UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

"Outsider" and "Insider" Perspectives on

Canadian Interracial Relationships

by

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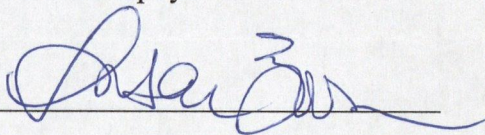DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

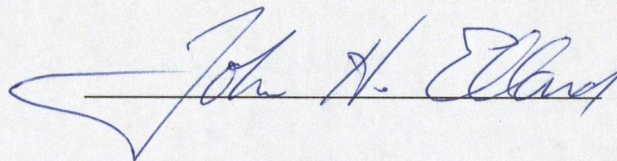CALGARY, ALBERTA

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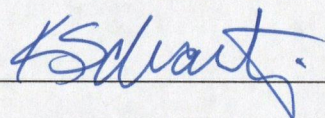# UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled '"Outsider" and "Insider" Perspectives on Canadian Interracial Relationships' submitted by Rebecca Lynette Malhi in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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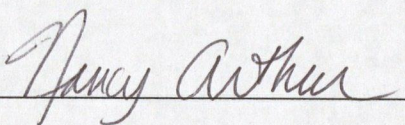
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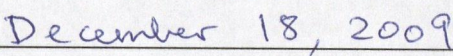
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Abstract

Canadian interracial couples live in a society that tends to approve of their unions in principle, but not in reality. The present research examined romantic interracial relationships from the perspectives of both "insiders" (that is, people who are members of different-race unions) and "outsiders" (people who are not interracially involved). My goal in doing so was two-fold: first, to explore outsiders' beliefs (e.g. attitudes and perceptions) concerning interracial couples, as expressed in the discourses they drew upon in talk on the topic; and second, to investigate how such beliefs and behaviours (e.g. public reactions) of members of Canadian society impact interracial couples.

The "insiders" study documented a consistent pattern of racially-based incidents that were perpetrated against the interracial participants, incidents that were ostensibly mild but still significant enough to cause the couple members some distress. Furthermore, the "outsiders" study found that, along with a few positive "celebratory" discourses, participants often drew upon negative "cautionary" discourses that depicted interracial couples as being very different from each other and likely to experience difficult lives.

The implication is that different-race couples face mixed messages in Canadian society: in a country with multicultural ideals of not "seeing race" or not "noticing colour," the factors of race and colour are, in fact, very important and influential.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to the glory of God and in loving memory of Tabitha Rose

Malhi (1987 – 2008), who enriched my life immeasurably.

Tabitha, you were always my biggest fan, and you thought that your Mum could do

anything. I hope you are proud of what I have done.

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"Insider" and "Outsider" Perspectives on Interracial Relationships

Interracial romantic relationships have fascinated and evoked controversy for centuries. Historically, such unions have been outlawed or punished in many parts of the world (Goodwin & Cramer, 2002), and even in the United States, it is only within the last fifty years that laws against miscegenation ("race-mixing") were abolished. Despite the fact that their relationships are no longer forbidden, interracial couples in present-day North America continue to experience various tensions and challenges as they live in societies that often are accepting of their unions in principle, but not in reality.

Although there is a growing body of scholarly literature from the United States regarding interracial relationships, I contend that the experiences and social worlds of Canadian interracial couples cannot be completely understood from the extant research, due to factors such as a different history of "race relations" and the societal emphasis in Canada on multiculturalism. Building on prior research, my goal is to extend the scope of this important field of study by focusing on the challenges and issues that concern Canadian racially heterogeneous pairs. Specifically, the present program of research was designed to investigate how interracial couples are impacted by the beliefs and behaviours of members of Canadian society.

To this end, I conducted a pair of independent, yet conceptually related, studies. In the first study, I focused upon Canadian "outsiders" (that is, people *not* involved in a different-race romantic relationship) and examined some of the socially available discourses that they produced when talking about their attitudes and perceptions of interracial couples. In the second study, I analyzed the societal reactions reported by Canadian interracial couples ("insiders") and investigated how such reactions were

experienced from their perspective, as well as any outcomes of these reactions on their romantic relationships. These two studies contribute to our understanding of the issues and problems encountered by racially heterogeneous couples by detailing observers' private opinions of them (which are often negative) as well as the public consequences (sometimes hostile) of being in a different-race relationship. In addition, in both studies I examined the concept that Canadian multicultural ideals may not buffer interracial couples from negative reactions.

Definitions of "race" and "interracial"

Although I use terminology such as "race" and "interracial" in my research, I am not postulating that races are real homogeneous social and analytical categories. "Race" has historically been used to classify human beings into distinct physical, biological and genetic groups, often using colour as the marker of differentiation (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000). Yet, scientists have concluded that there is little biological basis for the concept, as, at most, race might refer to a group of people with certain distinctive gene concentrations (Ashcroft et al., 2000).

Instead, modern conceptualizations stress the socially constructed nature of "race" (as well as its corollary, "interracial"). For example, according to Vickers (2000), the term "Black" varies in different places in the world. In Latin America, a "Black" person has predominantly African ancestry, but a person with partial African ancestry is counted with the White population. In Britain, "Black" is a political term, and includes people of African, Caribbean and Asian origins who mobilize against Whites. In the United States, due to the legacy of slavery, "Black" people often have many White European ancestors.

Therefore, in this document, I will be using the terms race or races in the sense of *social* groups that possess certain *visible physical characteristics*, such as a particular skin pigmentation, hair texture, eye shape, etc. Furthermore, the term interracial is used to discuss couples of "visibly different" origins (such as White/Black, and so on).

Issues Concerning Interracial Relationships

Any romantic relationship between two people may be viewed as potentially complex because of the members' different personalities and experiences, but the general perception in society is that being interracially involved adds extra complexity to the relationship. The current research is predicated on evidence that suggests that, although in most aspects, racially heterogamous couples parallel racially homogenous couples, societal factors may indeed add complexity to interracial unions. In the following sections, I discuss three important issues concerning interracial relationships, noting why they deserve research attention, and how I believe my research will contribute to the understanding of these issues.

Relative Rarity. People often have the impression that interracial couples are prevalent in society. Yet, census data from both United States and Canada indicates that although the numbers of interracial relationships are increasing, they are still relatively rare. In the United States in 2000, only 2% of the total number of couples were interracial (1.9% of all married couples and 4.3% of unmarried couples) (Fields & Casper, 2001). It is more difficult to determine the percentage of interracial couples in Canada as Statistics Canada does not collect data on race (though data is collected on ethnic origins). However, recent Canadian census data (Statistics Canada, 2006) show that approximately 3.9% of all Canadian couples were in interracial marital or common-law unions[1].

One could argue, of course, that in and of itself, the fact that they are uncommon does not make interracial relationships worthy of scholarly attention. Indeed, an argument could be made that, due to base rates of Whites and non-Whites (who make up approximately 16% of the Canadian population), same-race relationships will naturally outnumber racially heterogamous relationships. However, my research studies may provide insights into *why* different-race relationships are relatively rare in Canada. For example, in Study 1, the examination of outsiders' talk about interracial couples will highlight how the relative strength of negative societal discourses, compared to the relative weakness of positive discourses, may discourage people from romantic involvement in interracial relationships. As well, in Study 2, the investigation of insiders' reports of societal reactions will contribute to understanding how negative reactions might cause tension in, and undermine, current interracial unions and thus, potentially contribute to relationship dissolution.

Physical and Psychological Impact. A second issue is that couple members in interracial relationships may have dissimilar life experiences compared to same-race couples. Prior research from the United States suggests that, although race is socially constructed, it still has major physical, emotional, and psychological impact on the quality of life for the members of an interracial dyad (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003, Killian, 2001b). For example, American interracial couples are not always able to find proper housing or employment (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995). Also, due to repeated incidents of racial stereotyping or discrimination, individual members may experience physiological effects, such as hypertension (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008), and emotional effects, such as lowered self-esteem (Gaines & Leaver, 2002).

Extrapolating from such results, it seems likely that these incidents would "spill over" and also have a negative impact on the partner and children of the union.

As well, people in American interracial dyads may also experience psychological hardships that same-race romantic couples do not. One such hardship is stigma, which may be attached by outsiders to one or both of the interracial partners, and their "mixed" children (Frankenberg, 1993). (I examine stigma in more detail in Chapter 3). Stigmatized couple members often face being negatively stereotyped and treated. For example, in Frankenberg's (1993) study, White women involved with African-American men were viewed as inadequate, hypersexual or perverted. Interracial couples, particularly partners of colour, commonly report being the targets of discrimination, disparaging comments, and stares when appearing together in public (Killian, 2001a). Such negative attention can force American interracial couples to adopt protective strategies to avoid or minimize trouble, for instance, limiting affectionate behaviour towards each other in public or pretending not to be together.

Interracial couples in the United States also report disruption of established social networks as a result of resistance to their unions from family, friends, and co-workers (Killian, 2001a, 2001b). For example, family members sometimes refuse to attend the couples' wedding or other social events (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003). As well, in the work environment, public knowledge that someone is in an interracial relationship can entail risk to the person's work status or social status, therefore, individuals sometimes choose to keep their interracial involvement secret from their co-workers (Childs, 2005). It should be noted that resistance to interracial relationships may come from the communities and/or families of people of colour, as well as the dominant White group.

Although the extant literature from the United States details situations which are obviously serious and traumatic, we cannot assume that Canadian interracial couples face similar hardships. It is possible, for example, that the Canadian societal emphasis on multiculturalism might promote the concept of people from different races being desirable romantic partners, thus, counteracting the stigmatization of interracial couples or disrupted social networks. To date, knowledge about this issue in a Canadian context tends to be anecdotal, suggesting a need for scholarly attention. Thus, my studies contribute to filling a gap in the literature as currently, researchers do not know which (if any) hardships are experienced by Canadian interracial couples, the possible harmful effects on the individual members of the dyad, nor the implications for the relationship itself. To this end, first, I examine the positive and negative discourses available in society that may psychologically impact Canadian interracial couples (Study 1) and second, I analyze the talk of interracial couples (Study 2) to determine whether their experiences show evidence of stigma, disrupted networks, physical impact, and so on.

Media Portrayal of Interracial Couples. The third issue concerns the generally negative portrayal of interracial couples in the mass media. Internet searches for pictures of racially heterogamous couples often lead to pornographic sites, especially those featuring Black men and White women (Childs, 2005). In contrast, interracial couples are rarely seen in mainstream movies and television. Moreover, even when they are central to the plot, interracial relationships receive negative treatment. For example, movies such as *Jungle Fever* (Lee, 1991), *The Bodyguard* (Jackson, 1992), and *Monster's Ball* (Forster, 2001) depict interracial relationships which are destructive both for the protagonists and

their families. Such negative depictions reinforce common societal stereotypes that interracial relationships are often problematic, short-term or sexually motivated[2].

Portrayals of fictional interracial couples in mainstream media are important to consider because they form part of the social environment within which real-world interracial couples must live. For example, media depictions may establish certain expectations or stereotypes of what a prototypical interracial couple look like, their motivations for being romantically involved, their behaviour, and so on. As most of the media that Canadians are exposed to originates in the United States, it follows that Canadians are receiving these stereotypes, expectations, and so on (often involving American Black/White couples) almost unconsciously. Therefore, in both studies, I examined participant talk for evidence that the interviewees were aware of, and reproducing, media-influenced discourses.

