stating, “if any white person or any Negro live in adultery of fornication with each other, each of them must, on conviction be imprisoned” (Washington, p. 73). Similarly, Louisiana’s laws restricted “concubinage between a person of the Caucasian or white race and a person of the colored or black race a felony.” In 1913 North Dakota law outlawed any white male to intermarry with any Negro female. North Carolina declared all marriages between a white person and a Negro or between a white person and a person with “Negro descent to the third generation,
inclusive, shall be void.” The penalties varied from imprisonment to substantial monetary fines. With the exception of California, these laws were part of criminal statutes (Washington, 1993). Clearly, these laws provide evidence (for scholars and laypersons) that ordinary people wanted to love and commit to one another across color lines. These laws were not informed by rape or short-term interracial lust. Root (2001) proclaims, “Love not lust or curiosity guides the heart to a marital commitment despite taboos and warnings” (p. 26). Similarly, Washington (1993) contends, “These massive laws served well to extend the quagmire of black-white relations. Their very numbers and variety, however, attest to the reality that the color line was being crossed and that the public opposition was insubstantial against the flood tide” (p. 81).

Thus, coetaneous and contemporary race relations indicate a disjuncture between the constructed narratives of blacks and whites and the actual experiences of black-white interactions. For instance, throughout my life I have had many good and great friends some of whom include black and white women and black and white men. We have grown up together in the same community, city, schools, state, and country. Our “culture” is relatively congruent; yet, there are very few representations of our shared human experiences. Breger & Hill (1999) contend, “Two people from different cultures may actually have more in common than they have differences, especially if they share a similar background” (p. 8). Likewise, in 1923 Robert Watson Winston, a native of North Carolina, a leading lawyer in the state and a judge of the Superior Court described the complexity of race relations the following way:

By what authority do I speak on this vexed subject of race relationship in the South? For more than two centuries my people have lived in the South, and I myself am a Southern man. I became the owner by will of a three-fourths interest in five Negro slaves. I sucked the breast of a Negro woman, listened to the wonderful tales of my father’s slaves, rode “horse” on their backs, swam and fished with them, and ate their ash cake in the cabin. The Negro I think is my friend: I know I am his. Thus I ought to be impartial. (Washington, 1993, p. 151)

Consequently, these brilliant scholars (hooks, Davis, Spelman, Lerner) have left me with several unanswered questions. Firstly, why hasn’t the history of Sally Hemings and the entire
Hemings family been incorporated into historical documents? In other words, why didn’t I learn about Hemings in grade school as I learned about Thomas Jefferson or while I learned about the horrors of slavery? Whether one believes Hemings was Jefferson’s lover or not is irrelevant—the fact that a potentially loving relationship existed within a slave/master context is worth knowing and discussing! Why are blacks and white scholars opposed to constructing a broader and more complex analysis of race relations in which affirmation and normalization for “mixed marriages” can be achieved?

Secondly, why have blacks and whites continued to portray a singular, “beat down,” degrading image of black women? I censure the inability of social researchers to appreciate the complexity of the slave system. Bribing an “object” that has been clearly and indelibly defined as property, powerless, and “schooled in the art of obedience to a higher authority” (hooks, 1981, p. 17) does not explain the lives of Hemings, Dickson, Winchester, Calvert, Beckett, Jefferson, anymore than it explains Keene or me. To the contrary, these relationships implicate a complex matrix of power, love, and pride. Their interactions suggest relationships in which power is experienced as porous and circular.

So, again, I ask why does love continue to be negated across color lines? Why haven’t these relationships been incorporated into the dominant sphere of knowledge? Why are black women portrayed as unattractive callused quasi-females?

Gordon-Reed (1997) affirms my inquiry by asking,

Why do some whites (and I will add blacks) accept the notion that love could exist in a maternal relationship between a black slave woman and a white child, while they view the possibility of romantic and sexual love between a black slave woman and a white man during the same era as absurd and perhaps slightly alarming? (p. 167)

I think ordinary people, in their everyday lives, are the very actors responsible in part for the production and reproduction of racialized constructions of marriage. Washington (1993) asserts:
Marriage as an institution also pertains to the welfare of the group. For this reason, in societies where individual interests are definitely subordinated to group interest, choice of mates is always in some degree regulated by parents or by social convention. (p. 170–171)

Indeed, the blowing cotton in the wind exemplifies the extent to which our complex social histories have been economized into a neat simple pack in which love is discursively extracted from persons who love beyond the color lines. Nonetheless, Hemings and Jefferson were lovers without affirmation from the rest of the world. Keene and I and thousands of ordinary couples in the United States and throughout the world exist and love each other despite attempts to negate, discourage, and censure our love.

Root (2001) asserts, “The forerunners of this loving revolution were ordinary people who committed themselves to the heroic journeys of which fables and fairy tales are made: obstacles, tests, tragedy, persistence, and ultimately, for many more couples these days, triumph” (p. 26). Indeed, we have come together for the same reasons that all people come together—because we ardently enjoy the company of one another and cannot imagine being on the Earth without the other person: this is one way to describe being in love with another human being. As Keene and I sit on the deck of the River House enjoying its natural beauty, our fingers intertwined, I pick the cotton from my shirt and toss it to the ground: it’s only cotton after all.
THE REIFICATION OF OPPRESSION

Crossing Boundaries

The phone rang.

"Hi Candice, how are you?" Keene asked.

"I'm fine. Are you okay?" I asked, my voice rich with concern.

Keene replied in a somber voice, "Well actually my grandfather died. His funeral is in Carmel. I'll be leaving tomorrow. In the meantime, you can read his obituary in the San Francisco Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, and the New York Times. Make sure you read it."

Keene always gives me assignments as if I don't have my own work to do I thought, as I hung up the phone. I was a little surprised. My grandmother had died ten months before and her obituary hadn't appeared in three major newspapers! The next day I headed to work and sat down in front of a computer.

"Hi Candice, how are you?"

"I'm fine what's up with you?"

"Well my Mom is driving me crazy. One of the 'head honchos' at Kaiser died and the Oakland office is in disarray. Anyway she is flying down this week to attend a service for him."

Jessica and I had become great friends in a short amount of time. Jessica stood 5'11", blond hair, and green eyes—the ideological all-American girl. Yet, rather than identifying herself with the advantages that accompany such an appearance, she instead prided herself on her liberal upbringing (signature of Bay area residents). Educated at Mills College, Jessica purported a sense of female independence coupled with progressive political ideas. She often boasted about graduating from one of the best colleges in the country for women. I admired her.

Ironically, she had moved from Northern California, to Southern California to join her fiancé. Jessica had left her entire life to become part of Bill's success. Bill was a medical student
and Jessica and I spent hours discussing her impending wedding and the various ways in which women manage their relationships. Eventually, feelings of frustration would bubble to the surface with regards to Jessica moving her whole life to a place that doesn’t compare to the sophistication of the Bay area: all of this for Bill! Her feelings of anxiety were usually settled by envisioning the lifestyle she would eventually acquire when Bill became a doctor. In fact, every Friday she and I would dedicate two hours to discuss the wedding and our love lives, while searching the internet for wedding dresses, locations, and sharing marital goals and fantasies. We gleefully coined this tradition Wedding Friday (WF).

This Friday I deviated from our wedding ritual and began an internet search for the obituary of Keene’s grandfather.

“Hey Candice are you ready for WF?” Sarah towered above me with a big smile.

“Actually, Keene’s grandfather died and I’m trying to find his obit in the San Francisco Chronicle.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, is Keene okay?” she asked, in a consoling tone.

“Yeah, he had been ill for a while so the family expected it, as much as anyone can expect the death of a loved one.”

Jessica perched down next to me as she often did on Fridays in search of a death record instead of marital beginnings. After a few moments the obit appeared entitled “Founder & CEO of Kaiser Permanente, Surgeon Dr. Clifford Keene dies, 90.” We sat silently and read the description of Dr. Keene’s life.

“Keene has never mentioned the extent of his grandfather’s success.” I said.

Jessica appeared visibly flushed, cheeks red, foot nervously twitching. “That’s Keene’s grandfather!” she asked in an accusatory tone.

Ironically, the “head honcho” who Jessica mentioned earlier that week was indeed Keene’s grandfather. From that point forward something changed.
“Well are you going to the funeral?”

Jessica seemed angry and tormented. She abruptly stood and retreated to her office. In her office she appeared to be engaged in a conscious effort to compose herself. From my point of view it seemed that Jessica approved of the relationship as long as I was dating a white man without prestige, as though only white women (preferably those with blond hair) deserved the privilege of dating a man of a superordinate social class. Who was I after all to monopolize the love and capital of the grandson of a wealthy white man?

After ten minutes Jessica reappeared sheepishly calm, as she had not masked her disapproval well. Something in her eyes suggested that she was ashamed of her outburst, confused of its origins, and ready to amend her transgression.

“I’m really sorry Candice—give Keene my condolences.”

I forgave her. We remained friends and Keene and I went to her wedding a year ago. When she learned of my engagement she sent me a card in the mail that read as follows:

“Congratulations Candice! I know how hard you’ve worked to make this happen.”

Women, Mothering, & Power

I didn’t quite understand why Jessica sent such a rude card. I didn’t work for anything! Keene and I are engaged because among other things he loves me and I love him. It’s that simple. Isn’t that why she and her husband married??? Certainly, Jessica’s card hurt my feelings as I admired her so much and she is a dear friend. I know she is a loving person with the best intentions for her friends despite their varied skin tones. So why had she sent a card that had not reflected the best characteristics of her being?

Clearly, the concepts implicit in Jessica’s card warrant pause and consideration. The point of this chapter is to examine race relations from the standpoint of women as racism and racial harmony are situated and located in the everyday lives of mothers, daughters, and wives.
Too often the struggle for justice is gendered—we learn about the Civil Right Movement insofar as Lyndon B. Johnson ratified Civil Rights Legislation, "Bull" Eugene Conner opposed it, and Martin Luther King, Jr. dreamt about it. But we know little about the lives of Conner’s mother, his wife, or his daughters. Did they share Conner’s belief system? Were they opposed to it? If they weren’t opposed to his racist paradigm of the South, how did they affirm, reinforce, and legitimate racism in their everyday lives?

Hartmann asserts, “In our society children are generally reared by women at home while men appear in the domestic picture only rarely” (Nicholson, 1997, p. 101). John Stuart Mill proclaimed, “Like a man when he chooses a profession, so, when a woman marries it may be in general understood that she makes a choice of the management of household, and the bringing up of a family” (Tong, 1998, p. 19).