Literature Review - Early Research Studying Interracial Relationships

Interracial relationships have long been discussed in non-academic literary texts, such as the Bible and Shakespeare. Yet, in the early psychological literature, scholarly discussions were rare, perhaps because interracial relationships were considered "inappropriate" (Gaines & Leaver, 2002), and thus, not a fit topic for study.

Academic research often reflects and, in turn, influences societal perspectives. There was a burgeoning of scholarly interest in interracial relationships during the 1960's and 1970's (Kalmijn, 1993), coinciding with important race-related events, such as the Civil Rights movement and the overturning of anti-miscegenation laws in the United States in 1967 (discussed further in Chapter 3). Many of the theories in the field were developed by researchers during this time, but Foeman and Nance (1999) note that some

of these theories contain stereotypical assumptions about the members of interracial dyads. These early assumptions, which reflect the *zeitgeist* of the era in which they were produced, can seem absurd or even racist to people re-evaluating the assumptions after thirty to forty years. For example, the 1960's were a time of youthful rebellion and sexual freedom. Thus, it is not surprising that some researchers saw interracial unions as being motivated by a tendency to rebel against parental authority (Saxton, 1968) or for sexual reasons. An example of the latter motivation is the centuries-old stereotype of "jungle fever," which suggests that individuals become involved in interracial relationships out of a desire to experience sex with a different-race partner (Yancey, 2003).

Furthermore, in a literature review of early research on the perceptions of interracial couples, Lewandowski and Jackson (2001) note the following characteristics that were attributed by the researchers to the members: exaggerated phobia of incest (Grier & Cobbs, 1968), low self-esteem and self-loathing (Beigel, 1966), psychological sickness (Brayboy, 1966), and being overly-idealistic (Osmundsen, 1965). Similarly, Park (1928) suggested that people in interracial unions were "marginal" to both cultures of origin and were confused, alienated, and distressed. In sum, much of the early psychological research literature appears to be biased and flawed, especially in its emphasis on locating interracial relationships within a discourse of deviance (Chan & Wethington, 1998; Tyner & Houston, 2000).

Current Research about Interracial Relationships

More recent literature on interracial relationships (which, thankfully, does not exhibit the same biases and flaws as early research) tends to focus on three main issues of interest: perceptions and attitudes towards interracial couples, motivations for becoming

involved in a different-race union, and characteristics of interracial dating and marital relationships. The perceptions and attitudes literature is relevant to my research, and a detailed review is given in Chapter 2. However, the latter two issues are not relevant to the context of the present research, and so, in this document, I do not review the associated literature. In the next section, I describe a concept that was useful in the development of this research project.

"Outsider" and "Insider" Perspectives. Gaines and Ickes (2000) have noted two dichotomous perspectives that exist in early and current research examining interracial relationships. The first perspective, or what they term the "outsider's perspective," takes the point of view of people who are not themselves in interracial relationships. Conversely, the "insider's perspective" represents the view of the relationship that is held by its members.

Much of the current research concerning interracial relationships, even those studies conducted with samples consisting of "insiders," could be categorized as using the outsider's perspective. This is because participants are not usually given an opportunity to describe their social-psychological experiences *in their own words.* Gaines and Ickes (2000) suggest that the lack of participant "voice" has resulted in interracial relationships being depicted and interpreted in unflattering terms.

The outsider/insider distinction is especially problematic when theories and accounts offered by people outside the relationship are at odds with the accounts that interracial couples use to describe their own experiences and lives. For example, interracial unions have commonly been theorized by observers to be sexually motivated, with Black men, in particular, being suspected of having strong sexual motives towards

White women (Foeman & Nance, 1999). Yet, Lewis, Yancey, & Bletzer's (1997) study found that nonracial factors (such as common interests or appearance) were more important than racial factors (such as the novelty of marrying interracially) when choosing a different-race romantic partner. Similarly, outsiders consistently view interracial couples in terms of their differences, and the members are hypothesized to have higher levels of marital conflict and lower levels of satisfaction than same-race couples (e.g. Fu, Tora, & Kendall, 2001). However, interracial couples themselves tend to focus on their similarities and express satisfaction with their relationship (Killian, 2002). These results suggest that when the research conclusions contradict the lived experiences of the people intimately involved in the relationship under study, those conclusions are suspect.

Therefore, Gaines and Ickes (2000) proposed that knowledge gained from the "outsider perspective" needs to be complemented with an "insider perspective" that represents the view of the relationship that is held by its members. The "insider perspective" could potentially clarify whether partners' stated motives for entering, maintaining, or leaving interracial relationships are as simplistic as the "outsider perspective" traditionally has maintained.

I adopted Gaines and Ickes' distinction between the insider and outsider perspectives in my research program. Therefore, Study 1 examined interracial relationships from an outsider perspective, as my research focused on how members of Canadian society perceive different-race couples. Study 2, on the other hand, was conducted using an insider perspective, as my data was elicited from interviews with couples who are interracially involved.

Together, these two studies extended the existing literature on Canadian interracial relationships in several key ways. First, by revealing the socially available discourses about different-race couples which outsiders may draw upon. Second, by documenting insiders' accounts of societal reactions to them in public, as well as the couples' responses to such reactions. And third, by highlighting the influence of images and ideas disseminated through American-based media on Canadian beliefs regarding interracial relationships. These contributions are important because they reveal the complexity of the lives of racially heterogeneous couples, suggesting that much of the complexity is imposed on them from outside their relationship. As well, the present research provides insights into why interracial relationships are rare in Canada, despite widespread societal acceptance.

CHAPTER TWO – "OUTSIDER" PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

With the Canadian societal emphasis on multiculturalism, interracial couples are often viewed as emblematic of the success of multiculturalism because of their decision to transcend racial/cultural boundaries. To date, researchers have not discursively analyzed outsiders' beliefs about, and their responses to, people involved in interracial relationships, yet, as outsiders impact the couples' public and private realities in multiple ways, it is important to do so.

I interviewed a sample of Canadian participants and analyzed their talk regarding interracial couples. The results showed that participants frequently reproduced socially available negative discourses in their conversations, suggesting, for example, that interracial couples are very different from each other or that they will have difficult lives. These "cautionary" discourses view interracial relationships as potentially problematic romances, and suggest that people should think carefully before engaging in such a relationship. More rarely, participants produced "celebratory" discourses that suggest that there are advantages to being part of an interracial union.

A "Clash between Beliefs" or "Cool"?: An Examination of Outsiders' Cautionary and Celebratory Discourses about Canadian Interracial Couples

The current paper is an exploratory study that contributes to the body of knowledge regarding Canadian interracial relationships by examining some of the discourses that a sample of participants produced when talking about their attitudes and perceptions of interracial couples. Prior research has found underlying societal discourses in North America that are negative towards interracial unions. Yet, the Canadian emphasis on multiculturalism would suggest that discourses in favour of interracial relationships are also available. My goal is to illuminate the ideologies that promote and proscribe different-race romantic unions, with the hope that such an examination will provide insights into the social realities that are constructed by the competing ideologies and consequently experienced by interracial couples.

Competing Ideologies in Society

Over the last sixty years or so, Western societies have moved away from social policies and actions that are blatantly racist (e.g. segregation) to policies, such as multiculturalism, that are based on concepts of tolerance for people of different ethnic and racial groups. Interracial relationships are viewed by some researchers (e.g. Bibby, 2007; Kennedy, 2003) as one of the barometers of the success of multiculturalism, as these unions indicate that barriers between racial and ethnic groups are broken down, with subsequent social and biological "blending."

"Blended" relationships have, over time, apparently become more acceptable to Canadian society. Data from national opinion polls show that only 55% of Canadian respondents approved of interracial marriage between Blacks and Whites in the mid-

1970's, with an approval rate of 78% by 1990 (Bibby, 2007). A recent poll indicates that 92% of Canadians (and 77% of Americans) now approve of interracial unions, while for Canadian respondents less than 35 years of age, the approval rating was almost 99% (Bibby, 2007). To some scholars (e.g. Bonilla-Silva, 2006), such approbation is evidence of the growing popularity of a liberal ideology founded on the concept that refusing to acknowledge race or to "notice colour" is desirable. Childs (2005), for example, notes that "colour-blind love" has become trendy.

At the same time, a more covert societal ideology posits that racially heterogeneous couples are transgressing racial and cultural boundaries (Frankenberg, 1993) and are deviant (Childs, 2005). Different-race couple members continue to face numerous challenges from society that members in same-race unions are unlikely to encounter (Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006). For example, interracial couples have reported being the targets of stares, rude comments, poor service, and physical violence (e.g. Frankenberg, 1993; Hill & Thomas, 2000; Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006). Moreover, there is societal resistance to accepting people of different races or ethnicities into one's own family. A recent Canadian Leger poll (Leger, 2007) showed almost 10% of the interviewees would react negatively if their child were to marry interracially, with another 16% of the sample saying that their reaction would depend on the race of the prospective daughter- or son-in-law. Frankenberg (1993) suggests that humanist ideals stumble over questions of marriage and procreation. Therefore, it appears that in North American society, ideologies that both promote and proscribe interracial relationships co-exist.

Discourses

One of the ways in which ideologies are manifested in society is through the use of *discourse*. Henry and Tator (2002) define a discourse as "a repertoire of words, images, ideas, and practices through which meanings are circulated and power applied" (p. 244). We perceive our environments by means of a set of discourses on race, culture, and society (Frankenberg, 1993). Dominant discourses tend to sustain particular societal worldviews, and often function to maintain power and privilege for elite groups in society. Common discourses concerning race, for example, include a denial that racism exists in a democracy, as well as a discourse of binary polarization where people are separated into "us" and "them" groups, with "them" being negatively stereotyped and viewed as "Other" (Henry & Tator, 2006). In the context of the present research, dominant discourses dictate the kinds of relationships that are acceptable versus unacceptable (e.g. same-race relationships are preferred to different-race unions). Even without our awareness, these "normalizing truths" can shape our lives and relationships, justify imbalances of power and privilege, and suppress alternative discourses that might be more liberating for those who are marginalized (Killian, 2002).

Why Study Discourses?

Discourses, both overt and covert, shape the social reality of people in interracial relationships, and it is important to examine how such discourses are taken up and used in everyday conversations. Surprisingly, given the ubiquity and importance of societal discourses, as well as the marginalized status often assigned by society to interracial couples (Killian, 2001a), there is a paucity of research in which interracial relationships are interrogated from a discursive perspective. Equally rare are studies that investigate the attitudes and perceptions of people who are *not* involved in interracial romantic

unions ("outsiders") through analysis of the discourses that they produce. Yet, outsiders represent and comprise the co-workers, friends, neighbours, and the broader society that form the social worlds within which interracial couples live. Therefore, it is important to examine their beliefs about, and their responses to, people involved in interracial relationships because these beliefs and behaviours will impact the couples' public and private realities in multiple ways. If, as opinion polls suggest, the overwhelming majority of Canadians support interracial relationships, do outsiders' discourses reflect this acceptance, or are they reproducing discourses that mirror negative views of racially heterogamous unions as deviant, problematic or transgressing racial/cultural boundaries?