According to the Reproduction of Mothering (Chodorow, 1978) our becoming girl-gendered or boy-gendered is a process mediated by our mothers:

An account of the early mother infant relationship in contemporary Western society reveals the overwhelming importance of the mother in everyone’s psychological development, in their sense of self, and in their basic relational stance. It reveals that becoming a person, boy or girl, is the same thing as becoming a person in relationship and in social context. (Spelman, 1988, p. 83)

Specifically, children learn that they are black boys and black girls in relation to white boys and white girls. In other words, Chodorow’s analysis of a gendered socialization process negates the influence of learning about race and ethnicity in conjunction with one’s gender. Spelman (1988) asserts, “It does not seem accurate to describe what my mother nurtured in me and what I learned as simply being a girl. I was learning to be a white middle-class Christian and ‘American’ girl” (p. 85). Spelman learned about being a white middle-class Christian as a consequence of negating and simultaneously confirming that individuals with dark skin fall into the un-American category of “other.” Breger & Hill (1998) assert, “There can be no concept of self without a concept of other, that which is not Self” (p. 7).
Gail Mathabane began to appreciate the ways in which mothers manifest taboos into the minds of their children after her first child was born. Mathabane & Mathabane assert:

It surprised me how many mothers boxed their children’s ears or scolded them whenever the kids ask, out of innocent curiosity, how a white mother could have a brown baby. The mothers probably thought they were teaching their children not to point, pry, or be impolite, but their scolding might later have a harmful effect. It might serve to teach them that it is wrong for a white woman to have a brown child. (p. 163)

Gail’s observations are important for one primary reason. Specifically, she acknowledges that mothers’ are (partially) responsible for teaching and/or socializing children to perceive certain relationships as normal and others as so abnormal that they are to be avoided at all costs. Simply put, children are allowed to associate or admire the beauty of persons who mirror their own phenotype—when they begin to (excitedly and innocently) inquire about persons in which exotic external differences are obvious, parents send cues such as scolding, condemning, or negating their child’s observations. By their mothers’ reactions, black and white children learn to distinguish and understand the social consequences of intimately interacting with one another. In other words, a gendered person is responsible for socializing Keene to feel comfortable with appreciating my internal and external beauty. Likewise, my mother encouraged her children to judge a potential spouse according to his or her character, not by the color of one’s skin. By negating the power and privilege women have in sculpting a “racially hierarchical landscape” into the perceptions of their children, scholars and laypersons bypass the importance of the domestic sphere in constructing race relations.

Anzaldua (1999) articulates this point elegantly:

Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them. How many times have I heard Mothers and mother-in-laws tell their sons to beat their wives for not obeying them or for expecting their husbands to help with the rearing of their children and the housework, for wanting to be something other than housewives? (p. 38)

Indeed, throughout history women have been pacified and objectified in regard to their role in constructing a racially harmonious or appalling environment for their children. The role of
women in the struggle for equality and freedom has been defined within the context of the feminist movement. Yet, the feminist movement has never wholly confronted or acknowledged the intricate details of black-white interaction. Tong (1998) asserts, “Angela Davis pointed out that the Seneca Falls convention, like the entire nineteenth century women’s rights movement was a really white, middle-class, educated women’s affair” (p. 21). While researchers have examined white women’s racism in general, they have failed to investigate her racism in the socialization process. Moreover, sociologists have never acknowledged the power, complexities, and privileges associated with dark skin and those attached to it. hooks (1981) asserts:

For many white female abolitionists the sole motivating force behind their anti-slavery efforts was the desire to bring an end to sexual contact between white men and black slaves. Many pro-slavery white women ultimately denounced slavery because of their outrage at the sexual barbarity of men. They felt personally ashamed and humiliated by what they called white male adultery (which was actually rape). (p. 28)

Commenting on her mistress’ attitude toward the sexual encounters of black women and white men, Linda Brent wrote, “I was soon convinced that her emotions arose from anger and wounded pride. She felt that her marriage vows were desecrated, her dignity insulted; but she had no compassion for the poor victim of her husband’s perfidy” (hooks, 1981, p. 28). Dawson contends, “Continuing inquiry into another relative effect of miscegenation, Chase-Riboud describes ‘a strange and southern circle of complicity: the concubine, daughter, the mistress and the slave; the aunt and the niece. The six women reflected the intricate and convoluted ties that bound them one to the other: blood, love, servitude, hate, womanhood, time’” (Hubbard, 1997, p. 8).

Clearly, I’m not sure that the black woman is the sole victim in this situation, if a victim at all. Pay close attention to Brent and hooks’ word usage describing the feelings of the “legitimate” and conventional partners to white male slave owners: “ashamed and humiliated by white male adultery,” “humiliated,” “her pride wounded,” “her dignity insulted,” “marriage vows desecrated.”
I think hooks’ own biases steer her away from appreciating the usage of the word adultery as the employment of this word implicates relationships in which mutual love and affection may have occurred. More precisely, phrases such as “desecration of marriage vows” provide linguistic clues encompassing infidelity: a perspective not restricted to rape. In other words, white women have articulated in their own words emotions that express their innocuous belief that those relationships between white men and black woman were not exclusively issues of rape. White feminists have never detailed the humiliation of having another (black) woman sleep with their husband, nurse their infants, and rear their children. It seems clear that while the “white woman” was put on a pedestal economically and culturally, her person was continually devalued as her husband carried on intimate affairs AND fathered many children with black women. In many respects, constructions of “white womanhood” are narrow in that they pretend economic security precludes discussions of pain and emotional vulnerability.

To the contrary, much evidence suggests that white men sired several black children with no effectual consequences and black women were given the opportunity to become the lovers’ of white and black men. Washington (1993) asserts, “The emotional opposition to black-white marriages is paradoxical in that while a great concern is exercised over legal marriage between blacks and whites, illicit relations involving the white male and black woman are met with almost sheer indifference” (p. 9).

White women were ostracized at best and killed at worse for having love affairs with black men. For instance, in 1731, one white woman in Northampton County accused another of being “a Negro whore and Negroes strumpet who would have jump over hedges to have had a Negro.” Tamara Smith, a white woman in the same county faced six months in prison and a substantial fine for marrying a mulatto. Washington (1993) asserts, “It was generally felt that no knowledgeable, decent, self-respecting white woman would engage in marriage to a black of course unless she was a ‘very low type’” (p. 63). Generally, white women who married or
interacted with black men intimately were so negatively stigmatized that they were perceived as monsters; thus, they were avoided as “creatures who had sunk to the level of the beasts of the field” (Washington, 1993, p. 63). So again, I must, ask, how did it feel to be restricted to marrying and committing to a group of men whose racial and/or gender category precluded them from the elemental foundation of marriage: fidelity?

Feminism & Privilege

My own experiences in everyday life with “white liberal feminists” such as Jessica suggest that feminists are not ready to get “real” and acknowledge the rage and intimidation they feel in my presence. Instead, they purport liberal and egalitarian ideas. Yet, when I am the recipient of the same opportunities allowed to white women, they suddenly become angry and several degrees less “liberal.” Jessica, for instance, thought her friendship with me proved that she is a proponent of diversity and racial equality. However, upon discovering that I have the potential to obtain the same marital options as her, can be achieved in which privilege and ease can be assumed, she retreated to a reaction with deep historical roots, in which I am indelibly inferior to her status as a white woman. She could not begin to deal with her own conflicted emotions with regard to my relationship with an affluent white male.

Jessica’s reactions to my relationship exemplify the complexity of my argument. On one hand, Jessica is a liberal feminist and equality and justice are at the center of her moral compass. Yet, I had broken an unspoken social convention, as only white women deserve the privilege of being economically mobile in a patriarchal system. Tong (1998) asserts, “Wollstonecraft wrote not so much to all women as to a certain class of married women whose privileged status would permit them to work outside the home without in any way jeopardizing the quality of life within it” (p. 17). Put another way, many white feminists are outraged by white male hegemony in the Western hemisphere; yet, they have not fully denounced or relinquished the throne from which
they claim benefits from being the “natural partners” of these hegemonic rulers. DeBeauvoir provides a classic example, “Some years ago a well-known woman writer refused to permit her portrait to appear in a series of photographs especially devoted to women writers; she wished to be counted among the men. But in order to gain this privilege she made use of her husband’s influence!” (Nicholson, 1998, p. 12). Spelman (1988) corroborates this point:

We can begin to account for the reproduction of racism by taking our task to be not simply to explain how men have come to think of themselves as superior to women, but rather to explain how children learn that the superiority built into “masculine” is meant to be the prerogative of a certain group of men; and to explain how it is possible for a group of women thinking of themselves as inferior to “men” to also think of themselves as superior to some men and some women. (p. 95)

Paradoxically, white feminist scholars and laypersons continually flaunt their ability to attract black men. I can remember, for instance, being in an undergraduate sociology class during a discussion regarding feminism. Professor Jane spent a great deal of time describing the numerous ways in which white skin and blond hair are the prototypical adjectives of beauty. She declared, “Blond hair, blue eyes, and white skin are the three descriptors white and black men acquire when they have achieved success—we are the trophy, the quintessential status symbol for a man; white or black it doesn’t matter—we are the ultimate prize. This leaves many Black women very angry and bitter.” According to Professor Jane, the feminist movement was in part an oppositional paradigm to male hegemony and the objectification of women in a male dominated society.

At that point in my academic career, I was not comfortable labeling myself as a feminist. So far, feminism (and feminists) and I didn’t seem compatible as the discourse surrounding the “women’s movement” as detailed in popular culture is a movement for white women and social affirmation for the mobility of women with white skin: Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Abigail Adams, Dorothy Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft—all feminists, all women, all
white. Cady Stanton, for example, felt that white men should enfranchise white women on the basis of racial privilege before considering the enfranchisement of any other “race.” She wrote:

If Saxon men have legislated thus for their own mothers, wives, and daughters, what can we hope for at the hands of Chinese, Indians, and Africans?...I protest against the enfranchisement of another man of any race or clime until the daughters of Jefferson, Hancock, and Adams are crowned with their rights. (hooks, 1981, p. 127)

hooks asserts, “They (white women) admonished white men not for their sexism but for their willingness to allow sexism to overshadow racial alliances” (hooks, 1981, p. 127). Davis pointed out that the “Seneca Falls convention, like the entire nineteenth-century woman’s rights movement, was a really white, middle-class, educated woman’s affair” (Tong, 1998, p. 21). I admire the bravery and political ambition of these women, yet, they never specified the terms in which “woman” is defined. Put another way, these women were abolitionists and feminists. Nonetheless, they did not directly address women of color into “their” movement. I voiced a few of my concerns regarding feminist theory to my class and Professor Jane. This wonderful radical feminist responded angrily, “You feel that way because you are a black woman and black women don’t agree with feminism because black men don’t even get paid as much as a lot of white women, why should you care about our movement when your men aren’t taken care of economically???”

Ain’t I A Woman?

Historically my racial category as “black” precludes my inclusion into that which is womanly, beautiful, or valuable. The trophy facade in relation to the white woman is the only image of “womanness” perpetuated in public discourse through media, literature, and education. Thus, it never occurred to Professor Jane that I may not have a black spouse or that I may also be considered a “trophy” in the eyes of white men or “non-blacks.” It never occurred to her that I
was speaking as a “woman” and not as a member of an inferior social category or that I didn’t hold her image of Black.

In light of our manufactured social history, I don’t think Professor Jane was trying to be malevolent or hurtful as she was the most invigorating and life-altering Professor of my college career. She and I became dear friends (even after I told her how much her comment hurt and disappointed me). Partially, her comments reflect a historical construction of white “womaness” being superior to the nature of all other women. To put the point a slightly different way: while white women have been degraded to second class citizens and have struggled for recognition of their oppression, they have never experienced the plight of women of color. African, Latina, and Asian-American women have never been perceived as women deserving of marital mobility, freedom, justice, and happiness. Similarly, Dawson asserts, “Heming’s public voice is silenced not only because she is an unmarried woman but also because she has the blood of Africa flowing in her veins; consequently, she does not conform to the dominant ideologies of womanhood which excluded her from the definition of woman” (Hubbard, 1997, p. 1). Essentially, to believe black women should not be slaves is a wholly different matter than asserting an actual paradigm from which Black women are treated as equals to their white counterparts.

Consider Aristotle’s distinction between the former (white women) and the latter (women of color):

The difference between a woman and a slave is this way: while a woman is “inferior” the slave is a wholly worthless human being. (Spelman, 1988, p. 40)

Davis’ (1998) definition of womanhood in relation to “black” is useful here. She asserts, “In order to function as slave, the black woman had to be annulled as woman, that is, as woman in her historical stance of wardship under the entire male hierarchy. The sheer force of things rendered her equal to her man” (p. 116). In other words, Black women where relegated into being equal with “their men” insofar as Black men and women shared the social identity of
subhuman slaves—once again this historical construction excludes Black women from the category of “womanhood.”

Thus, white feminists such as Jessica and Professor Jane are conflicted and wounded, as they have not been made to confront the contradictions. On one hand, they are the benefactors of privilege and social affirmation. But this privilege is prevalent ONLY by comparison to Black women and “non-whites.” Their sense of worth and value is profoundly linked and dependent on me believing that I am subordinate to all that is White. Spelman (1988) contends, “Those of us who are white may not think of ourselves as racists, because we do not own slaves or hate blacks, but that does not mean that much of what props up our sense of self is not based on the racism that unfairly distributes benefits and burdens to whites and blacks” (p. 121). Thus, to a certain extent, feminists are only willing to acknowledge the historical relations between Blacks and whites in which affirmation for white women and whiteness is socially manifested.

Remember Spelman’s words from the previous chapter:

It is of course difficult to explain how claims about roles are established, but the history of race relations in the United States surely makes ludicrous the idea that the role of white men is to be the benefactors of Black women—to protect them and to provide them with the comforts of life. This neither describes what white men have done, nor what they have been told they ought to have done, with respect to Black women. (p. 120)

Likewise, Gail Mathabane began one of the chapters of her book regarding interracial love as follows: “For black women the pain runs deep.” She went on to justify this title by detailing the anger Black women displayed when she tossed her blond hair with her Black husband at her side. So, the title of the chapter “for black women the pain runs deep” seemed fitting for her narrative. But couldn’t this “pain” be true of women in general?

Are our wounds and scars so different, so insulated that they become the essence of our existence while white women escape ever dealing with the degrading nature of historical black-white relationships? In other words this chapter reflects the circular and contradictory elements of human interactions. Yes, I am a woman of color, a person whose skin is so powerful that it
transcends my inclusion into the category of woman. Indeed, I am a different type of woman. Sojourner Truth articulated this point so well:

I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my Mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman? (Davis, 1998, p. 22)

My ancestors were strong enough to work in the fields and in the home. They were smart enough to become teachers and educators in the community in the face of massive opposition. Harriet Tubman, for instance, was head of the Intelligence Service on the Department of the South throughout the Civil War; she is the only American woman to lead troops black and white in battle (Davis, 1998). Certainly, Black women were formidable in mind and body. Yet, they were too weak to realize this made them desirable and enviable in the eyes of all persons in the conventional category of “woman.” They were too weak to confront the contradictions of our history insofar as they did not challenge the notion that Black women were only worth raping and only capable of being loved by men of a similar skin color.

To this end, I do not identify with Black feminist paradigms or social movements that attempt to frame these negations as “oppression” and “struggle” (in a world dominated by white men and women), where they are the quintessential descriptors of Black womanhood. Patricia Hill Collins endorses this notion stating, “In spite of differences created by historical era, age, social class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, the legacy against racism and sexism is a common thread binding African-American women” (Nicholson, 1997, p. 224). In other words, oppression and struggle have become synonymous with black “womanness” in every social context and in spite of experiences that cannot be named by racism and/or sexism. Black in conjunction with oppression/struggle/poverty equals Black women’s standpoints. According to the vital components of Black feminism, by virtue of living in black skin, I am automatically oppressed and economically exploited by white men in the free-market. Thus, according to black and white
feminists, the answer to my own question, “Are our wounds and scars so different, so peculiar that they become the essence of our existence?” is a futile inquiry as the omnipotent presence of Blackness responds, “YES!”

Through time and space rebellion against oppression and social inferiority at the hands of white men and women have become the “natural” adjectives to describe the experiences of Black women—even if their lives differ from this collective mantra. The *Combahee River Collective* (1981), for example, uses the word “oppression” in conjunction with black (women) 25 times in an essay composed of 30 paragraphs. Indeed, according to Black feminists, being born black is an automatic express lane to oppression and cultural deprivation by white capitalists and then by Black male sexists. Ironically, The *Combahee River Collective*, the definitive “Black Feminist Statement” contends, “As black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic” (Nicholson, 1997, p. 66). Collins smartly rejects this statement asserting, “in spite of this statement, by implying that only African-Americans can be Black feminists, they require a biological prerequisite for race and gender consciousness”(Nicholson, 1997, p. 242). More importantly, the statement, “as black women…” assumes that there is a homogenous experience, a taken for granted knowledge, regarding the issues of relevance for Black women.

Contemporary (Black) writers and scholars continue to ignore the possibility that some (slave) women bartered their bodies in exchange for money, gifts, or food, and more importantly, these same scholars, women and men respectively, negate the power involved in making the decision to commit a sexual act in exchange for personal gains and/or fulfillment. Essentially, if Black slaves could and did risk their lives in exchange for food or personal gain, they were also capable and did risk their lives for love. Black feminism has completely silenced the variations of experiences within the matrix of “Black womanhood.”
In other words, I am a woman living in black skin and I am in love with a man residing in white skin. In many regards, I do not identify with the constructions of Black women produced by Black or white feminists nor am I consumed with the struggle for “Black” liberation by means of separating myself from my white brothers and sisters. Instead, I am writing this piece to expose a conspiracy of silence with regards to fluidity, love, and power within race relations—a conspiracy perpetuated by persons living in white and black skin.

Subsequently, I should not be surprised that my white sisters cannot fathom or confront their own discomfort with my love affair with Keene. We, as women, “Black” and “white,” have never confronted the complexity of our past or the extent to which it informs our relationships and interactions in everyday life.

In fact, the tunnel vision (by tunnel vision I am referring to the negation of blackness in relation to privilege or power) in which Professor Jane’s perceptions are rooted exemplify the conceptual limitations that “scholars” maintain with regard to reporting race relations. In other words, scholars are not willing to broaden the scope of their sociological investigations with regards to historical and contemporary interactions between “non-blacks” and “Blacks.” Essentially, in reporting the activities of the social world, scholars preserve persons of color in a static subordinate position compared to whites.

Clearly, persons in everyday life have a tremendous task with regard to untangling the past and realizing the degree to which our history impacts our current situations with one another. In a broader sense, we must ask how contemporary racism influences the questions we ask of the past. When sociologists interrogate the past, why aren’t we asking questions like: How did it feel to be degraded by a person that has been permanently labeled as inferior and unattractive compared to her white counterparts? Do you resent his lover the way most women would, or do you pretend that she is inconsequential as a result of her dark skin? How does it feel knowing that your husband had the audacity to break your sacred wedding vows, (in which monogamy is
coveted) sired several “mixed” children, and housed his lover and her children along side you and your children?

Womankind, Once and For All

I certainly, do not want to end this chapter on an unconstructive note as I ask these questions for all women to figure out together. I’ve asked Professor Jane to think about some of these questions and to acknowledge the extent to which they affect her sense of esteem and worth. I asked Jessica about the hurtful aspects of her card. I mentioned to her that they did not reflect the best attributes of her being. Both women responded well. In the next class I had with Professor Jane she was careful not to pigeonhole Black women into a singular inferior social location. Jessica, Bill, Keene, and I had dinner last week in San Francisco. She bought me a gift: a deck of cards that have 50 tips that all brides-to-be must have.

Our friendships are not simple as we challenge each other to be better persons. We challenge each other to be more present and thoughtful in our everyday lives as mothers, lovers, sisters, daughters, and most importantly leaders. I am not arguing that the trophy illusion should be eradicated in relation to white woman; instead, I would appreciate that notion being extended to engender all women. In other words, every woman (through public discourse) should be made to feel as if she is a prize regardless of her skin color. Every girl and woman should be affirmed to the extent that they are labeled a “trophy,” a prize in the eyes of themselves, not men. To this end, hopefully, women of color (particularly those labeled “Black”) will be able to appreciate the dimensions of their social identities and challenge the partial constructions of their role in history by white and Black scholars.

In other words, we as womankind must reclaim and own our power. We must appreciate the extent to which we are the “masters” in creating loving and accepting environments for our friends, lovers, sisters, mothers, daughters, and most importantly for ourselves! In the absence of
men we must come together and answer a few of my questions, questions that lurk and taunt us in
the shadows of our beings. Only by bringing to light an incoherent, painful, and glorious past can
we reconstruct a new more inclusive paradigm for our offspring to identify the eclectic
dimensions of their social identities. By no means am I implying that motherhood is the natural
progression for women. Conversely, I want to impress upon the reader the importance of
appreciating the multiple roles women perform in the duration of a lifetime (one of which may be
child rearing) that allow them the power to affirm or discourage racial and/or sexual oppression.

Moreover, as social researchers, we must be flexible, critical, and inclusive in our
sociological assumptions. Tong (1998) elegantly makes this point:

Women's standpoint is not an ossified truth some feminist academicians have
chiseled in stone for all women to worship; rather, it is a kaleidoscope of truths,
continually shaping and reshaping each other, as more and different women
begin to work and think together. (p. 129)

Thus, Jessica, Jane, and I will continue to add myriad of colors, edges, and shapes into the
kaleidoscope of experiencing the world from the standpoint of “womanhood.”
ONE DROP OF HOPE

The Oscars

Tonight Brandi and I decided to have an Oscar party to celebrate this moment. This night is historic, as three “African-Americans” will be nominated for an Academy Award. Halle Berry, Will Smith, and Denzel Washington look beautiful. Flaunting, beautiful smiles, bronzed skin, teemed with intangible grace they already look like winners.

We were so excited that “our” favorite leading man was finally getting the recognition he deserved. We weren’t rooting for him simply because he was exceptionally good-looking...well maybe we were. Denzel is a superior leading man and his roles in “Hurricane,” “Remember the Titans,” and “Malcolm X” made the films among America’s best. Likewise, Halle Berry was up for an Oscar for her role in “Monster’s Ball.” She, too, is exceptionally beautiful but was here tonight as a consequence of her acting ability. These nominations came partially as a result of a movement generated by activists such as Jesse Jackson, Oprah Winfrey, and Whoopi Goldberg. These three, along with several other actors, challenged the Academy’s inability to appreciate or incorporate black actors into the film industry. So tonight, these nominations arrived as a historical consequence of 100 years of exclusion from the academy of films.

Thus, when Julia Roberts opened the envelope for best actor in a leading role and joyfully roared Denzel Washington, I, along with many other people of color, jumped to our feet, screaming, “go on Denzel—that’s my man!” In truth, it was clear that Julia Roberts, Hollywood’s favorite white actress, was just as proud as I was on that night. Shortly after Denzel received his Oscar, Halle Berry stood to emotionally receive her award. Most importantly, she expressed the pain of belonging to an ethnic category that has been negated and silenced through time and space. She mentioned and thanked her mentors past and present ranging from Dorothy Dandridge to Oprah Winfrey. On this night, tears streaming down her beautiful face, she ardently
articulated how it feels to be part of an ethnic group that has been excluded from the full making of culture in America. Indeed, as Americans we were all better on this night as Hollywood was attempting to include people of color into the full spectrum of public discourse and culture.