Perceptions of Interracial Couples and Attitudes Towards Them

Census data from both Canada and the United States show that people of colour represent a growing segment of the total populations of both countries (Fields & Casper, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2006). However, despite the increased opportunities for potential social "blending," interracial relationships are still fairly rare (Milan & Hamm, 2004). Scholars have attempted to account for such a discrepancy by focusing on research questions such as how people in society perceive interracial couples and examining attitudinal content. For example, while some people in society view interracial unions as a positive interpersonal experience, others view romantic relationships between different-race partners as a threat to the social order (Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000). When individuals hold such negative perceptions of interracial relationships, Feagin and O'Brien (2003) found that they would strongly resist close relatives, especially their children, becoming involved in an interracial relationship. Recall that the Leger poll (Leger, 2007) I mentioned earlier showed similar results.

Other studies have revealed that, despite the increased acceptance of interracial couples in society, negative perceptions of them persist. Lewandowski and Jackson (2001) found that different-race couples were considered less compatible than same-race couples, a finding that was especially pronounced when one of the members was African-American. People in a study conducted by Garcia and Rivera (1999) had significantly more positive perceptions of racially similar dyads than of racially dissimilar pairs. Garcia and Rivera's participants also perceived interracial couples to be less compatible, less attractive, less likely to be satisfied maritally, more likely to receive disapproval, and more likely to experience relationship dissolution.

Why are Interracial Couples Perceived Negatively?

Several theories offer some insight concerning why different-race couples are perceived negatively. Research by Forgas (1993) indicated that, based on their implicit knowledge of prototypical relationships (or what "belongs together"), people make automatic judgments of couples. If one of the couple members (usually from an outgroup) is conspicuously different from what is expected by the observer, they may be perceptually isolated and trigger a cognitive bias against them in the perceiver (Gaines & Ickes, 2000). Thus, it is more likely that two people with similar skin colour will be seen as romantic partners than persons with dissimilar pigmentation (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995). This may also provide some explanation why couples consisting of Black and White members (phenotypically the most dissimilar combination) are relatively rare in Canada and the United States, compared to other cross-racial couples (Statistics Canada, 2006; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990). Furthermore, Black/White

relationships are often faced with the most opposition from society (Childs, 2005; Todd, McKinney, Harris, Chadderton, & Small, 1992)[3].

Levinger and Rands (1985) stated that negative perceptions of interracial couples may also arise from societal xenophobia (people are suspicious of others who look different physically), or when observers assume that there are fundamental genetic differences between racial groups that cannot be altered or ignored. As well, the linkage by observers of racial differences with social differences (e.g. social class, education, residence, and so on) may result in negative perceptions. For example, African-Americans are seen by many White people as being lazy, violent, and desiring to live on welfare (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003). Such stereotypes are harmful both to the target and to their partner as prejudice against a couple member's racial group can contribute to negative perceptions of the couple as a unit (Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001). Not surprisingly, the converse is also true. Perceptions of the individuals in an interracial union tend to be more negative than those of individuals in same-race relationships (Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001).

Contradiction between Stated Attitudes and Potential Behaviour

Considering the generally negative perceptions of interracial couples that have been reported in prior research (e.g. Garcia & Rivera, 1999; Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001), it is interesting that other studies (e.g. Dunleavy, 2004) have shown that people tend to hold positive attitudes, *in principle*, towards interracial relationships. Dunleavy (2004) has speculated that supporting racially heterogeneous unions is increasingly seen by members of society as a means for expressing equality and acceptance of other people.

On the other hand, this approval does not necessarily translate into personal willingness to becoming involved in an interracial relationship. In the Todd et al. (1992) study focusing on interracial dating, only 61% of respondents, overall, would be open to dating people of a different race. Similarly results were found in research by Knox, Zusman, Buffington, & Hemphill (2000), where only about 50% of the college-age respondents were willing to enter into an interracial relationship.

This interesting disconnect between stated attitudes and potential behaviour is supported by a 1997 Gallup poll which found that 66% of American college students said that they approved of interracial relationships, yet only 7% of them reported actually having been involved in such a union. In a study by Harris and Kalbfleisch (2000), participants provided reasons for their non-involvement in interracial dating, giving both personal factors (e.g. lack of attraction to someone from another race) and social factors (disapproval from family and friends, being stigmatized in public, etc.) Furthermore, some participants in Lewandowski and Jackson's (2001) research had difficulty even imagining themselves in an interracial marriage.

In the studies described above, an argument could be made that, because of base rates, racially homogamous relationships will naturally outnumber racially heterogamous relationships and, consequently, the results showing discrepancies between stated attitudes towards, and actual (or potential) participation in, interracial unions are not surprising. However, many of these studies and surveys used samples from college students (e.g. Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Knox et al., 2000) and integrated neighbourhoods (e.g. Todd et al., 1992) – populations with probably the best opportunities for potential social "blending."

Perceptions and Attitudes Concerning Interracial Relationships – Discursive Approaches

The research described in the previous section suggests that despite ostensible acceptance of interracial unions by society, there is still underlying opposition to such relationships. This conclusion is strongly supported by studies (again, primarily from the United States) which have been conducted using a discursive analytic approach (e.g. Childs, 2005; Feagin and O'Brien, 2000; Frankenberg, 1993). In these studies, participants drew upon (and in some rare cases resisted) socially available negative discourses about different-race relationships and people of colour. As well, the Black/White couples in Killian's (2002) study indicated that they were fully cognizant of the existing societal discourses that opposed their relationships.

Negative Societal Discourses

One of the negative prevailing societal discourses is that homogamy is normative, along with various rationales of why people do not (and should not) form romantic unions across racial lines (Killian, 2002). This has led Frankenberg (1993) to term cross-race relationship formations as "border infractions" (p. 93).

However, people are very reluctant to directly express opposition to interracial relationships, because they run the risk of appearing racist. In fact, similar to the results from quantitative studies, research participants (e.g. Childs, 2005; Feagin & O'Brien, 2000) tended to support interracial unions, in principle, but then qualified their ostensibly liberal viewpoints. Childs (2005), for example, noted that her White participants routinely used disclaimers such as "I don't have a problem with interracial couples *but*," followed by multiple reasons why such relationships don't work. Indeed, both Childs (2005) as well as Feagin and O'Brien (2000) found that participants were consistent in their

indirect opposition to different-race relationships, especially for members of their own family (and most particularly, for daughters). Such indirect opposition was often manifested by citing multiple "practical" obstacles to interracial unions. These barriers tended to be expressed by the participants in "subdued" language, with the interviewees using cautionary phrases that suggested that couples should be "thinking twice" or "thinking things through."

In Feagin and O'Brien (2000), two major obstacles that were ubiquitous in participant talk were the lack of common ground between couple members and that interracial couples have a lower quality of life in society. These obstacles could be interpreted as discourses of *difference* and *difficulty*, respectively. In the discourse of difference, there is an assumption that interracial couples who have dissimilar phenotypical features (such as skin colour) will also lack common ground in terms of values, shared backgrounds, religion, and behaviour. This discourse sounds practical and non-racial. However, not only is there little or no basis for this assumption of biological and cultural differentiation based on phenotype, but it also establishes binary polarization of "us" and "them", with the other group being deficient in attributes that are important to "us." The following quote illustrates this discourse using cautionary phrasing:

> *"I would say to the child that they should think carefully before, let's say, getting married to someone who's of a different race, because customs are different, outlooks are different, common friends are different, living patterns are different...they should think carefully about it before getting married, because they would have these things to overcome, that they would not have were they dating somebody who was the same race." (Feagin & O'Brien, 2000, p. 143)*

The second common discourse found in Feagin and O'Brien's (2000) interviews is the discourse of difficulty. Participants expressed "concern" rather than opposition

toward the poor quality of life and the anticipated suffering thought to be faced by interracial couples and their children. Although this too sounds like a non-racial issue, the researchers noted that social barriers (such as stigma towards interracial couples/families) are often generated by the dominant group, and there was little concern about working to eradicate the barriers and enhancing the lives of interracial families.

Positive Discourses

So far, the literature review that I have described from the quantitative and discursive perspectives has painted a bleak picture of the perceptions and attitudes of members of the broader society towards interracial relationships. Frankenberg (1993) noted that although there were discourses against interracial relationships, there did not seem to be discourses that promoted them. This is not quite accurate. On rare occasions, positive discourses, or at least, resistance to negative discourses, can be found in the talk of members of society.

One example of a positive discourse is the discourse of multiculturalism, which implies that the existence of different races or cultures in society should be celebrated (Childs, 2005). I have heard many people assert that Canada is not a "melting pot" like the United States (where all cultures are supposedly blended to become "American") but a "mosaic" or "tossed salad" (where the integrity of individual cultures are maintained). From this perspective, then, interracial couples are symbolic of a multicultural society because they are assumed to have transcended racial differences. One participant in Feagin and O'Brien (2000), for example, suggested that more intermarriage will create a society that is positively integrated across racial and ethnic lines, while another person said that through interracial unions, people gain more understanding of other ethnic

groups ("them") and how they are a lot like "us." As I noted earlier, interracial relationships have become trendy, and some of Feagin and O'Brien's interviewees worried that their children would face social pressure that would force them to become interracially involved.

Other discourses seem to put positive spins on negative experiences. For example, the "Romeo-and-Juliet effect" (Driscoll, Davis, & Lipetz, 1972) found that external factors, such as family opposition or stigma, may actually enhance an interracial couple's relationship. Also, Chan and Wethington (1998) focused on the resilience of interracial couples, suggesting that rather than such unions being problematic, couple members could demonstrate coping skills and social competence, and grow emotionally and psychologically within their relationships.

Why is This Study Necessary?

This literature review shows that attitudes towards, and perceptions of, interracial couples have been studied from both quantitative and discursive perspectives in the United States. Even in Canada, some research studies (e.g. Lalonde, Giguère, Fontaine, & Smith, 2007; Uksul, Lalonde & Cheng, 2007; Tzeng, 2000) have investigated attitudes towards interracial dating. Why, then, is my topic worthy of research attention? How is it different from extant research? Why is it important?

The answer lies in one of the key concepts of multiculturalism – that racial and cultural diversity is valued in Canada. With multicultural norms celebrating diversity, Canadian interracial couples (who are sometimes seen are symbols of the success of multiculturalism) might be commended by outsiders for transcending racial/cultural boundaries. Furthermore, societal discourses promoting interracial relationships do exist

and could be utilized. For example, a "browning" discourse suggests that, over time, interracial relationships will eliminate racial divisions in society (Sundstrom, 2008). Yet, no research, to my knowledge, has investigated the attitudes and perceptions of Canadian outsiders from a discursive perspective. Such a study is important because it will provide insights into the societal beliefs that racially heterogamous couples encounter on a daily basis, and contribute to our understanding of the challenges they face and the encouragement they receive.

<div align="center">Method</div>

Participants

In order to recruit "outsiders," that is, people who were not in different-race unions, participation in the study was restricted to people who were not currently in an interracial relationship, had never dated interracially, and were not children of interracial unions. Thirty-eight undergraduate psychology students participated in this study, and in return, received bonus course credit. As a large number of psychology students at the University of Calgary are White females, "purposive sampling" was required in order to ensure that both genders and a mixture of ethnic origins were represented in the sample. Thus, participants self-selected to one of four sign-up sheets (White female, White male, visible minority female or visible minority male), and I continued sampling until there were approximately equal numbers of participants in each cell.

The sample was comprised of ten males and six females from visible minority groups as well as nine males and thirteen females who identified themselves as Caucasian/White. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 36 years of age ($M = 21.68$, $SD = 3.37$). Six participants were married or involved in long-term dating relationships.