The next morning I got up and read the paper: I was still feeling good from last night’s victory. In large bold face words the headline read, “Halle Berry: Hollywood’s first African-American lead actress to go home with Oscar.” I smiled as I read the article and thought fondly of our changing world: it will be a better place for my children. Yet, as I continued to read the article and view the photos of Halle Berry with her “white” mother I wondered if this event was such a victory. I bought a few more magazines. In each magazine and newspaper photo, her Anglo/white mother stood beside her. Yet, each article reported her as the first African-American actress to win an academy award for a leading role. Halle Berry is of European and African descent; however, despite the presence of her European/white mother, she was reported as being solely African-American. I pondered this inaccurate description of her heritage.

Historical Binaries & Social Identity

Certainly, to report Berry’s ethnic identity as solely African-American is incorrect. In fact, it is a lie. Just as Sally Heming’s eclectic identity was masked under the category slave, Halle Berry’s rich ethnic heritage is being economized into a neat package called Black—Halle Berry the first Black actress to win an academy award in a leading role, the newspapers and magazines read. Certainly, members of society interpret these images and internalize their meanings. Despite the presence of Berry’s white mother she is labeled and perceived as Black in public discourse.

To this end, interracial marriage and the offspring of these relationships are precluded from the dominant discourse. By doing so, the conceptual boundaries for marriage, love, and family are actively interpreted through heterosexual, monocultural, racialized positions. For
example, when a child views a television sitcom about a nuclear family s/he is being socialized to perceive “family” in the context of a heterosexual familial unit. In other words, a nuclear family is an extension of the normative behavior of heterosexuality. Similarly, television generally depicts intimate relationships in the context of same race interaction. Essentially, it is very unusual to view interracial families or relationships in magazines, movies, or literature. The aforementioned exclusion affirms the binary in which persons are labeled as Black or white. Consequently, the traditional “white/Euro-American” or “Black/African-American” heterosexual familial unit is transformed through time and space into natural categories of social organization. In other words, if society negates the relationships from which biracial persons are manifested he or she simultaneously eradicates the option of one knowing and/or claiming a dual ethnic location.

Halle Berry is forced to identify with the ethnicity in which prominent visible markers exist on her being: she is Black because she looks black. It’s that simple, or maybe not. In order to wholly discuss the exclusion of “biracialism” as a legitimate category of identity, one must pay heed to the concept of “biracial” in opposition to “monocultural” identity insofar as these concepts are woven into the historical fabric of the master/slave nexus. For instance, earlier chapters examined the ways in which interracial intimacy has been recorded and legitimated as sexual coercion, abuse, and degradation between white men and Black women. “Masters” raped slaves to create more workers to exploit.

Moreover, masters used the Black female slave to satisfy perverse sexual cravings and demonstrate unchecked white male power in the Black familial unit. This is the primary inheritance I acquired regarding black-white relations through social research, movies, teachers, and laypersons.

The Black woman’s body was only worthy to men of a different racial category (particularly “white men”) insofar as they wanted to rape and brutalize her and insofar as these
narrow interpretations are repeated today, in both popular and academic media, my body and person is only worthy of sexual and economic exploitation by White men. This legacy resonates in Angela Davis’ words regarding interracial intimacy, she warns, “His instinctual urges would find expression in his relationship with his property—the Black slave women who would have to become his unwilling concubine” (p. 122). Specifically, I have demonstrated in the previous chapters that the possibility of love between a master and a slave has not and will not be endorsed by scholars or laypersons respectively. Love, kindness, complexity, and chaos were not recorded as historical components from which to evaluate these liaisons. Consequently, a narrow and pessimistic social identity was constructed for the offspring of these unions as “one drop rules” were meant to dehumanize their beings.

The Byproducts of Rape

The offspring from “interracial sex” and/or relationships were merely subhuman stock born into the atrocities of American slavery. John Henrik Clarke wrote:

The family as a functional entity was outlawed and permitted to exist only when it benefited the slave-master. Maintenance of the slave family as a family unit benefited the slave-owners only when, and to the extent that such unions created new slaves who could be exploited. (Davis, 1998, p. 113)

Lewis & Onuf assert (1999), “All the children produced by liaisons between masters and slave women, even if consensual, would still be slaves and hence far less destabilizing to the social order than free people of color” (p. 105). Washington (1993) contends, “The children of white fathers and black mothers were generally disowned by their fathers, despite the exceptional patterns set by those living in the limited spheres of polygamy and concubinage. The children were not only disowned by their father but despised by society” (p. 62). White imperialist, capitalist patriarcher instituted and enforced “one drop rules” mandating that the children born from these relationships be labeled as Negro/Black/African-American as one drop of “black” blood constitutes a Black being. To make this point a slightly different way, biracial-Blacks were
relegated into hypodescent or the attribution of an individual’s race/ethnic identity to the group with a lower social status when one or more racial category is available (Hartung, 2000).

Washington (1993) affirms this position stating:

Instead of developing the mulattoes as a separate group, as an advance between black and whites, white American society placed all blacks among the outcast. All blacks are held in contempt; no blacks are social equals. (p. 62)

In *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, Frederick Olmstead refers to “mulattoes” as a group of “illegitimate offspring who from habit of early life, the advantage of education, and the use of wealth, are too much superior to the Negroes in general, to associate with them, and are not allowed by law, or the popular prejudice to marry white people” (Washington, 1993, p. 59).

“Black slaves” or Americans of African origin were considered intellectually inferior by whites as the former group originated from a continent perceived as primitive and animalistic by Anglo-Saxons: this central rationale justified slavery as an economic practice. Whites repudiated mulattoes, as they were a physical and tangible reminder of the contradictions, complexities, and chaos surrounding a peculiar economic institution. Washington (1993) asserts, “the mulatto is held in contempt because his approximation to the white group is evidence of his irregular and illicit origins” (p. 62). Or, in less euphemistic terms, mulattoes or biracial persons served as social mirrors reflecting the passion, sexual aggression, coercion, lust, and schizophrenic quality of everyday life within the master/slave nexus. Likewise, commenting on sex between Black and white Douglas Adairs wrote:

Sex between blacks and whites created a tangled web of love and hatred, of pride and guilt, of passion and shame. Erotic activity brought blacks and whites close together, blurred the distinctions between them, and broke down the barriers; but by threatening to close the gap between free and enslaved, and producing a group of people whose position was deeply ambiguous, it was also potentially explosive. (Lewis & Onuf, 1999, p. 76)

Anzaldua (1999), provides an elegant description of persons caught in the intersections of conflicting boundaries asserting:
The lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (p. 25)

Thomas Jefferson described the impact of slavery as “manifesting odious peculiarities” within the social identities of “biracial” offspring. Consider Dawson’s analysis of Madison Hemings, the son of Jefferson and Hemings, reaction to his parent’s affair:

Madison recalls his self-inflicted pain which prompted him to butt his head against the fence, producing blood, because he couldn’t understand why his father didn’t love him. Madison’s rage is the result of miscegenation’s effect on the offspring, yet it is also indicative of the erasure of self-identity that characterizes the plight of slave children. (Hubbard, 1997, p. 6)

The historical construction of a vile and heartless white male capitalist patriarch informs racial categories and is inextricably linked to the refutation of interracial love and biracial identity. Simply put, if white men were incapable of loving their Black mistress’ then they concurrently were unable to love their “biracial” offspring. To this end, biracial persons are non-existent. Yet, as scholars, we must be thorough in our thinking and research by perpetually asking, how is one Black and white, African and European, dark and luminous, coiled and straight yet wholly Black? Melville J. Herskovits’ famous quote is prophetic, “Two human groups never meet but they mingle their blood. And of course, this has always been the case in the United States. But due to the alchemy of American racism, no new race ever results. Black and white do not make gray here but black” (Korgen, 1998, p. 19).

Certainly, through time and space, contemporary scholars and laypersons have channeled “hypodescent” into the viable and legitimate category of identity at the dangerous risk of reinforcing racial essentialism and separatism. In 2001, for instance, Christina Bryant, my sister-in-law, described her ethnic composition as African-American despite being the daughter of a Swedish/white father and Asian-African/Black mother. When asked why she identified herself this way she used the “one drop” rule to explain the negation of her assorted ethnic composition.
Susan, a 46-year-old woman with an African-American father and white mother refers to herself and biracial individuals as Black stating, “I think a person who has African heritage is African-American, whether they are biracial culturally or not. The theory of race as it’s used in this culture does not allow for anything else” (Korgen, 1998, p. 26). In other words, sociologists and individuals in everyday life employ the contradictory term, biracial-Blacks to describe assorted social identities.

Certainly, the term “biracial-Black” is not logical or rational; nonetheless, it is given agency through persons in their everyday lives as indicated by Berry and Bryant’s elimination of their white/European heritage. To a certain extent, this negation may be an attempt by biracial persons to avoid the dichotomous nature of their identity—an effort to avoid the polemical constructions of “Black” and “white.” Korgen (1998) contends, “Anselm Strauss, working within a theory of identity writes that personal identity is meshed with group identity, which itself rests upon a historical past” (p. 43).

Architects of Knowledge

The exclusion of dual ethnic identities is partially an insurgence on the part of Black (male) historians to reject white male hegemony in the Black familial unit. Contemplate the language employed by Black historians, activists, and scholars regarding sexual intimacy between white men and Black women. Speaking of the atrocities of slavery Dubois reconciled his anger toward American politics stating that he would forgive the South for slavery, white supremacy ideology, and the fragments of race pride rooted in the Civil War “but one thing I shall never forgive, neither in this world or the world to come: its wanton and continued and persistent insulting of the black womanhood which it sought and seeks to prostitute to its lust” (Davis, 1998, p. 124).
Davis (1998) contends, “in launching the sexual war on the woman, the master would not only assert his sovereignty over a critically important figure of the slave community he would also be aiming a blow against the black man.” Moreover, Davis (1998) details the ways in which Black women fought “alongside their men, accepting or providing guidance according to their talents and the nature of their tasks” (p. 125). During slavery, according to Davis, Black women were not allowed to be passive or feminine “in order to assume their rightful place beside the insurgent male” (p. 124–125). Davis (1998) reinforces this position asserting, “The black woman in chains could help to lay the foundation for some degree of autonomy, both for herself and her man (p. 116). Washington (1993) alleges, “The effect of slavery was to increase the instability of blacks with respect to pride in person and family. The wanton use of black women by white men taught very well the sex code expected of blacks” (p. 62).

One nameless observer of the slave system wrote:

Among the slaves, a woman a part from mere natural bashfulness, has no inducements to be chaste; she has many inducements the other way. Her person is the only means of purchasing favors, indulgences, presents. (Washington, 1993, p. 54)

She or he compounds the aforementioned quote by arguing that the Black slave aspires to become the “favorite girl” of an overseer, master or one of his sons, virtually any white man that can ease her morbid conditions will satisfy her burning desire to become an object in an intricate web of sex, power, and capital (Washington, 1993). Implicit in these arguments is the notion that Black men were the “natural” and “rightful” masters of the Black female body. Davis (1998) makes this point well, “The African slave woman: in the living quarters the major responsibilities ‘naturally’ fell to her. It was the woman charged with keeping the ‘home in order’” (p. 115). It was “the biological destiny” for African women to cook, sew, have and rear children, and maintain cleanliness in the domestic sphere (p. 115). Most importantly, the Black woman was a vital component to the furtherance of freedom, equality, and liberty for Black men in relation to white male hegemony.
Indeed, it is difficult to decipher the extent to which Black (male) historians’ enthrallment with the sexual exploitation of Black female slaves is informed by patriarchy and male domination. Be instructed by Nicholson’s (1997) definition of patriarchy, “A set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women” (p. 101). More importantly, she writes, “In the hierarchy of patriarchy, all men, whatever their rank in patriarchy, are bought off by being able to control at least some women” (p. 101). Bearing in my mind this definition, consider the language employed by scholars: “I shall never forgive the South for its use of the black woman’s body and womanhood.” “The black woman in chains could help to lay the foundation for some degree of autonomy, both for herself and her man.”

The language used to detail the plight of Black women objectifies the Black female body in the same style as the “white master.” Are these historians outraged because white men dominated “property” that was rightfully theirs to degrade, misuse, love, or protect? hooks affirms this question stating, “Black men have a vested interest in maintaining existing barriers which discourage black female-white male marriage for it eliminates sexual competition” (hooks, 1981, p. 67). To this end, these men (and women—I do not exclude Davis from this critique) are regenerating the same behavior of ownership and objectification of Black female womanhood they claim to abhor. These scholars are writing, theorizing, and pontificating in the absence of women in their everyday lives (as lovers). Where are the varied voices, narratives, and souls of Black womanhood? Why does a masculine spirit represent her varied experiences as a concubine, mother, fighter, creator, and lover? Most importantly, we must ask, can we wholly know the exact details of everyday life and relationships in the context of slavery without igniting bias and subjectivity within the authors? To make the point a slightly different way, we should ask, to what extent our sociological methods, inquiries, and interpretations are informed by experiences in our everyday lives in a gendered, racialized, hierarchical society? To this end, we
may discover the ways in which the objective positions of social scientists are governed by personal motivations. Washington (1993) affirms this stance:

It soon becomes evident in the research on sexual unions between blacks and whites that we know very little about our historical past, and what we do know comes forth less as description of reality than a projection of what writers believe reality should be. (p. 64)

Reconstructing Sally

Clearly, historical relations inform our contemporary attitudes and interactions with individuals of different skin tones and racial categories. In other words, we have legitimated a correlation in which persons of assorted ethnic backgrounds are indelibly linked to rape and shame. Mediated and disciplined by mothering, fathering, writing, reading, hearing, seeing, naming, and leading, we as a society of women and men, mothers and fathers, teachers and leaders, poets, historians, and journalists have ignited the fire of race relations so thoroughly that “biracial” persons in their everyday lives carry the burden, scars, and ashes of shame in their social identities. Thus, by choosing one ethnic identity they avoid the ignominy our culture imposes on their social identity as the symbolic byproducts of rape: this is quite a dilemma. I do not want my niece, nephew or any other child born to “Black” and “white” parents to assume the socially constructed baggage of the slave/master, Black/white dialectic. As critical scholars, we must reconstruct a new, more inclusive tale for our progeny.

By revealing love, harmony, interdependence, chaos, and fluidity into historical race relations, we dissolve the slave/master binary. To this end, we liberate the stifled identities contained in our singular beings. Our varied social identities are “unsilenced.” We can begin to shout discursively, celebrating our unique experiences as the “new mestiza” (Anzaldua, 1999, p. 44). We will begin to celebrate the lives of the following persons (and incorporate their complex heritage in the full spectrum of culture).
Alexander Hamilton is allegedly of “Black and white” parentage although this has been difficult to corroborate as he was born out of wedlock. Nevertheless, he certainly fathered two “Negro” sons. One son married a light skinned Black woman. His other son married a white woman and the two lived as a “white” couple (Washington, 1993). Some Americans claim that Jefferson took great pride in his biracial children allowing them to serve his guests at dinner parties and encouraged them to leave the plantation if they were white enough to pass in white society (Lewis & Onuf, 1999). The eldest “biracial” son of Sylvee (a black slave) and Thomas Wright received social affirmation from his white father and the community at large. The proud father boasted of his formidable physical strength. After Wright’s death in 1805, Robert inherited his Father’s plantation, six adult slaves, and married a white woman. Robert’s marriage was illegal but caused no social dissent as many “solid” citizens asserted that Robert was an “honest, upright man, and good citizen” (Lewis & Onuf, 1999).

Moreover, it was not uncommon for biracial women to receive exceptional treatment as the informal wives of wealthy, white Southern gentlemen. For instance, “in the antebellum period, young New Orleans bachelors could shop for placees, stunningly attractive Black women, well educated and trained in the art of casual domesticity, at the Quadroon balls, held at the Salle d’Orleans” (Korgen, 1998). In their childhood and teenage years, these biracial women acquired refined Parisian manners such as speaking French, playing the piano, and learning how to entertain a party. A disproportionate amount of powerful Black political leaders were biracial. Odell asserts, “Fully three-quarters of the top level Negro leaders in Reconstruction were visible mulatto, while the national proportion of Negroes who were visibly mulatto was about 15 percent” (Korgen, 1998, p. 16). These men were able to acquire an education and a significant level of wealth as a consequence of intimate relationships with their “masters” or more accurately their “fathers.”
By 1918, Blacks and whites perceived mulattoes or biracial persons as the natural leaders of the Black race as indicated by their ability to acquire education and wealth (Korgen, 1998). In truth, despite the ebbs and flows of anti-miscegenation sentiments and the repudiation of its offspring, biracial persons were able to acquire a certain degree of comfort and social advantage as a historical consequence of familial relationships with the ruling gender and racial category: white men. In many cases, white men provided handsomely for their offspring, thus, creating an elite class of refined well-educated “blacks.”

Yet, many laypersons and historians have popularized the idea that “masters” treated light skinned Blacks or the “house Negro” better than the “field Negro.” A dark skinned Black man or woman that received preferential treatment was labeled an “Uncle Tom.” The aforementioned perceptions continue to permeate in contemporary culture. Spike Lee’s film “Jungle Fever,” for instance, depicts a circle of Black women who complain about Black men’s preference for light-skinned women. In fact, Flipper’s wife complains that she has suffered for being nearly white in a Black culture that associates light skin with the rape of Black slaves by their white masters. In a pivotal scene in the movie she acknowledges the privileges and burdens associated with her pale skin and then asked “so why does my husband need to sleep with a white woman?” Her question surely legitimates the ways in which race relations have been recorded. Specifically, her frustration connotes the taboo associated with “mixed” race children as these individuals represent sexual activity beyond deeply entrenched color lines. More importantly, she equates her pale skin with the rape of her ancestors at the hands of their white masters.

Indeed, our culture has reified the theory that all Black-white relationships were based in rape and violence. Specifically, the myth of light-skinned Blacks receiving preferential treatment compared to that of darker skinned individuals simply affirms the racial hierarchy in U.S culture. In other words, these historians have failed to mention that “masters” often treated persons categorized, as slaves kinder as those “light-skinned slaves” were their sons and daughters.
Washington (1993) asserts, “They care for their children, clothe and educate them, and may even
live with them. In some cases the white fathers send their Negro children away to be educated
and in a number of instances have provided for them in their wills” (p. 67). Similarly, the “Uncle
Tom” was often the friend, son, daughter, or mistress of their “master.” By failing to incorporate
a kin relationship into the slave/master context, social scientists neglect an opportunity to describe
a more accurate and diverse portrait of slavery and race relations.

By no means am I suggesting that the aforementioned person’s lives were not
complicated or consumed with privilege and I am not arguing that slavery or the plight of the
Black woman within the matrix of slavery was providential for every woman respectively.
However, it is important to appreciate the varied and twisted narratives of individuals caught in
the racial intersections of Black and white, slave and master, good and evil, as we are bound to
reveal unpredictable and highly mobile race relations.

Clearly, historical and contemporary race relations warrant pause and careful
consideration. By reflecting on and revisiting the tales of our past, the motives of the authors, and
the political climate of the time, we can offer a new generation of Americans a fuller and richer
history from which to (proudly) identify and link their current social identities. Korgen (1998)
asserts, “Biracial support groups came into existence in the early 1980s on the explicit premise
that both black and non-black identities are necessary to the well being of interracial marriages
and their offspring. The result is that biracial Americans no longer have an obvious racial
identity” (p. 22).

In other words, a true victory, a tangible measure of the progress of race relations, would
reflect a society willing to acknowledge and legitimate the assorted ethnic compositions of Sally
Hemings, Halle Berry, Christina Bryant, Tiger Woods, and the many persons both famous and
ordinary who are forced to live in the “borderlands” on our society.
FINDINGS

This research is significant insofar as it examines critical issues of historical race relations and the extent to which they inform contemporary interactions between Americans of African and European descent. This research revealed the limited scope or complete negation from which the scientific community and media have examined the following categories: (a) historical constructions of womanhood, (b) the meaning and employment of the words black and white in relation to persons living in black and white skin, (c) interracial families (d) love beyond constructed color lines. Moreover, the research exposed the importance of self-examination during the research process.

Historical Constructions of Womanhood

Historical constructions of womanhood have precluded Black women from positive and varied constructions of personhood. The analyses of brilliant scholars (such as hooks, Davis, and Spelman) with respects to race relations have silenced the eclectic dimensions of women living in dark skin. Appreciate the similarities in Davis’, hooks’, and Spelman’s comments regarding black women:

White male slave owners usually tried to bribe black women as preparation for sexual overtures so as to place them in the role of prostitute. As long as the white slave owner paid for the sexual services of his black female slave he felt absolved of responsibility of such acts. Given the harsh conditions of the slave life, any suggestion that enslaved black women had a choice as to their sexual partner is ludicrous. (hooks, 1981, p. 25).

Davis asserts:

The alleged benefits of the ideology of femininity did not accrue to the Black female slave—she was expected to toil in the fields for just as long and hard as the Black male was. (Spelman, 1988, p, 122)

It is of course difficult to explain how claims about roles are established, but the history of race relations in the United States surely makes ludicrous the idea that the role of white men is to be the benefactors of Black women—to protect them and to provide them with the comforts of life. This neither describes what white
men have done, nor what they have been told they ought to have done, with respect to Black women. (Spelman, 1988, p. 120)

To this end, radical and liberal feminists ontological assumptions are similar in that they presume Black women share a homogenous standpoint of oppression. Specifically, this investigation revealed the perpetual relegation of all that is “Black” into subordinate, separate, and static positions compared to whiteness and persons with white skin. More importantly, there are very few images in popular culture or within the public discourse that affirm women of color or provide positive models for persons to celebrate “cultural blending” or the extent to which our social identities are already “racially, ethnically, and culturally integrated.”

Therefore, in contemporary “real life” situations, I have often felt uncomfortable around “Blacks” and “whites” as both groups often relate to me assuming that I perceive myself as oppressed or alienated from whites as a consequence of living within the racial category “Black.” It never occurs to Blacks or whites that my fiancé is “white” or that our relationship is not filled with racial conflict and polarization. Yet, within my personal sphere of American (women) friends whose eclectic identities include slices of Africa, Europe, Mexico, Japan, India, and the Middle East, we do not spend much time discussing the ills of the prison system, slavery, poverty, racial injustice and the like. Not that we are not concerned with social challenges, but we are not consumed or predisposed to identifying with social ills as a consequence of our racial and/or ethnic category. In other words, we are more likely to discuss, the trials and errors of financing a new car, the best ways to pay for graduate school, upcoming weddings, the right time to buy a house etc. In other words, we discuss the “normal” concerns of upwardly mobile Americans—these concerns cross ethnic and racial boundaries.

Nonetheless, through sociological research assumptions and methods, African-American and Caucasian social scientists have affirmed the position that race is problematic, static, and the most important variable to explore the lives of people of color. “Blackness” in relation to Black women is problematized while persons living in white skin are excused from having their “race
consciousness” examined. By doing so, race relations can only be explored in a conflictual dialectic: race and race relations are problematized and recorded in a polemical manner. Subsequently, the “intersections” of human activity are not engendered in studies of the social world. Thus “racial blending is left unexamined. In other words, persons whose lives and behaviors are not in conjunction with dominant ideology are silenced and made invisible through legitimate sources of knowledge. Most apparently, the assorted lifestyles and histories of Black women are economized into a homogeneous identity of oppression and anger.