Most of the participants were born in Canada ($n = 24$). For the people who had been born outside Canada, the length of residence in Canada ranged from 3 years to 20 years ($M = 10.86$, $SD = 5.42$). Visible minority participants reported a variety of ethnic origins: Middle Eastern ($n = 6$), Asian ($n = 7$), South Asian ($n = 2$), and African ($n = 1$). All participants were fluent in English.

Procedure and Materials

Participants were interviewed individually at the University. Before each interview, I obtained informed consent from the participant. Most of the individual interviews were 30-45 minutes in length. A list of questions was used to focus the conversation on a variety of topics (Appendix A). Topics included how the participant personally defined the term "interracial," the general attitude of Canadian society to interracial relationships, challenges that interracial couples face, what is the participant's definition of "interracial" etc. All interviews were conducted in English and were tape-recorded. They were then transcribed for analysis.

Analysis

Even in present-day society, the topic of interracial relationships is a sensitive one. Childs (2005), for example, stated that many people have difficulty articulating issues relating to race or interracial intimacy, or tend to express racially-based opposition to such unions in non-racial terms. Therefore, in the current study, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was a particularly appropriate methodological framework to examine the potentially fluid and contested nature of participant talk about interracial relationships. As I was interested in participant beliefs, narratives and experiences, as well as the societal discourses they utilized, I chose to conduct what Braun and Clarke call a

thematic analysis at the "latent level." Such an analysis not only looks at the semantic content of the data (i.e. what the participant said), but also permits an examination of the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations, and discourses that may shape or inform the surface meaning of the data.

Thus, with this inductive approach, the transcripts were read and re-read, then coded for diverse themes related to interracial relationships, such as challenges faced by the couples, "exoticism," coping strategies, multiculturalism, and so on. These sub-themes were grouped into the two broad themes that will be discussed in the following section.

Results

Two parallel themes emerged in my analysis of the interview data, both tending to support prior research. One theme could be described as more negative or cautionary toward interracial relationships, with participants viewing such unions as potentially fraught with difficulties. The second theme is more celebratory, with the participants describing interracial relationships as opportunities for personal learning and excitement.

"Cautionary" Themes

Most of the interviewees had some exposure to interracial couples, as they either had friends or family members who were involved in such unions. Eleven participants had family members who were interracially involved, nineteen people had friends in interracial relationships, two participants had both family and friends in different-race unions, and six participants had neither friends nor family in such relationships. Perhaps this was why none of the participants made value judgments regarding interracial relationships, for example, suggesting that they are wrong, immoral, and so on. However,

participants did produce certain themes and narratives that clearly indicated that, to them, interracial unions were more complex than other romantic relationships with more potential for conflict or problems.

Interracial couples have external and internal differences. A prevalent idea held by participants in this study was that interracial couples in Canada have major "differences" between the members. Although some interviewees (usually White participants) expressed this idea directly, the notion of difference seems to also underlie other views held by a majority of the participants. Interestingly, "differences" can be interpreted as part of both of the cautionary and celebratory discourses, though in the latter case, it was usually framed using a term associated with multiculturalism, "diversity."

Contrary to the discourse of colour blindness, one of the differences was in terms of physical appearances. In general, participants expected interracial couples to be visibly different in phenotypical features, but almost invariably described differences of skin colour[4]. Furthermore, the participants tended to infer that people who had *external physical* differences would also have *internal cognitive* differences, such as values or perspectives, as a result of their diverse upbringing. As a consequence of these dissimilar values and perspectives, the interviewees anticipated that interracial pairs would experience barriers to their relationship, as well as problems within their relationship.

Eight participants (seven of whom were White) directly stated that people with different cultures or ethnic backgrounds would also have different views, values, beliefs, morals, and ways of thinking. As one White female stated,

Generally speaking, somebody comes from a different background, they're going to have a lot of different traditions, a lot of different interests, and if you're in a relationship or at least a romantic type of relationship, you want to have some similarities with the person. And I mean if you have completely

different value sets and completely different beliefs about holidays and that sort of thing, it's going to be hard to build a life upon that.

In a similar vein, a White male participant suggested that problems in a relationship can occur when someone is unfamiliar with the customs and beliefs that are associated with his or her partner's culture/race, or is resistant to them. He then described the experiences of two of his siblings whose interracial relationships had each encountered a *"big clash between beliefs."* These vicarious experiences were given as a rationale for not becoming interracially involved: *"I hate to say that there's a reason why I haven't dated interracially."* To this particular interviewee, the negative examples were proof that *"it's difficult for two cultures to mingle."*

The "clash of beliefs" that the participant referred to (and other participants alluded to) draws directly upon the discourse of difference, that is, that visible race differences between romantic partners are associated with deep incompatibility in views, values, and so on. Although this discourse is dominant in society, two of the interviewees (both White women) resisted this discourse. One participant stated that although strangers might *perceive* interracial couples as very different and consequently, as having difficult relationships, that scenario is not necessarily true. The second interviewee made a similar point, saying that any differences were *"all surface"*, and that two people, regardless of race, are involved because they are in love and want to be together.

Interracial couples will be stigmatized. A second cautionary theme that participants drew upon was that of potential stigma for couples who chose to become interracially involved. According to Katz (1981), stigma is a process by which an observer perceives a target to have some negative attribute, and then "disvalues" the target based on their possession of that attribute. In this study, both White and non-White participants

indicated that interracial couples are likely to be stigmatized and face negative reactions in public as a result of being visibly different from each other. As one person noted, although society has evolved to see interracial relationships as positive, there is still a *"stigmatism"* (sic) towards it. Another person said that society is not at the point where *"you just naturally accept"* interracial couples. Three people suggested that being *"looked at funny"* or receiving *"dirty looks"* from strangers might cause additional problems for the interracial pairs that same-race couples may not experience. Note that stigma or opposition is attributed to anonymous strangers or society in general, not to the speaker or their friends, family members, and so on.

Two non-White participants gave reasons why strangers might feel uncomfortable seeing racially heterogamous couples in public. One woman mentioned that, in society, interracial couples are *"not natural to see, like, in a sense, it's not something that you think is normal."* According to the participant, strangers will judge such couples and think, *"Why are they with that person?"* A similar idea was voiced by a visible minority male: although we live in a multicultural society, the norm is still that people of the same race will become romantically involved (*"like with like"*). The participant noted that when people of different origins do get together, members of society wonder *"Why aren't they dating people of the same group?"* and view this situation as *"kind of bizarre."* This participant, however, suggested that public scrutiny may result from mere curiosity, and not necessarily from negative attitudes or racism.

In a similar vein, other participants also seemed to believe that the attention paid to interracial couples in public was not necessarily hostile. Three participants noted that they themselves stared or did double-takes when they saw interracial couples in public,

and they attributed these reactions to surprise or curiosity due to the rarity of the relationship. One White female noted that it is not common to see two people of different races together, and that *"the bigger the contrast, the more it might catch people off guard."* For example, a Black/White couple is more obvious that an Asian/White couple. Similarly, a South Asian female participant also mentioned that certain combinations of interracial pairs would be "weird," such as East Indians and Asians. She was careful to note that her reaction was not prejudice, but surprise at the rare combination: "I know that if we saw that, it would be like, *'Oh look!'* Not *'Oh, my God, they're together!'* but it would be like, *'Oh, my God!'* because we never see it, never."

I contend that the quotes in the previous two paragraphs provide clear evidence that participants are drawing upon the discourse of homogamy, which, as I mentioned earlier, is a dominant discourse in society. However, it is also important to note the utilization of a parallel discourse of deviance. Consider the terms that participants used when talking about interracial relationships: unusual, bizarre, not natural, weird, not common, and "not something that you think is normal." These are not positive terms. In fact, they tend to suggest abnormality and definitely contravene humanist and liberal ideals.

Interracial couples face more barriers to their relationships. Another idea that was present as part of the "cautionary" theme was that an interracial couple would face more barriers to their relationship than a similar same-race couple would. This was variously described as *"things to work through"* or *"more hurdles to jump."*

One major barrier was the disapproval from families or communities and, interestingly, both White and non-White participants spoke of this scenario during their interviews. Four White participants mentioned that there might be opposition from their

own families. One woman, for example, said that her father would be "*weirded out if I had babies of a different skin colour than me.*" Another woman noted that her "*redneck uncles*" would disapprove of her being in an interracial relationship, but that family disapprobation would also depend on her partner's race (with an African-Canadian being preferable to an Asian- or South Asian-Canadian).

More commonly, participants anticipated disapproval from ethnic families and communities. White participants, for example, with friends from other ethnic groups (usually Asian-Canadians or South Asian-Canadians) noted that their friends were apprehensive about dating or marrying interracially because of familial or community disapprobation. One White participant with a Vietnamese friend said:

> *His family, especially his dad, they're very traditional, and very unaccepting of it… dating and stuff like that, every single time, his parents were like, "Can't you find a nice Vietnamese girl?" And he was always like, "I'm not attracted to Vietnamese girls."*

Twelve non-White participants also discussed family/community disapproval as a barrier to interracial relationships. This group stated that they had often observed other members of their ethnic group, such as friends or family, meet with community disapproval, so had direct and concrete experience with the consequences of forming an interracial relationship. These participants noted that for the older generation in their communities as well as for newly arrived immigrants, interracial relationships are indicators of becoming "too Westernized" and losing one's culture, thus, they discourage such unions. As all the ethnic participants are not recent immigrants and seem to have "Westernized" values, many implied (and five of them directly stated) that the pressure to maintain traditions caused tension for the younger ethnic members. One interviewee remarked that there was a dilemma between forming romantic attachments within your

own ethnic group and between *"respecting multiculturalism"* by becoming involved in an interracial relationship. This last comment is interesting because it implies that the social pressure to have an interracial relationship is part of the discourse of multiculturalism and originates from the dominant society.

Social consequences for ethnic people in interracial unions can be harsh, including becoming targets of gossip, being confronted by other members of their community, or being ostracized by their own or their partner's family. One Asian-Canadian woman, for example, described how her friend (also Asian) and her family were socially isolated during a community dinner because the friend brought her White boyfriend to the event. Another ethnic female said that if she were to be involved in an interracial relationship, the reaction from her friends would be disbelief (*"What the heck are you doing?"*)

As a result of the potentially negative consequences for non-White partners in interracial relationships, five ethnic participants in my study said they were unlikely to date or marry a different-race partner[5]. Three non-White participants said that they would date interracially, but not marry the partner unless highly specific criteria were met – for example, one person would only marry another Jew, and another participant required her partner to speak fluent Chinese and have the same religious background.

Interracial romance for the "wrong reasons." Although most of the people in the study stated that love, physical attraction, and common interests were the primary reasons for interracial couples to be together, four interviewees suggested other factors might play a part as well. These participants, all of them White, suggested that some interracial couples might become involved for unusual or even "wrong" reasons. Participants seemed to attach negative connotations to these other factors, perhaps because they are

counter to the dominant Western discourse that romantic love should be the primary motive for engaging in an intimate relationship. For example, one female interviewee said that people may *"want to be seen as accepting, or to make a political statement or something."* This statement reinforces the idea that multicultural ideals exert subtle social pressure to become involved in an interracial romance as a way of showing that a person is liberal, tolerant, or "not seeing race."