Employment of Language

This research revealed the degree to which language is wed to social identity and the affirmation of a distinct social reality. By using words such as biracial, Black, white, slave, master, woman, and man, researchers perpetuate gender and racial essentialism in investigations of the social world. Clearly, the word “biracial-Black” lacks rationality and legitimacy in the everyday world of human interactions as “one drop” rules are rarely maintained in everyday life. The social definitions of “Black,” “white,” and biracial depend on the situation, context, and historic moment in which they are employed. The lives of the biracial persons we examined in an earlier chapter living in the antebellum era, for instance, lived within a superior social location compared to “full blood blacks.” In some cases they were exposed to education, social parties, and musical training and felt superior to “monoracial” blacks. Yet, almost overnight, after the Civil War, these same persons were categorized as “hi-yellow” or “fair skin blacks.” The new political climate altered the social identity of these persons; thus, changing their “multiracial” background into a monoracial category.

Moreover, by examining the relationship between language and identity, this research revealed the absence of language to adequately describe and name affection and harmony across the color lines thereby limiting the conceptual boundaries of actors to name and describe
situations that are not wholly matters of racism but instead a consequence of “racial and cultural” blending. In other words, when I met Keene’s parents at the airport, I retreated to the dominant discourse to interpret my fears and anxiety. But when I deconstructed the language surrounding “interracial” intimacy as it related to my experiences with Keene, I realized that I could not wholly identify with any of these constructions. Essentially, the words and language available to describe race relations preclude racial and cultural “bridges” that connect a complicated and segregated past to a hopeful and integrated present. There is no socially recognized language to affirm the positive blending, mixing, combining, rearranging, merging and interaction that exists across color lines despite evidence that indicated Blacks and whites have been “mixing” for several decades.

Interracial Families

This research revealed the absence of culturally blended families in most agents of socialization. Social research, movies, commercials, magazines, and musical videos reflect affection and human interaction between heterosexual racially, homogenous persons. Social phenomena is described and demonstrated in a racially segregated manner. For instance, most commercial advertisements depict happy, beautiful, and ‘racially homogenous’ couples and families. Television programs depict same race, opposite gender households. (In fact, I cannot think of one sitcom since the Jeffersons’ that displays an interracial family in a loving and harmonious light). Dating shows pair persons with similar skin tones together. By doing so, heterosexual racially homogenous families are perceived as “natural” and conventional in the public discourse.

Conversely, “interracial” and “gay” and “lesbian” households are rarely depicted in the public as these families deviate from the normative constructions of family and social organization. Their families and household are silenced and made invisible within the dominant
discourse. In the event that they are discussed, their interactions are described as “unconventional” and their actions are problematized and described using polemical descriptors. For instance, “Jungle Fever,” a film about love and infidelity across color lines, discussed race, politics, and love; yet, the movie ended with Flipper uniting with his wife as “interracial” dating was too problematic, ultimately divisive, and unrealistic for persons living in different racial categories.

Love Beyond the Color Line

This study revealed the overwhelming negation of love across color lines in social literature. Gordon-Reed (p. 119) pointed out elegantly the affirmation of “transracial mother love” but the extension of this love to mature men and women is actively forbidden. Sociologists, historians, and laypersons cannot fathom two people of “opposing” skin tones being socially compatible. There must be a “cause” to explain why someone would intimately interact across color lines. Moreover, researchers have limited the scope from which they examine “interracial” interactions as historical and present records particularize the rape of Black women and their perpetual economic degradation: all this turmoil is caused or explained by unchecked white male authority over all aspects of daily life.

Essentially, the characteristics of white men have taken on a mythical form in scholastic literature. According to Davis, hooks, Spelman, The Combahee River Collection, and other pieces of sociological literature, white men are portrayed as the ubiquitous embodiments of aggression, power, knowledge, and capital. Similar to Black women in this respect, the varied identities and behaviors of white men have been restricted to that of universal “oppressors” of all other gender and racial categories: regardless of evidence that suggests most white men could not afford to own slaves or property of any kind.
In addition, this research exposed the refusal of scholars to locate and describe liaisons between whites and Blacks that indicate affection, harmony, and unity or interactions that cannot be named by racism or sexism. Most historians and sociologist have been unwilling to construct the bridges necessary to cement the “holes” in our past. In other words, although this research revealed love and harmony across racial lines, the academic community has not fully affirmed the importance of reconstructing a language and body of knowledge that incorporates love and affection into its foundation of literature.

Research and Self-Examination

By using my own experiences in everyday life, as a person living in black skin apart from and in conjunction with a person living in white skin, I was able to explore race relations from a unique standpoint and expose the ways in which “objective” science is a reflection of the researchers relative position in the social world. In other words, my emotions and subjective epistemology created a richer context and backdrop to explore the dynamics surrounding “interracial” families.

Mainly, I was able to reveal the ways in which researchers have neglected race relations that lend themselves to the deconstruction of structure and agency. In other words, this study focused on the ways in which structure and agency reproduce and legitimate each other. By employing a metatheoretical analysis including grounded theory, structuration theory, standpoint theory, and poststructuralist paradigms to “interracial love,” the study exposed the ways in which ordinary people give agency to love, harmony, racism, and sexism. By using my own experiences, I was able to detail how love is legitimated and married to racial homogeny instead of “real” people. I was able to locate where the socialization process of racialized love takes place and describe how it affects persons in their everyday lives. Clearly, ordinary people are the very actors responsible for stigmatizing interracial families and biracial children: “one drop rules”
and anti-miscegenation laws are byproducts of racialized attitudes of love and personhood: this is the good news.

If we as a community of mothers, sisters, scholars, daughters, wives, husbands, teachers, friends, and leaders have the power to denounce, silence, or negate diverse expressions of love, we certainly have the power to shift our energies into more accepting and inclusive behaviors.

This is not the same as celebrating “multiculturalism.” Multiculturalism celebrates our differences to the extent that we do not affirm the degree to which we are culturally blended and experience the social world together. In other words, we must recognize the aspects of daily interaction that symbolize cultural sharing, bridging, borrowing, and merging. A synthesis of cultures, ideas, symbols, ideologies, music, literature, and food is the very essence of what makes America unique and beautiful. Thus, by celebrating the ways in which we are all reflections of each other’s beings or in many respects “opposite sides of the same coin” we can begin to construct a more inclusive tale to validate the multidimensional aspects of our social identities.

As a society of “culturally blended” individuals we must affirm the diversity of our own beings and by doing so we will minimize the stigma attached to “interracial” intimacy and marriages.
DISCUSSION

A Return to Love

I have reached my breaking point. I can’t stand this anymore—I’m suffocated here. I am losing beliefs, my convictions, and myself. Is this what marriage is about? If so, I don’t think I’ll make a good wife. I’m too opinionated and out-spoken. I’m tired of curbing my thoughts and feelings to fit into this neat package called “us”? He said we were going to dinner tonight but now he is laying down watching a baseball game. I have to get out of this, I can’t breathe.

“Keene, what are we doing tonight?” I asked in a sharp tone.

“You can do what you want, I’m tired and I just want to watch the ball game.”

“I thought we were going to dinner tonight.”

“No, we are not going to dinner. I’m tired and I just want to watch the ball game.”

“Fine.”

I walked into our bedroom irate but unwilling to reveal this to Keene. I was prepared to be angry with him for the rest of the night. I got dressed and prepared to have dinner and catch a late night movie: alone.

I walked into the kitchen, sashaying past Keene, obviously irritated and dialed the number to the only movie theater in Napa. I would go to dinner and see a movie. I needed space and a few hours away from us. I grabbed my purse and headed toward the door.

“Candice come here and sit down next to me.”

“I can’t, I have a movie to get to and I need to stop at the bank first.”

“We can go rent a movie together if you want.” Keene said as he affectionately pulled me into his arms.

“No, Keene,” I said abruptly pulling away from him, “I don’t want to rent a movie.”
“Are you mad at me?”

“No,” I lied, “I’m fine. I just want to go to my movie.”

“Okay.” Keene said through pained eyes.

I walked out the door and headed toward the bank. Evening walks helped calm my nerves. In truth, I was not mad at Keene as much as I am overwhelmed by this new uncharted phase of our relationship. Indeed, living with someone is very difficult I conceded as I walked into New York Pizza and ordered a bowl of pasta for two. I handed the woman $19.00.

“It’ll be 30 minutes,” the cashier replied. “That’s fine,” I replied as I walked next store to Starbucks to order my favorite coffee concoction. I just need a little time to myself and I’ll head back home with pasta for the two of us, I thought as I gulped down the remainder of my Carmel Macchiato. I pulled out a book and started to read: I would finish this chapter and head back home. After all, marriage is supposed to be challenging but loving Keene is easy. A few minutes later I glanced up and saw a familiar face. Actually he was quite handsome standing 6’2” tall with striking brown eyes. Keene entered Starbucks and was now sitting across from me.

“Candice, what’s going on with you?” Keene asked his eyes full of concern. “I thought you were going to the movies.”

“Nothing’s wrong. Are you following me?”

“No, I’m not following you.”

“Well how did you know I was here?”

“You said you were going to the bank so I knew you would be here—the bank is right over there.”

“Oh well, what are you doing here? I thought you were going to watch your game.”

“I was worried about you so I decided to find you.”

“Why are you worried about me?” I asked in an agitated tone.
“I worry because I love you and I want you to be happy,” Keene said extending his hand to touch the tips of my fingers.

I looked into his eyes and they now appeared larger and pregnant with emotion. In them, I saw tenderness, love, and vulnerability: this made my heart pitter-patter and I looked at him and smiled.

“Honey, you don’t need to worry about me. I’m fine—I guess I’m use to living in LA and going out to dinner on Friday nights. As much as I love living with you it can be a bit overwhelming,” I whined.

“I know but don’t worry, it takes time to adjust to living with someone. We’ll be fine.”

Now he was holding my hand tightly looking ardently into my eyes.

“By the way,” I said, “I love you too.”

“Let’s go home.”

We stood up, Keene reached for my hand and we turned the corner, homeward bound.

Experiencing Love

Indeed, my relationship with Keene is solidified by love, respect, and friendship. Although our love has been questioned and stigmatized in public discourse, Keene and I love each other wholly. Despite the polarized method in which historical and contemporary race relations have been recorded and promoted, Keene and I have decided to spend our lives together. In the face of the binary that exists between our racial categories we have chosen to marry each other. In other words, just as the revolutionaries that came before us, that existed in the absence of social affirmation and recognition, we have found happiness and joy by loving each other.

We are creating a new paradigm from which to define “family, love, and commitment.” This is not an easy endeavor as there are not many constructions of love, intimacy, or companionship that I can identify with—science, media, and persons in everyday life have almost
made it impossible to celebrate the love we share for one another. The polarization of persons living in black and white skin have left me struggling to provide a discourse that reinforces and legitimizes love across the color lines.