The concept of "rebellion" was raised by three White male participants as a potential motivation for interracial attraction. One person stated, *"It could be going against the family, going against the community, just trying to rebel against something."* Along similar lines, another male said, *"You could also be doing it, a young, rebellious person, to, I suppose, annoy some authority figure in your life."* A third interviewee posited that parents pressuring children *"to go with, you know, a person of the same type"* might inadvertently push their children into actions that *"their parents didn't want them to do,"* such as involvement in an interracial union. This idea of "rebellion" as a motive for interracial relationships seems to be linked with the twin discourses of homogamy and deviance. To these participants, interracial couples are infringing the boundaries of acceptable romantic relationships (e.g. Frankenberg's "border infractions"), and it is assumed that the older generation will not welcome such unions.

Interracial couples have more problems. As I noted earlier, interracial couples were expected to have major differences in terms of beliefs, values, viewpoints, and so on. As a consequence of such differences, twelve participants (eight of them White) anticipated that couples would experience additional problems within their relationship. (The remaining interviewees tended to imply that *all* couples were likely to have problems).

Consistent with the discourse of difficulty, participants expected that mixed-race couples would have to work harder to resolve conflict than would same-race couples. Interracial pairs were viewed as having to make difficult choices, such as how to maintain culture or raise children. Religious differences were also seen as a potential source of conflict (as it was generally assumed that different cultures have different religions). Two participants talked about potential problems if one person in an interracial relationship was from an individualist culture, and the other person was from a collectivist culture. Almost all the participants stated or implied that interracial couples would need to negotiate, compromise, and adapt in their relationship.

"Celebratory" Themes

In sum, congruent with the extant research literature, I found evidence of negative perceptions and cautionary discourses about interracial couples in the current study's data. Along with the negative themes, however, participants also discussed celebratory or positive themes which promoted unique advantages to being in an interracial relationship.

"Coolness" and exotic factors. As I noted earlier, interracial romance is increasingly viewed in society as trendy or cool, and this was reflected in participant talk. For example, two White participants said that Black men, in particular, were seen as exciting. One female stated that White women might be attracted to Black men because they are depicted in the media as dangerous or as underdogs, which makes them seem more provocative: *"they're not necessarily the bad guys, but they're sort of portrayed as the bad guys in the media."* A White male noted that music videos often showed Black men with White women, but not vice-versa. He also suggested that Black males were

stereotyped as "cool" because they were expected to play basketball, listen to rap music, and so on.

However, depending on the race/gender combination, interracial relationships are differentially evaluated in terms of being cool. The same participant who talked about cool Black males also noted, *"I've never heard of a White guy saying a Black girl is attractive."* Similarly, another White female participant described how unlikely it would be for an *"Asian geek"* to date a White girl because *"that would be dating above his social level almost."* However, she noted that it was acceptable for White men to date attractive Asian girls or *"really hot brown models."* Three participants specifically mentioned ethnic females in terms of being exotic.

Attributes such as "exotic" and "cool" indicate how the discourses of difference and homogamy can also be positively reframed. Ten participants (six of them White) mentioned that people are often intrigued by a *"different kind of look"* and will be physically attracted. Two participants used the phrase *"opposites attract,"* with reference to physical looks. Although this reframing seems positive, participants were referring to initial attraction. It is when interracial couples become more seriously involved that participants anticipate problems.

Novelty, learning experiences, and diversity. Although participants in my study perceived that "major differences" between interracial partners might be sources of conflict in the relationship, the differences could also be viewed positively as an opportunity for experiencing variety, self-development and excitement. Interestingly, this was one of the most common themes with twenty-one participants (twelve White, nine non-White) - out of a total sample of thirty-eight participants - mentioning it. Being in an

interracial relationship was described as being cool, intriguing, novel, a *"new adventure,"* an *"enriching experience,"* and unique. Three people used the phrase *"the best of both worlds"* and one person suggested that interracial couples *"combine all the goodness together and form a better relationship."*

Twelve participants promoted interracial unions as a learning experience that gave people the opportunity *"to try something new."* Three people talked about the lack of excitement in knowing all about their own culture, and the attraction in learning about other cultures.

This celebratory discourse seems to suggest that participants were considering interracial unions as opportunities for potential *self-expansion* (Aron & Aron, 2000). The central concept of the self-expansion model is that people are desirous of entering into relationships in which they will be expanded in some way (additional power, knowledge, social identity, etc.). Thus, participants in the current study may have believed that engaging in an interracial relationship is advantageous because couple members have access to their partner's cultural resources, experiences, and so forth, and will grow through the process of assimilating these assets.

The word "diversity" was used by three participants. Interracial couple members were viewed as bringing "different things to the table," and having diversity in heritage, backgrounds, and experiences. This is interesting because while *diversity* was given a positive connotation and seen as an advantage, *difference* was negatively viewed as a disadvantage. According to the three people who talked about this topic, diversity provides interracial couples with multiple perspectives, which allows them to be more accepting of other people, more flexible, and open-minded. To one participant, interracial

couples *"... don't have to be so, just straight road, that's the only road, there's no other left turn, right turn, kind of a thing."*

Multiculturalism. Thirteen interviewees (seven of them White) utilized a multicultural discourse, often with patriotic pride. One interviewee said, *"I, personally, am proud that we are multiracial and multicultural together."* Canada was typically described as a "mosaic" (in comparison to America which was invariably described as a "melting pot"). Participants who drew upon the multicultural discourse suggested that because Canadian society was accepting of ethnic differences, there would be more opportunities for interracial relationships to form. They also stated that interracial couples would experience few problems because Canadian society was tolerant and less racist than the United States. Although five participants used negative discourses of difficulty or difference *and* the discourse of multiculturalism in their talk, in most cases, participants who used a multicultural discourse did not also draw upon negative ones.

Interestingly, participants (particularly non-White interviewees) tended to use very idealistic terms when talking about multiculturalism. For example, one participant said, *"this is sort of like the future...what we envisioned and how the world would be."* Other participants suggested that regardless of background or skin colour, *"we are all humans"* and *"we are all the same"*, phrases which counter discourses of deviance and difference.

Interracial couples have stronger relationships. Earlier, I noted that interviewees often drew upon the discourse of difficulty, anticipating that various external (e.g. stigma, family opposition, etc.) and internal pressures (e.g. differences in values) would result in an interracial couple experiencing problems in their relationship and lives. However, this cautionary discourse was also reframed by some participants to become celebratory.

Fifteen interviewees (five visible minority, ten White) believed that if interracial couples could deal with such difficulties, their relationship would be "enhanced." As one participant said, "*If they can actually jump over those hurdles, if they can get through those obstacles, then they're so much stronger because of it.*" This celebratory discourse is consistent with what Driscoll et al. (1972) termed the "Romeo-and-Juliet effect," the concept that opposition may enhance an interracial couple's relationship. Interestingly, some of the same participants who drew upon negative discourses drew upon this discourse as well. For example, the participant mentioned earlier who talked about the "clash of beliefs" between people of two different cultural groups also suggested that an interracial couple being together shows the strength of their relationship.

In addition, seven interviewees suggested that interracial couples possessed special personality characteristics that allowed them to overcome obstacles and problems that same-race couples do not have to face. These personality traits included determination, the ability to tolerate differences and being able to ignore negative feedback. Eight participants also attributed interracial couple members with a high degree of commitment to their relationship, and a willingness to fight for it. Congruent with the resilience discourse (Chan & Wethington, 1998) and overlapping with the celebratory diversity discourse, participants expected interracial pairs to be flexible and open-minded, and to use strategies, such as compromise and communication, to resolve problems.

Discussion

My goal in this exploratory study was to determine whether Canadian participants produce negative discourses about interracial couples that are similar to those found in extant literature, and given the Canadian societal emphasis on multiculturalism, whether

discourses in favour of interracial unions would also be found in the talk. In the following

sections, I will discuss the results of the study, its limitations, suggestions for future

research, and conclude with the implications of the findings.

Cautionary Discourses

Generally, the results from my study support findings from discursive research

conducted by Frankenberg (1993), Feagin and O'Brien (2003), and Childs (2005)[6]. As

predicted by the existing literature, participants did, in fact, reproduce the dominant

discourses of homogamy (and its twin discourse of deviance), difference, and difficulty in

their talk. These "cautionary" discourses view interracial relationships as potentially

problematic romances, and suggest that people should think carefully before engaging in

such a relationship.

Although these results replicate earlier research, they are still important to examine

for two reasons. First, these findings comprise (to my knowledge) the first discursive

investigation into the attitudes and perceptions of Canadian "outsiders" about interracial

relationships. Recall that a recent Canadian opinion poll (Bibby, 2007) showed an

approval rate of 99% for interracial relationships by the under-35 years age group. This

statistic can be contrasted with the results of the current study which indicated that

participants (also aged less than 35 years) had more ambivalent attitudes. That is, while

the interviewees approved of interracial relationships in principle, they had many

misgivings about them as well. The discursive data from my study provides a counter-

balance to wide-spread beliefs (bolstered by opinion polls and media) that suggest

interracial couples have almost universal acceptance from Canadian society.

Second, the finding that participants are drawing upon dominant negative discourses is also important because it may help to explain why interracial relationships are still relatively rare in Canadian society. For example, some of the interviewees used evaluative terminology such as "bizarre," "not natural," and "weird," when talking about attitudes (either their own or other peoples') towards racially heterogamous relationships. Other participants expected interracial couples to experience very difficult lives or believed that racial differences signify major relationship-threatening differences. I contend that such socially available discourses strongly discourage people from entering into an interracial relationship because of the emphasis on all the potential problems (stigma, family opposition, etc.). This may explain why nine out of thirty-eight participants in the study expressed reluctance to become involved interracially.

Celebratory Discourses

As predicted, and consistent with prior research, some of the positive discourses about interracial couples that were noted by researchers such as Childs (2005) and Feagin and O'Brien (2003) were also found in the results of the current study. Such "celebratory" discourses intimate that there are advantages to being part of an interracial union. For example, interracial relationships might allow couple members to be seen as cool and trendy, or allow them access to a variety of cultural resources. The discovery of celebratory discourses in participant talk is important because it indicates the existence of alternative societal discourses that are available to resist and counter the dominant negative discourses about interracial couples. Although celebratory discourses were drawn upon more infrequently than cautionary discourses, they may serve to promote

interracial relationships, and provide some explanation for the increase in the number of interracial relationships in Canada in recent years (Statistics Canada, 2006).

However, a closer examination of the celebratory discourses indicates that they are not as positive as they initially seem. First, participants who promoted "coolness" or "exotic" factors in a relationship were not approving of all race/gender combinations. Some participants indicated that certain interracial relationships (those containing members who were Asian males or Black females) would be evaluated more negatively than unions with Black males or Asian/South females. The implication is that some interracial couples will face *more* social disapproval and potential hardships than other couples because members of society do not understand the attraction between them.

Second, becoming involved in an interracial relationship because it is fashionable to do so or because your romantic partner has an aura of coolness or exoticism seem like shallow reasons to enter into a relationship. Of course, one could argue that the participants are young University students who perhaps are unlikely to be thinking of long-term relationships, and that many people, regardless of race, enter into relationships for shallow reasons. However, since the participants who utilized this discourse did not talk about common interests or love between interracial partners, I contend that this discourse advances and reinforces the concept that interracial relationships are transient, based mainly on physical attraction, and are not relationships that people would be committed to for the long-term. This discourse has a connotation of "dabbling" or experimentation. Such a discourse seems to be a weak argument in favour of interracial unions, compared to the strong discourses that counsel against them.

Third, although the discourse suggesting that interracial couples have stronger relationships seems positive, it is based on the participants' fundamental assumption that the couple members *do* have obstacles and problems to overcome. This discourse is analogous to praising someone for having the H1N1 flu virus because then they will have antibodies to it! Participants also suggested that interracial couples have special attributes that allow them to succeed at their relationship. Again, this discourse seems positive, but sets a very high, perhaps unattainable, standard for people in different-race unions. I suggest that both of these discourses are weaker and less compelling than dominant negative discourses. Moreover, these discourses may, in fact, *discourage* interracial relationships – the "stronger relationships" discourse because of its underlying emphasis on the problems inherent to such unions and the "special qualities" discourse because of the emphasis on attributes that most people may not feel that they possess.

Finally, the multicultural discourse, as expected from prior literature, was commonly drawn upon. Although this discourse appears to promote interracial relationships (couples will not experience any problems in society because Canada is not a racist country), I view it as problematic because of its overly-idealistic nature[7]. There seems to be a denial, or at least, an ignorance of the very real problems that people of colour, and interracial couples, in particular, face. Instead, it appears to portray Canadian society as people *wish* it to be, not as it is, and because of that, I do not believe that it would be compelling enough to counter more concrete, negative discourses.

Conclusions

In the world, there are many things that have cautionary and celebratory discourses associated with them: buying a house, going to war, becoming a vegetarian, and so on. In

most of these situations, the discourses describe the costs and benefits, risks and rewards, associated with each binary decision (e.g. buying or not buying a house). Yet, regarding a phenomenon like the formation and maintenance of interracial relationships, the discourses are not so clear-cut. The cautionary discourses discourage, but don't forbid, different-race unions, while the celebratory discourses encourage them only weakly.

As Canada is a country that prides itself on multiculturalism and acceptance of various races and ethnicities, it would be logical to assume that celebratory discourses regarding interracial relationships would be common in participant talk. However, the results from the current study do not support such a claim. In fact, compared to cautionary discourses which were frequently drawn upon by the participants and provide strong, concrete arguments why people should not be in interracial relationships, celebratory discourses were less utilized and, in my opinion, less likely to rhetorically persuade members of society that interracial unions would be beneficial for them.

A plausible explanation for the inequity between positive and negative discourses in Canadian society is provided by two contemporary theories of racism, aversive racism" (Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2004) and "democratic racism" (Henry & Tator, 1994; 2006)[8]. Both theories argue that many White individuals in Western society hold ambivalent attitudes towards people of visible minority groups: On one hand, these individuals embrace abstract principles of equality and justice and believe themselves to be non-racist but, on the other hand, they hold negative feelings and beliefs about non-Whites. As a result, racism is often expressed in covert, indirect, and socially acceptable ways that maintain the person's non-prejudiced self-image.

Therefore, aversive racists may discriminate against non-Whites by actions that, on the surface, are not racially-based, but do, in fact, have underlying negative racial motivations. For example, they may choose to hire a White applicant with marginal credentials rather than a Black applicant with the same credentials because such a decision can be justified on non-racial grounds (that the Black person was rejected because they were unqualified, not because of their race). Democratic racists, on the other hand, tend to use justificatory arguments and obfuscation to mask racist beliefs. For example, denying that racism exists or assuming that non-White people ("Them") have different values, beliefs, and traits from "Us."

According to Hodson et al. (2004), aversive racism may characterize the racial attitudes of most American college students. Is it possible that participants in this study could be expressing racism in one or both of these subtle forms? It is a distinct possibility as many participants were accepting, in principle, of interracial relationships, but discursively qualified their support on non-racial grounds (e.g. the couples were too different or that their lives would be difficult). Extrapolating from this sample to society, for interracial couples, this would mean public approval for their relationships (recall that they are viewed as exemplars of the success of multiculturalism) but private disapproval. The concepts of aversive and democratic racism serve to explain why Canadian opinion polls indicate such high acceptance rates for interracial couples and yet, the census data indicate that such unions are statistically infrequent. Future research is required to further explore the connection between these subtle, insidious forms of racism and interracial relationships.

Limitations and Future Research

In the present study, participants were asked about interracial relationships in general. However, there are differences between dating relationships and relationships that require more commitment, such as marriage or common-law cohabitation. Participants, for example, may have had interracial *marital* relationships in mind when utilizing negative discourses, and different-race *dating* relationships in mind when discussing celebratory discourses (some of which, as I mentioned, seemed to imply more transient unions). Future research should ensure that participants distinguish between dating relationships and marital relationships, so that researchers can determine whether certain discourses are more commonly associated with a particular relationship status.

In addition, I did not ask participants to describe the race/gender composition of the hypothetical interracial couple(s) that they had in mind when they answered my questions. If, as I suspect, participants were considering Black/White couples, then it is perhaps not surprising that the results of the study replicate the discursive research from the United States (which have tended to focus on attitudes toward Black/White couples). However, my results have indicated that a couple consisting of, say, a Black male and a White female would be viewed more positively than a couple with a Black female and a White male. Therefore, future studies should make sure that participants clarify their answers by either describing the hypothetical couple, or by assigning them particular race/gender couple combinations to consider.

As well, all of the interviewees for this study were undergraduate students. It is possible that demographic factors, such as age, years of education and higher socio-economic status, might have played a role in which discourses were drawn upon. Thus, older, less educated, more socially-disadvantaged people might utilize fewer celebratory

and more cautionary discourses than the sample in this study. Further research with interviewees varying on demographic characteristics would be valuable.

Societal Implications

The ways is which discourses portray people mirror the ways in which people are treated in society. Given that the results of the present study seem to indicate that negative societal discourses about interracial couples are stronger and more compelling than positive discourses, the implication for racially heterogamous couples in Canadian society is that their relationships will continue to be viewed as problematic. Yet, the big picture is not completely bleak. The celebratory discourses are, for the most part, *reframing* the cautionary discourses. For example, "difference" is bad, but "diversity" is good. Similarly, interracial couples are expected to have major difficulties, and yet participants seemed to admire them for "going the distance" and expected their relationships to be enhanced as a result. This suggests that dominant discourses can be resisted, and that one way to make life better for Canadian interracial couples is to stress and encourage the reframing of negative discourses. Thus, seeds of an alternative, liberating discourse were found in participant talk, offering hope for interracial couples in the future.

CHAPTER THREE – "INSIDER" PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

The "typical" Canadian couple in a heterosexual romantic pairing is a same-race couple, thus, interracial couples who are visibly different violate the social norm of homogamy. Yet, researchers have very little knowledge how members of Canadian society react to such a contravention, nor do we know the effects of negative reactions on the individual members of an interracial couple, and the implications for their relationship. Therefore, in this study, I utilize the theoretical framework of social stigma to analyze the societal reactions reported by Canadian racially heterogamous couples, investigate how such reactions are cognitively and affectively experienced from the perspective of the targets, and examine the real and potential outcomes of the reactions on their romantic relationships. Results from the study showed that participants described various incidents, as a couple, where they had experienced negative reactions in public, suggesting that one or both of the couple members were being stigmatized. These reactions support the idea that members of Canadian society do view interracial couples as violating norms of homogamy, and send them signals (both direct and subtle) that their relationship is unsuitable. As well, the effects on the targets are obviously significant. The reactions from the participants (hurt, anger, lowered mood, not showing public affection, deliberately not noticing, etc.) indicate that societal reactions are not trivial and are taken seriously by the participants. In this paper, I have suggested that these societal reactions are a reflection of "modern" or "democratic" racism.

Violating the Norm of Racial Homogeneity: Societal Reactions to Canadian

Interracial Couples and their Effects on the Dyad

"Almighty God created the races 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."[9] (Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992, p.xii)

Census data (Statistics Canada, 2006) indicate that, even with an increasing number of interracial relationships, the "typical" Canadian couple in a heterosexual romantic pairing is still a same-race couple. Thus, by default, an interracial couple, particularly one where the members are phenotypically or visibly different, violates the social norm of homogamy. Although most people might assume that few, if any, consequences would result from such a contravention, researchers have very little knowledge about how members of Canadian society react to this type of situation. Furthermore, if the reactions are negative, social psychologists have almost no information about the effects on the individual members of an interracial couple, and the implications for their relationship.

In the current paper, my aim is to address the gaps in the extant literature and to extend the body of knowledge about interracial couples. To this end, I utilize the theoretical framework of social stigma to analyze the societal reactions reported by Canadian racially heterogamous couples, investigate how such reactions are cognitively and affectively experienced from the perspective of the targets, and examine the real and potential outcomes of the reactions on their romantic relationships. Given the centrality of loving relationships in the lives of human beings, and their association with peoples' physical, mental, and emotional well-being (Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Malach Pines,

2005), research that focuses on how interracial relationships in Canada may be negatively

impacted by society is both timely and valuable.

Interracial Relationships and other "Marginalized Relationships"

Social psychological research into intimate relationships suggests that romantic

partners tend to share demographic similarities in terms of age, religion, race, class, and

so on (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006). Researchers have also noted that societal norms tend

to encourage such matching between partners by rewarding couples who follow the norm

and, perhaps more importantly, punishing couples who deviate from the norm (Kalmijn,

1998; Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006; Malach Pines, 2005).

Consider, for example, the scorn and gossip that accrues to an older woman who

marries a much younger man (Kenrick & Trost, 2000). Lehmiller and Agnew (2006)

classify such relationships as "marginalized" – nontraditional romantic involvements that

elicit social disapproval for the partners due to their union. Harsher social punishments

for marginalized relationships have historically included shunning and lynching. There

can also be religious sanctions (e.g. excommunication) or legal punishments, such as

imprisonment or the death penalty (Duck & VanderVoort, 2002). Whether severe or

mild, these consequences send societal signals to the couple and to outside observers, of

the suitability or unsuitability of a romantic pairing (Duck & VanderVoort, 2002).

Societal notions about the appropriateness of various relationships, however, are

not written in stone and often vary by culture (Duck & VanderVoort, 2002). Polygamy,

for example, is acceptable in many countries, but is generally disapproved of in the

Western world. As well, relationships that were once reprehensible or even forbidden

can, over time, become more accepted by society. For instance, homosexuality was a

criminal offence in Victorian England[10], but now, many countries - including Canada - permit legal marriage for gay and lesbian couples.

Societal views on interracial relationships have also altered over time. In Nazi Germany, such unions were punishable by imprisonment or death (Goodwin & Cramer, 2002), but historically, even in the rest of Europe, taboos against interracial couples were very strong. Similarly, from the 1600's until recently in the United States, racially heterogamous relationships, especially between couples comprised of a White person and a Black person, were rejected by mainstream society. As illustrated by the quote at the beginning of this section, anti-miscegenation laws between Blacks and Whites existed in a majority of states until they were struck down in 1967 by the U.S. Supreme Court, which declared that Americans had a constitutional right to their choice of marriage partner (*Loving vs. Commonwealth of Virginia*, 1967).