Moreover, the homogenous construction of my own identity as a person living in black skin, dictates that I must separate myself from whiteness in order to promote the economic and social mobility of “my people.” But my people live in the bodies of black, brown, yellow, heterosexual, bisexual, gay and lesbian, Spanish and non-Spanish speaking men and women. Therefore, I cannot identify with or relate to the dominant ideology of race relations as they restrict the master statuses of white men and women to “oppressors” leaving people of color to fill the role of being “oppressed.” This is not to say that I live in the absence of injustice and racism but it is to appreciate that Keene and the members of his family are not oppressors nor have I experienced oppression by him. Instead, our love has been repressed and omitted by black and white scholars; they actively deny the varied experiences of historical and contemporary race relations.

Subsequently, when Keene and I have our children they will not be “black” and “white” or biracial, they will be the beautiful reflections of two persons deeply in love with each other. You may ask yourself, how many times will she use the word love in this paragraph? The answer is simple: I will use the word as many times as it takes the reader to understand that love is what has brought Keene and me together. I will use the word as many times as it takes the academic community to realize that love is a variable from which to examine race relations. Love must be incorporated into the discourse describing all “unconventional” relationships whether this category describes transracial adoptions, interracial families, or same-same sex households.

A new language for our coetaneous and contemporary experiences must reflect the eclectic dimensions of our identities. In other words, the word black must cease to be restricted to powerlessness, poverty, and alienation. Moreover, persons living in black skin must “let each
other off the hook”—we can and do experience social mobility without denying our unique and formidable historical past. Clearly, I am a person living in black skin and most days I feel completely empowered knowing that I have attempted to broaden the definition of “blackness” and by doing so I have simultaneously challenged the superiority attached to “whiteness” and persons living in white skin.

In sum, Keene and I and perhaps the tale of Sally and Thomas reflect complicated narratives of people whose spirits are intertwined, whose hearts and souls will and have connected in life and death.
Appendix

Raw Data
The phone rang.

"Hi Candice how are you?" Keene asked.

"I'm fine. Are you okay?" I asked my voice rich with concern.

Keene replied in a somber voice, "Well actually my grandfather died. His funeral is in Carmel. I'll be leaving tomorrow. In the meantime, you can read his obituary in the San Francisco Chronicle, LA Times, and the New York Times. Make sure you read it."

Keene always gives me assignments as if I don't have my own work to do I thought, as I hung up the phone. I was a little surprised. My grandmother had died ten months before and her obituary hadn't appeared in three major newspapers! The next day I headed to work and sat down in front of a computer.

"Hi Candice, how are you?"

"I'm fine what's up with you?"

"Well my Mom is driving my crazy one of the "head honchos" at Kaiser died and the Oakland office is in disarray. Anyway she is flying down this week to attend a service for him."

Jessica and I had become great friends in a short amount of time. Jessica stood, 5'11", blond hair, and green eyes, the ideological all-American girl. Yet, rather than identifying herself with the advantages that accompany such an appearance, she instead prided herself on her liberal upbringing (signature of Bay area residents). Educated at Mills College, Jessica purported a sense of female independence coupled with progressive political ideas. She often boasted about graduating from one of the best colleges in the country for women: I admired her.

Ironically, she had moved from Northern California, to Southern California to join her fiancé—Jessica had left her entire life to become part of Bill's success. Bill was a medical student and Jessica and I spent hours discussing her impending wedding and the various ways in
which women manage their relationships. Eventually, feelings of frustration would bubble to the surface with regards to Jessica moving her whole life to a place that doesn’t compare to the sophistication of the Bay area: all of this for Bill. Her feelings of anxiety were usually settled by envisioning the lifestyle she would eventually acquire when Bill became a doctor. In fact, every Friday she and I would dedicate two hours to discuss the wedding and our love lives, while searching the internet for wedding dresses, locations, and sharing marital goals and fantasies. We gleefully coined this tradition Wedding Friday (WF).

This Friday I deviated from our wedding ritual and began an internet search for the obituary of Keene’s grandfather.

“Hey Candice are you ready for WF?” Sarah towered above me with a big smile.

“Actually, Keene’s grandfather died and I’m trying to find his obit in the San Francisco Chronicle.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, is Keene okay?” she asked, in a consoling tone.

“Yeah, he had been ill for a while so the family expected it, as much as anyone can expect the death of a loved one.”

Jessica perched down next to me as she often did on Fridays in search of a death record instead of marital beginnings. After a few moments the obit appeared entitled “Founder & CEO of Kaiser Permanente, Surgeon Dr. Clifford Keene dies, 90. We sat silently and read the description of Dr. Keene’s life.

“Keene has never mentioned the extent of his grandfathers success.” I said.

Jessica appeared visibly flushed, cheeks red, foot nervously twitching. “That’s Keene’s grandfather!” she asked in an accusatory tone.

Ironically, the “head honcho” who Jessica mentioned earlier that week was indeed Keene’s grandfather. From that point forward something changed.

“Well are you going to the funeral?”
Jessica seemed angry and tormented; she abruptly stood and retreated to her office. In her office she appeared to be engaged in a conscious effort to compose herself. From my point of view it seemed that Jessica approved of the relationship as long as I was dating a white man without prestige for only white women (preferably those with blond hair) deserved the privilege of dating a man of a superordinate social class. Who was I after all to monopolize the love and capital of the grandson of a wealthy white man?

After ten minutes Jessica reappeared sheepishly calm, as she had not masked her disapproval well. Something in her eyes suggested that she was ashamed of her outburst, confused of its origins, and ready to amend her transgression.

“I'm really sorry Candice--give Keene my condolences.”

I forgave her. We remained friends and Keene and I went to her wedding a year ago. When she learned of my engagement she sent me a card in the mail that read as follows:

“Congratulations Candice! I know how hard you’ve worked to make this happen.”

Settings

I called Dale.

Hi Dale, I was hoping that you could take me to the airport tomorrow. Atlas, I have a friend to take me to the airport! I’ve only been in MI for three months and I’ve made many friends a few I consider dear. Especially Dale: he and I had become great friends. We spend endless hours discussing the utility of sociology, the contradictions between working in the academy and social activism as well as the typical dilemmas encountered by first year graduate students.

“Sure no problem,” Dale replied in his typical cooperative demeanor.

“Actually I was thinking that we could leave an hour earlier so we can have breakfast. I frequent a cozy café about two minutes from campus.”
“That sounds terrific, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

As I hung up the phone, I wondered if having breakfast with Dale off campus was such a good idea. After all, in the liberal state of California, Keene and I are not always made to feel comfortable in certain places. Upon retiring for the evening, I decided to throw caution to the wind. If nothing else, I would have an interesting story to tell my friends at home. Besides, Maggie’s serves a great breakfast and I was going to be on a plane for the next five hours.

Dale arrived promptly at 8:00a.m. While driving to our destination I sang along to my favorite tune on the radio; suddenly the trepidation I felt the previous night seemed trivial judged against my growling stomach. I definitely needed a substantial breakfast. As we entered Maggie’s the smell of fresh coffee, warm maple syrup, and sweet muffin filled our nostrils.

“Good Morning. Can I get you something to drink?”

I recognized this smiling face, she often served Brandi and I on our frequent trips to devour a hearty meal. I exhaled a sigh of relief: Maggie’s proved to be a delightful café regardless of the skin tone of my company. Dale and I ordered our food and began our normal chatter regarding the WMU graduate program.

“Well breakfast was great but we better get going if we want to get to the airport on time. I’ll pay the bill.”

“Candy, you don’t need to do that.” He replied gratefully.

“It’s the least I can do for all the trouble I’m causing you this morning.”

“It’s no problem I don’t mind taking you to the airport--”

“And I don’t mind paying for breakfast.”

We headed toward the front of the café toward the cashier. I gave her my bill.

“$2.85 please,” the hostess requested.

Puzzled by the total I asked, “That seems awfully cheap for two meals--are you sure that’s correct?”
“That’s how much your meal cost.” She replied bitterly.

“Well we are together,” I retorted nodding toward Dale, “can you please charge me for both of our meals?”

“Well they are on this check separately, you two were charged separately?”

She continued to process the remainder of the bill separately.

“$3.85 please.” She said as the bottom drawer charged open.

I pondered this. Brandi and I had eaten here on numerous occasions and our bill had never been separated nor had the cashier insisted on processing it this way after being instructed not to.

I paid the remainder of the bill and headed out of Maggie’s.

The Negation

Intersections congested with myriads of cars, formidable towers looming in the sky above the earth’s surface while serene currents flow beneath our traffic: I had arrived in Chicago. I had been selected to represent Western Michigan University at an ethnography conference. Fortunately, frequent trips to Chicago were needed to plan the upcoming event. After I made a few of these trips alone, Rachel, another student from WMU, volunteered to join me. After several weeks of planning, the big day had arrived. We were going to join Howard Becker (perhaps one of the most notable scholars in the discipline) along with several other graduate students at the fourth annual ethnography conference. On our way to Chicago Rachel and I shared many details about our lives. Most notably, Rachel shared her disgust with growing up in a small rural farming town full of “trashy, small-minded, white people.” Indeed, Rachel looked forward to the diversity implicit to the landscape of Chicago. After all she boasted, “I have dated a fine black man. He really liked me but I could never share this relationship with my family.”
I assured Rachel that she would have the opportunity to meet diverse persons from various backgrounds if she simply made it a goal. Rachel and I entered the restaurant to greet Dean Taylor, one of the speakers at the conference. Before long Miguel and Hector joined us. Dean, an openly gay white sociologist from the Midwest; Hector, a Ph.D. design student from Brazil; Roberto, a graduate student from Mexico, and Rachel, a white female, grew up in a small farming town in Michigan. As I scanned the table I felt proud to be seated at a table that represented the complex mosaic of America.

Although that evening Rachel disclosed very little information about her background as the rest of us chattered away. Instead, she remained awkwardly silent throughout dinner. Meanwhile Hector, Miguel, Dean, and I engaged in a wealth of topics ranging from Mexican food to my upcoming wedding. After three hours of exhausting every possible topic I stood up to depart. Dean leaned forward to hug me and said, “It was so refreshing to meet such a lovely and intelligent grad student. You must go on to get your Ph.D.” He nodded at Rachel and continued down the street to his hotel. Miguel and Hector thanked us for coming and departed.

“I had such a nice time tonight. That was such a nice compliment Dean gave me. It made me feel so good about myself and my future as a sociologist.”

My comment fell on deaf ears. As Rachel and I headed back to our hotel she explained to me that she felt totally behind in the game of life.

“I feel so inadequate in situations like that—you’ve been exposed to so much more than I have. I feel like you know so much more about the world than I do,” she cried.

“Rachel you shouldn’t feel inadequate or ashamed because of your background. You’ve had a unique and interesting upbringing that would enrich any dinner table discussion,” I replied as we entered the hotel lobby passing a middle-aged African-American desk attendant.

“After all,” I continued, “we are young, and we have a lifetime of adventures ahead of us...”
“That black man is checking you out,” Rachel abruptly interrupted pointing to the old man at the desk, “he looks like he really likes you.” She insisted as we entered the elevator.

“It’s not unusual for older men to notice younger women although I’ve never found men old enough to be my father sexually attractive” I replied in a cold voice.

As we elevated to our floor I considered Rachel’s comment. In a 12-hour trip of all the men that had showed an interest in me she had only acknowledged the regard of an older black desk attendant. I interpreted this as being her way of referencing a legitimate partner for me as if to say that despite my social position, one that she acknowledged as being superior to her own, I was to remain interested in black men. More notably, she chose to acknowledge a man with a lower social status than her own. The intersection of gender and race seemed obvious. As long as I stay with a black man, I will have a lower social status than she as a consequence of the social stigma attached with blackness. Thus, while Rachel boasted about her adventures with black men she refused to concede that I, too, was desired and affirmed by white men. This was more than she could bear to avow; after all social mobility by means of a marriagability is a privilege of white women.