However, attitudes are slower to change than laws (Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992). Although societal views in North America seem to have ameliorated over time so that interracial couples are no longer regarded in wholly negative ways (e.g. as deviant), they are not regarded in wholly positive ways either. As I will describe, people in interracial relationships face numerous challenges from society that are not encountered by their counterparts in racially homogamous unions (Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006). These forms of social opposition suggest that, whereas interracial relationships are no longer forbidden, they continue to be considered societally "inappropriate" (Gaines & Leaver, 2002) or as "marginalized relationships" (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006).

How, then, does society punish those who contravene the established norms of racial homogamy? Interracial couples, particularly partners of colour, commonly report

being the targets of disparaging comments when appearing together in public (Killian, 2001b). They often receive poor service or are mistreated by people in the service industries, such as restaurant staff, retail clerks, real-estate agents, and so on (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006; Lewis, 1994). In rare cases, they have even been attacked by people attempting to "rescue" one of the partners (Frankenberg, 1993). However, according to the prior literature, the most common form of societal resistance to interracial couples is staring (Hill & Thomas, 2000; Rosenblatt, Karis & Powell, 1995; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990). This reaction by strangers has been termed a "negative nonverbal discourse" (Hill & Thomas, 2000, p. 193) and is illustrated by the following quote:

> *"As soon as we stepped out the door I became acutely sensitive to the way people regarded us. It was difficult for me to regard our love as an aberration in social norms. Only when people stared did I remember how deeply race as an issue still permeated American society."* (Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992, p.47)

Social Stigma as a Theoretical Framework

To an outside observer, the most obvious difference between members of an interracial dyad is the variance in genetic features, such as skin colour, hair texture, or eye shape. These fixed features are often used as perceptual cues to determine the members' racial backgrounds (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995), and this, in turn, may be used to cognitively assess the partners' "belonging together." Thus, people with similar skin pigmentation are more likely to be perceived as belonging in a social relationship than people with dissimilar colouration (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995). In North American society, it is generally the non-White partner in an interracial union who is seen as "not belonging" with a White partner (Gaines & Ickes, 2000), as stigmatization tends to accompany those who are conspicuously different from others (Goffman, 1963).

Gaines and Leaver (2002) state that *social stigmatization* is a major reason for interracial dating and marital relationships being seen as "inappropriate" by outsiders. In the context of interracial relationships, social stigmatization refers to one or both partners (and sometimes their children) being marked as inferior, due to their membership in socially devalued groups (Gaines & Leaver, 2002). Goffman (1963) suggested that stigmatized individuals possessed attributes (such as physical deformities, disabilities, or the inherited "tribal" stigmas associated with race, nation, and religion) that, in the eyes of others, discredited and "tainted" them (p. 4). Katz (1981) further stated that the process of stigmatizing someone has two components: an observer must perceive that person to have a negative attribute, and then the observer will "disvalue" the target based on their possession of that attribute. Therefore, interracial couples are more likely to be the recipients of stigma and social disapproval due to the difference in physically observable features of the partners, compared to dyads where the differences are largely unobservable, such as inter-religious or homosexual couples (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006).

Although there is a fair amount of research on prejudice and social stigma (e.g. Allport, 1954/1979; Goffman, 1963; Jones, Farina, Hastorf, Markus, Miller, & Scott, 1984; Katz, 1981), for the purposes of examining the experiences of interracial couples, there are definite knowledge gaps. For example, some of the earlier literature tended to focus on the roots of prejudice and on the people with the power to stigmatize (e.g. Allport, 1954/1979; Katz, 1981). More recent research has examined experiences of discrimination from the perspective of the targets (e.g. Swim, Cohen, & Hyers, 1998) but has been based on individuals, not on partners in interracial relationships. Therefore, some psychologists have called for further research into the experiences of couples who

face stigmatization (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006; Duck & VanderVoort, 2002), as well as how they might cope with such predicaments (Gaines & Leaver, 2002; Troy et al., 2006).

It is important to pursue such investigations because research into the experiences of individuals who are targets of racial prejudice and discrimination suggest that there can be serious physical, emotional, and psychological consequences for them, but there is, as yet, very little knowledge about the effects on an interracial dyad. What are some of the effects of stigmatization on individuals that could also "spill over" and influence their partners and children? On a practical level, stigmatized individuals have been denied employment as well as housing in certain neighbourhoods (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). Physical effects, such as high stress levels and hypertension, have been linked to the commonplace, daily verbal or behavioural slights and indignities (termed "racial microaggressions") that are directed against stigmatized people, especially Blacks (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). On a psychological level, stigmatized individuals may experience anxiety, depression and loss of personal and group self-esteem (Crocker et al., 1998). They may also need to constantly be vigilant in public places (Crocker et al., 1998). Such research strongly indicates that stigmatization for one or both members of an interracial couple have major negative implications for their health, happiness, and well-being.

Furthermore, on a dyadic level, some studies have looked at the features of interracial relationships, such as commitment levels, satisfaction, conflict, and so on. (e.g. Lehmiller & Agnew; Troy et al., 2006). However, in general, they do not examine how experiences of stigmatization or discrimination influence such characteristics of the couple's relationship. Although beyond the scope of my research project, I believe that

such research would be beneficial in understanding why some interracial relationships thrive under adverse conditions like stigmatization, and other relationships fail.

Canadian and American contexts

It is important to note that, to this point in the article, I have been citing American authors. Although some social psychological research in the field of interracial relationships has been conducted in Canada (e.g. Lalonde, Giguère, Fontaine, & Smith, 2007; Tzeng, 2000; Uskul, Lalonde, & Cheng, 2007), most of the scholarly literature focusing on the societal and psychological implications of interracial relationships has originated in the United States (among others, Lewis, Yancey, & Bletzer, 1997; Kalmijn, 1993; Killian, 2001a, 2001b; St. Jean, 1998). In addition, past research has concentrated mainly on African-American/White couples (among others, Datzman & Brooks Gardner, 2000; Jacobson & Johnson, 2006; Murstein, Merighi, & Malloy, 2001).

However, it is my contention that, due to different contexts, findings from interracial relationship research conducted in the United States are not necessarily applicable or transferable to Canadian society. Although Canada does share many aspects of culture with its southern neighbour, Canada's demographic distribution and history of "race relations" are very different from that of the United States. For instance, Canada never officially maintained the institution of slavery. In addition, Canada has an official policy of multiculturalism, which assumes that all inhabitants of the country share some aspects of a common culture (such as economic and political life), and retain their own unique ethnic culture in social, linguistic and religious ways (Canada, 1971). Multiculturalism is supported by a clear majority of Canadians (Berry & Kalin, 1995).

Interracial Relationships in Canada

Because Canada and the United States do differ in important ways, can researchers in this country assume that race is *not* an issue that deeply permeates Canadian society? Is there reason to believe that Canadian interracial dyads might be subject to prejudice and discrimination due primarily to the members being visibly different?

At first glance, it might not seem that Canadian interracial couples are marginalized or viewed with disfavour in society. In fact, what Tzeng (2000) termed "push factors" seem to encourage and celebrate Canadian interracial relationships. Some of these factors include: census data indicating a steady increase over time in the number of common-law and marital interracial relationships (Statistics Canada, 2006); recent polls suggesting an overwhelming acceptance of interracial relationships in Canada – over 90% of the respondents approved of intermarriage between ethnic groups (Bibby, 2007); societal indicators, such as the lack of controversy about the racial composition of some well-known Canadian couples (for example, the current and previous Governor-Generals and their spouses), as well as the increasing number of interracial couples appearing in advertisements and television programs; and awareness through the mass media (such as *Maclean's* magazine), that interracial unions are being viewed positively as a barometer of racial and cultural integration (Bibby, 2007).

However, results from public opinion survey research provide less celebratory evidence. A recent poll (Leger, 2007) indicates that many Canadians still hold prejudices against people of different ethnic origins (almost half of the respondents stated that they were slightly to strongly racist), a factor that, indirectly, might prevent interracial couples from gaining full societal approval. Also, the pollsters found that almost 10% of the interviewees would react negatively if their child were to marry interracially, with

another 16% of the sample saying that their reaction would depend on the race of the prospective daughter- or son-in-law. In addition, the percentage of people actually involved in interracial unions remains fairly low, less than 4%, despite Canada's visible minority population being about 16% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2006). This suggests that tangible and intangible barriers to such unions may still exist.

Why is This Study Necessary?

Canadian interracial couples, like American interracial couples, violate the norm of homogamy. Our lack of knowledge about potential consequences of doing so, the disparity in survey results about Canadians' opinions about racially heterogeneous couples, as well as the surprising scarcity of Canadian research focused on interracial relationships presents an important opportunity for scholarly inquiry. Thus, I believe that my study will address knowledge gaps in the extant literature and shed some light on the confusing and contradictory evidence. One of my goals, therefore, is to examine the societal consequences of violating the norm of racial homogeneity by detailing and analyzing the reports of Canadian interracial couples describing reactions towards them in public. A second, equally important goal is provide insights about how societal reactions impact the interracial couples themselves. As social situations in public are often ambiguous and open to interpretation, an examination of the cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses of the couples to incidents of scrutiny, comments, or stigmatization will contribute to our understanding of their lived experiences.

Method

Participants

The participants who volunteered for this study were eleven heterosexual interracial couples from the University of Calgary and the community. One couple contacted the researcher after having read about her research in an article published in the campus magazine; the remaining couples were recruited through word of mouth ("snowball" sampling) or referral.

Couples were eligible to participate in the study if they were in long-term interracial romantic relationships (that is, they were married or had been cohabiting for at least one year). I made no stipulations about the racial composition of the couples. All eleven couples included one White partner and one partner from a visible minority group. In five of the couples, the female was White and her partner was non-White; six couples consisted of a White male and non-White female. Ten of the couples were married, with the length of marriage ranging from 1 to 35 years ($M = 9.86$, $SD = 11.29$). One couple was in a common-law relationship and had been romantically involved for 1.5 years. Eight of the married couples had children. A high proportion of the participants ($n = 15$) reported that they had been involved in prior interracial relationships.

Of the visible minority participants, two of the women had Asian heritage (Korean, Filipino) and one woman had a South Asian background. The remaining non-White participants referred to themselves as African-Canadian or Black. However, these terms included people from the Caribbean (three male participants), African countries (two males and two females) and the United States (one female). Two of the visible minority

participants were born in Canada. Nine non-White participants were immigrants, but all had resided in Canada for over 10 years.

Participants ranged in age from 23 to 63 years of age ($M = 38.45$, $SD = 11.21$). They tended to be well-educated, as a large majority of participants ($n = 20$) reported at least some post-secondary studies.

Procedure and Materials

In total, I conducted three interviews per couple, with participants being interviewed separately and conjointly. The individual interviews took place first, usually during the same session, with the conjoint interview being held at a later time. There were three major reasons for this dual-interview procedure. First, the individual interviews allowed me to solicit experiences, thoughts and feelings that the person might have been hesitant to share in their partner's presence (e.g. marital problems), and such information was kept confidential. Second, the dual-interview procedure was informed by prior literature that states that a dominant discourse in society is that non-White people see racism everywhere, thus, their narratives are often dismissed by White partners as "paranoid" (Killian, 2002). Interviewing couple members individually before the conjoint interview ensured that non-White partners were not silenced when they described incidents of racism. Finally, having separate interviews for the partners allowed a comparison of the same event (for example, how the couple met or a particular incident of racism) from different perspectives.

The interview sessions occurred at a mutually convenient location, often at the couples' home. During the initial meeting, each participant read and signed an informed consent form and then completed a demographic questionnaire.