How dare I find love and happiness beyond the walls of the conceptual boundaries of race, class, and gender?
Region Matters

I’ve never met a Southern belle but she must be one. I don’t think I have ever met someone so genuinely sweet; so perfectly feminine. She must be what people are referring to when they describe the charm of Southern women. She is so lovely to listen to as her accent slips out and alters the rhythm of her voice. Indeed, Jan and I had become good friends. She and I often discussed her fears with regards to love—Jan was almost thirty and she had no marital prospects.

“It’s gets really hard for black women in the academy to find a suitable marital partner who is black.”

“I suppose so, but there are a lot of other men that would be lucky to have someone like you,” I said.

Jan pondered my compliment and continued on with her concerns.

“As black women achieve more mobility, you just don’t see black men. I mean I am working on my Ph.D. and I can’t find a black man to date me. The only men that are here are white. I mean people have to understand that we don’t have options with regards to dating a black man—they aren’t here!” she said her voice full of frustration.

“I suppose this may be true at this university but there are plenty of eligible men for you—they just have a different skin complexion.”

“I’m not opposed to dating a white man especially considering that there are no black men for me to date. But my family just wouldn’t understand. We are from the South and my parents have really bad memories about white people: they don’t really trust them. I know that they would be really uncomfortable if I brought home a white man. They are really afraid of me marrying one. But they’ve got to understand that I don’t have any black male counterparts here.”

“Would you be afraid to bring home a white man?” I asked.
“Well I wouldn’t be afraid because I am open to dating anyone who I can be happy with no matter what color they are, but I know my parents wouldn’t approve of me dating a white man,” she said sadly.

“It’s hard for me to fathom that kind of opposition. My parents have never equated white men or women with forbidden fruit.”

“My parents just don’t trust white people; they grew up in a different time but they just don’t understand that I can’t find a suitable black man so I may have to marry someone from a different race.” she said her voice full of despair.

“Jan, you have to realize that you are extremely engaging and beautiful. Men are going to be attracted to you. If you fall in love with a white man or a black you will be fine. Your parents will adjust...”

A loud ring interrupted our conversation. Jan rushed to pick up the phone.

“Hi Mom, how are you? I’m just sitting here with my friend...yeah she’s black! Why does that matter Mom? Candy, excuse me, this is going to take a minute.”

I walked over to the computer and checked my email for about 15 minutes. Suddenly, Jan’s voice rose with a sharp determination.

“I don’t want to be part of this conversation, I’m hanging up the phone now...good bye,” Jan placed the phone down.

“Are you okay,” I asked my voice full of concern as Jan never raised her voice.

“My Mom and my sister where on the phone and we were just chatting about stuff. Then my sister said that she had a nightmare that I was holding a white baby and it belonged to me because I had married a white man. My Mother chimmed in a said that I better not marry a white man. At that point I got off the phone. Isn’t that ironic—it’s as if they could hear our conversation all the way in Alabama. I don’t know why they can’t understand that I just may marry a white man. There are no black men here.”
The ways in which Jan justifies her decision to date or consider dating a man “outside her race” are rooted in social taboos. She continually feels the need to justify her decision by repeatedly proclaiming “there are simple no black men in the academy,” as if she needs a causal explanation that can account for her decision to date a white man.

“Jan, if you decide to date a white man, you need not justify this decision with any grand theory—if you like each other you should date each other, it’s that simple!”

“Yes,” she said smiling, “you’re right, I don’t need a reason. If someone, including my parents have a problem with it, it’s their problem not mine!”

**The Response**

I sat down at the opposite end of the table. This would be our first dinner in our new home in Napa. Actually, it is a small one-bedroom cottage much smaller than our last nest in Los Angeles. Yet, this place is cozier and warmer. It’s ours.

I like it here, I thought as the smell of spicy fajitas filled my nostrils. Everyone is friendly and the town is absolutely lovely. Indeed, this is my favorite time of the day, as the sun begins to set, the sky is illuminated with brilliant shades of purple, red, and orange. The tall pine trees blowing in the wind seemed to make this moment picturesque.

I debate whether this is the right time to share my tale. What if the language I use in the narrative offends him. My heart begins to thump a bit louder. Suddenly, I am nervous: I hope my tale doesn’t ruin our chance at happiness. But I must know what he thinks about it.

“Did you ever read Chomsky in college?” Keene asked.

“Sure, I love theorists that deconstruct language and reality. Post-structuralism is my favorite epistemology. In fact my thesis is laced in methods from that genre of sociology. Actually, you should read my introduction. I think you will really like it. It’s starts with one of your jokes regarding marriage.”
“Is the introduction long, I’m a bit tired?”

“No,” I said eagerly, “It will only take a minute to read.”

“Okay.”

I stood to retrieve my copy of the introduction. I was no longer nervous as the anticipation of his response was long overdue. I had been working on this draft for an entire semester. After presenting it to my theory class a fellow classmate said, “Candice, that was great: what does your fiancé think?” A few days later the Chair of my committee asked the same question. “Candice, I love this intro...it’s embodied and situated. The only question I have for you is what does your fiancé think? Are you going to interview him?”

“I don’t know,” I replied to both men. I’m not sure if I’m ready to share all of this with him. It’s almost like sharing intimate entries of my journal with him. He may take it personally; I don’t want to hurt him or make him feel responsible for the ills of the world. One of the ways I manage this relationship is by keeping negative stuff outside of its reach. Our relationship must be shielded from the external chaos of the social world especially as it relates to black and white. I don’t want to invite “it” in to our safe loving world. But maybe I would have to share this with him. At some point our worlds merge: the internal and the external, the good and the bad, the personal and private all become one. The progression of this towards marriage has changed the ability for us to operate separately.

Silently, Keene read page after page not making any comments. I stood and began to clear the table.

“What do you think?”

“It’s good.”

“Thanks. What do you think about what I wrote?”

“It’s good.”

“How do you feel about it?”
“You should give a copy to my parents. They will like it.”

“Okay.”

“Were you nervous about meeting my parents because you are black or just because you were meeting my parents?”

“Both, I thought I made that clear in the introduction.”

“Yes, you did. This is well written. You wrote a very nice introduction.”

As if the discussion was over, Keene stood from the table and walked over to the television.

“Is that all? Don’t you have any other comments about the paper?”

“Candice,” Keene replied very sweetly, “I said it was well written. Now I want to watch the evening news.” He sat in his favorite chair and began surfing the channels in search for a baseball game or the news—which ever came first.

**Managing the relationship**

I have reached my breaking point. I can’t stand this anymore—I’m suffocated here. I am losing beliefs, my convictions, and myself. Is this what marriage is about? If so, I don’t think I’ll make a good wife. I’m too opinionated and out-spoken. I’m tired of curbing my thoughts and feelings to fit into this neat package called “us”? He said we were going to dinner tonight but now he is laying down watching a baseball game. I have to get out of this, I can’t breathe.

“Keene, what are we doing tonight?” I asked in a sharp tone.

“You can do what you want, I’m tired and I just want to watch the ball game.”

“I thought we were going to dinner tonight.”

“No, we are not going to dinner. I’m tired and I just want to watch the ball game.”

“Fine.”
I walked into our bedroom irate but unwilling to reveal this to Keene. I was prepared to be angry with him for the rest of the night. I got dressed and prepared to have dinner and catch a late night movie: alone.

I walked into the kitchen, sashaying past Keene, obviously irritated and dialed the number to the only movie theater in Napa. I would go to dinner and see a movie; I needed space and a few hours away from us. I grabbed my purse and headed toward the door.

“Candice come here and sit down next to me.”

“I can’t, I have a movie to get to and I need to stop at the bank first.”

“We can go rent a movie together if you want.” Keene said as he affectionately pulled me into his arms.

“No, Keene, I said abruptly pulling away from him, I don’t want to rent a movie.”

“Are you mad at me?”

“No,” I lied, “I’m fine. I just want to go to the movies.”

“Okay,” Keene said through pained eyes.

I walked out the door and headed toward the bank. Evening walks helped calm my nerves. In truth, I was not mad at Keene as much as I am overwhelmed by this new uncharted phase of our relationship. Indeed, living with someone is very difficult I conceded as I walked in to New York Pizza and ordered a bowl of pasta for two. I handed the woman $19.00.

“It’ll be 30 minutes,” the cashier replied.

“That’s fine,” I replied smiling as I walked next store to Starbucks to order my favorite coffee concoction. I just need a little time to myself and I’ll head back home with pasta for the two of us, I thought as a gulped down the remainder of my Carmel Macchiato. I pulled out a book and started to read: I would finish this chapter and head back home after all, marriage is suppose to be hard but loving Keene is easy. Thirteen minutes later I glanced up and saw a familiar face.
Actually he was quite handsome standing 6'2" tall with striking brown eyes. Keene entered Starbucks and was now sitting across from me.

"Candice, what's going on with you?" Keene asked his eyes full of concern. "I thought you were going to the movies."

"Nothing's wrong. Are you following me?"

"No, I'm not following you."

"Well how did you know I was here?"

"You said you were going to the bank so I knew you would be here—the bank is right over there."

"Oh, well what are you doing here? I thought you were going to watch your game."

"I was worried about you so I decided to find you."

"Why are you worried about me???" I asked in an agitated tone.

"I worry because I love you and I want you to be happy," Keene said extending his hand to touch the tips of my fingers. I looked into his eyes and they now appeared larger and pregnant with emotion. In them, I saw tenderness, love, and vulnerability: this made my heart pitter-patter and I looked at him and smiled.

"Honey, you don't need to worry about me. I'm fine—I guess I'm used to living in LA and going out to dinner on Friday nights. As much as I love living with you it can be a bit overwhelming," I whined.

"I know but don't worry, it takes time to adjust to living with someone. We'll be fine."

Now he was holding my hand tightly looking ardently into my eyes.

"By the way," I said, "I love you too. Let's go home."

We stood up, Keene reached for my hand and we turned the corner, homeward bound.
The Primary Agent

"I’m downstairs."

"Great," she squealed, "I’ll be right down. On second thought, maybe you should come up to my room."

She opened the door to room 862 at the Hyatt Regency. This was her first trip to Chicago. Her Women’s Club was having a conference in the windy city and she intended on having a great time.

"Hi," I said happily, "I’m so glad to see you."

She hugged me until I could hardly breath, kissing my cheeks affectionately.

"I’m happy to see you too, you look so pretty. My entire life I’ve dreamt about having a drink in a jazz bar in downtown Chicago. Let’s go."

"Okay," I said. I am always amazed at her energy and courage. She had flown to Chicago on September 11. She never allowed anything to get in her way: what she set her mind to she accomplished.

We entered the bar and ordered cocktails. The saxophone released a long melodic note. I inhaled deeply and admiringly gazed across the table at this beautiful woman. Casually dressed in a white shirt and blue jeans, flaunting a smile that brightens the entire room in which she stands, she is captivating: I look at this woman in total awe. Every part of my being adores her: I am mesmerized. I cannot believe that I have been so lucky to know her my whole life. We are great friends indeed. I can talk to her about my fears and dreams and in so many ways she is my reflection. I reflect all that she is; I am the accumulation of all her beliefs, politics and love. We talk about everything allowing our conversations to cover politics, love, marriage, and everything and anything that comes to the forefront. When I am discouraged she reminds me that I am bound by nothing. More importantly, I have watched her live her life as if race, class, and gender are inconsequential. A free spirit: she is bound by nothing.
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