After gaining informed consent, I conducted a semi-structured interview with the participant. A discussion guide (Appendix B) focused the conversation on topics such as how the couple met, reactions to their relationship from family, any concerns they had about their relationship, and so on. When the participant was nervous or hesitant to engage in a conversation, I had prepared more detailed probes to elicit answers (Appendix C). Participants were asked to describe the general attitude of Canadian society to interracial relationships, challenges that interracial couples face, and so on. At the completion of each individual interview, I provided a partial debriefing, the participant was thanked, and a time was scheduled for the upcoming conjoint interview.

At the conjoint interview, I obtained informed consent from both members of the couple and then provided participants with another discussion guide (Appendix D) which included topics such as the characteristics of their relationship and major milestones in their lives together.

Most of the individual interviews were approximately one hour to ninety minutes in length, while the conjoint interviews generally took about one hour each. All interviews were conducted in English, and were tape-recorded and then transcribed for analysis. Participants were given the option of choosing their own pseudonyms, therefore, the names used in this paper do not reflect race or ethnicity. For example, "Hashim" is a White male who just liked that name.

Analysis

Childs (2005) notes that interracial couples may differ in their interpretations of other peoples' responses to their relationships. For example, some couples might feel that society is accepting of them, while others may report significant levels of opposition,

while still others might be uncertain about opposition that is expressed very subtly. In the current study, I selected thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as an appropriate methodological framework to examine the fluid and contested nature of participant talk about societal reactions to their interracial unions, as well as their responses to such reactions.

To this end, I conducted what Braun and Clarke call a thematic analysis at the "latent level," as it not only looks at the semantic content of the data (i.e. what the participant said), but also permits an examination of the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations, and ideologies that may shape or inform the surface meaning of the data. Thus, with this inductive approach, the transcripts were read and re-read, then coded for diverse themes related to interracial relationships, such as public reactions, community reactions, emotional responses to potential racist situations, concerns about children, coping strategies, and so on. As the two major topics of interest involved experiences of social stigmatization and the couples' responses to these situations, special attention was paid to themes and discourses which might be associated to these topics.

Results

Reactions from Strangers

Given the emphasis in Canadian society on multiculturalism and tolerance, perhaps it is not surprising that the couples in this study self-reported that reactions from strangers were relatively benign. However, during three conjoint interviews, participants' qualified or added to their initial reports of benign reactions by describing more serious incidents. The interviewees said that they had forgotten such incidents, but that talking to me or their partner had jogged their memories.

Possible Overt Violence. Contrary to some of the data from the United States (Frankenberg, 1993), the couples in my study had not encountered any physical violence directed against them because of their interracial status. However, several individuals suggested that the *possibility* of violence existed and was dependent on their specific physical location. Interestingly, most of the places that were mentioned as potential arenas of aggression are located in the southern United States, for example, *"rural Alabama or Mississippi or someplace like that"* (Sunprop), or *"down in Memphis"* (Hashim), but very few of the participants had actually visited those locations.

Male interviewees, in particular, noted that while there were excellent opportunities for career advancement in the United States, they would think twice about moving there because of concerns for the safety of their families. Such threats were seen as coming from powerful White and Black groups that are ideologically opposed to interracial relationships. Hashim, a White male, for example, mentioned the danger from the Klu Klux Klan, while Didie, who is Black, said that he would not be accepted in any African American community because he is interracially married. Elizabeth, a White woman married to a Black man, stated that they would never move to the U.S. because *"in the South and in the eastern side of the States, it's all, there's a large majority of Black people, and they don't like White people"* whereas in places like Idaho, White supremacist groups like the Aryan Nation are tolerated. The implication is that wherever they went in the United States, either she or her husband would be stigmatized and their relationship devalued.

The participants in the study were very definite in stating that Canada was a better place for interracial relationships than other countries such as the United States, Germany

and Poland, where opposition to their unions is more openly expressed. However, even in Canada, the interviewees felt that acceptance of interracial relationships was more likely in large Canadian urban centres (such as Toronto or Vancouver) than in rural towns, where peoples' attitudes were considered to be more "redneck." For example, Sunprop, a Black participant, referred to Blacks being lynched in the southern United States, then immediately related it to non-progressive racial attitudes found in a local rural town. The association is not random. Sunprop stated that when he goes to the town, *"my awareness or my sensitivities are probably heightened a little bit."* As a Black man in an area that is not completely welcoming of non-White people, he is marked with the stigma of skin colour and there is some implicit danger to him when he goes there.

Racist actions. Several of the participants in this study noted that they, their partners, or their children had experienced racism *as individuals.* However, racist actions directed towards them *as a couple* were fairly rare[11]. Furthermore, such actions tended to be ambiguous, leaving couples to wonder whether the perpetrators were racist or there was some other explanation. For example, during their joint interview, Sunprop and his wife Esther were still unsure why they received poor service when they attempted to book their wedding reception at an exclusive golf club. When I asked whether the staff member had said something to them, Sunprop replied, *"No, not at all. Just the manner. Just the manner. You know, they were just very cold. And they scrutinized us, they were scrutinizing. Scrutinizing us up and down."* Esther thought that the reason was racism, but Sunprop was inclined to believe that it was due to snobbery. This situation illustrates two of the challenges faced by interracial couples – mistreatment by people in the service sector as well as the "negative discourse" of being scrutinized. However, it also

illustrates how partners may handle such challenges. Although Sunprop and Esther described the situation as *"awkward"* and *"uncomfortable,"* they discussed it together and said that, later on, they *"had a good chuckle about it."* Another way to handle this type of situation is to prepare for it. For example, Alan, who had experienced prejudice and discrimination due to stigma, warned Elizabeth before they were married of the negative reactions that she might encounter if they continued their relationship.

Comments. The participants in my study reported that, as members of an interracial dyad, they were seldom on the receiving end of derogatory or racist comments from strangers. However, as Ela, a White female, noted, we live in a country where people are *"very careful"* with what they say. According to the participants, comments made to them are more likely to be inappropriate, ignorant or rude, rather than racist. For example, Elizabeth, who has a baby daughter, was "complimented" by a woman who said that she *"breeds well,"* and reported that several women have told her, *"Oh, I've always wanted to have a Black baby."*

Elizabeth, as well as other White female participants, mentioned that they were frequently asked intrusive questions by strangers and acquaintances regarding phenotypical features of their partner or child. For example, regarding Elizabeth's daughter: *"Oh, she's so pale. Why is she so pale? Her father is so dark". I'm like, "Why is the skin colour the first thing that you mention? Why does it matter?"… "How dark is she going to get?" That's a very common question. "How dark is she going to get?" "Ahh, I don't know. I have no idea. Why does it matter?"* Questions of this sort not only indicate a vulgar curiosity, but also seem to denote an association between a non-White partner's or child's stigma (evidenced by skin colour, hair texture, and so on) and the

White partner. Such questions seem to be gender-linked, as none of the male participants reported being asked questions about the racial features of their partner or child. It is also interesting that despite her paleness, the child is automatically assumed to be a Black baby, an assumption that Elizabeth mentioned as being painful to her, as her genetic contribution is seen as inconsequential.

Assumptions. Several interviewees mentioned that strangers often made assumptions about them, based solely on visual observation. For example, Maria and Alice (both non-White) suggested that members of a visibly different couple are often assumed to *not* be together. This assumption is congruent with Rosenblatt et al. (1995) and Gaines and Ickes (2000) who concluded that society does not expect people who look "different" to be in a social relationship. Yet, the interracial couples in this study did not stress their differences, but their *similarities* in terms of education, backgrounds, family values, etc. Almost half of the sample mentioned that their religion was a unifying feature of their relationship, and for one couple, it was their mutual *lack* of religion that they saw as promoting closeness. However, as Alice described in the following quote, outsiders' assumptions exert subtle pressure on the couple's beliefs of affinity:

> *People see us from the outside, "Okay, she's Black, he's White" and they don't really see the connection. But at the same time, they don't really know us as individuals, to see why we kind of came together...I know that people perceive us as different, as a different relationship. Therefore, they make us feel like we are different, and that's what makes us feel like we are different. Because people perceive us as different.*

Canadian society also expects parents and children to look similar. Three of the non-White women (Maria, Alexandra, and Stephanie) stated that when they were in public with their lighter-skinned children, people assumed that they were not the mothers. Stephanie, for example, was hurt by the assumption that her son has a White mother: "*I*

had a girlfriend, who was Caucasian, and she's walking with him, and they thought it was hers… So, I was like, "Why can't I have this baby?" Like, it's, it's my son."

Furthermore, due to many Canadian families having paid care-givers ("nannies"), who are usually non-White, to look after their children, several interviewees mentioned that outside observers might assume that non-White women with lighter-skinned children in tow were, in fact, nannies. This situation is difficult for the women involved. For example, Maria said that she and her husband Dennis joked about it but, for her, it was "just half a joke." Oddly, the situation seems to be a source of amusement for their spouses. Alexandra's husband Peter said:

> *Because, I don't know, because our kids are just a little lighter, they take more after me, obviously. Sometimes, she gets the reaction, you can just tell, "Are you the nanny?" ((Laughs)) She got that a lot, especially when my daughter was younger. People think, perhaps that she could be the nanny. ((Laughs))"*

Staring and unwanted attention. Consistent with previous research (Hill & Thomas, 2000; Rosenblatt, et al., 1995), the interracial couples who were interviewed in this study reported staring as the most common reaction exhibited in public by strangers. Interestingly, though, participants interpreted and described the looks that they encountered in multiple, sometimes contradictory, ways: double-takes, curious, disapproving, uncomfortable, disturbing, interested, disgusted, subtle, friendly, hostile, not hostile, not bad, and so on. For example, Didie, a Black male, at first said that *"it's just a look, it's just a friendly look…it's curious"*. Later, he attributed different motives to observers. When out in public just with his wife, he suggested that people might be thinking that *"a Black guy got a girl,"* yet, when they go out with their sons, he attributed any stares to the beauty of the children.

Reactions of disapproval or disgust were most often shown by older people, who participants anticipated might hold attitudes against interracial relationships. For example, consider the following quote by Alexandra, a Black female:

> *One time Pete and I went running, and he, well, he's never really experienced any kind of racism or anything like that. But we went running and this older man was coming towards us. And I could sense it right away. And I don't look for it, because I just. I think if you look for it, you will find it, right? But he was coming towards us, and he had this look on his face of disgust, and he seriously stopped and stared us down as we ran past. And I didn't say a word to Pete, and he said, "What the hell is that guy's problem? I ought to go over there and knock him out." I said, "Don't worry about it. He's an old man."*

On the whole, the couples did not enjoy being the centre of attention. Alice and Curtis declared that they have no privacy in public as people are always watching and making assumptions (e.g. an argument is attributed to them being interracial, not that they are having a bad day). Maria was convinced that people were watching because they expected the failure of the relationship. One interesting finding was that five interracial couples got intensified attention *as* a couple, that is, people noticed them when they were together but they did not get much attention separately. As the following quote shows, the attention was especially unnerving for a White partner because they were not used to being under observation.

> *"So he really noticed when he started dating me that people were just. "People are really noticing me, they're noticing me!" And I'm like, "Well, they're noticing us, Curtis". But I think it's probably the first time in his life that he felt that people were just like, looking at him. And it was a bit of a shock to him."*

Responses to Reactions from Strangers

How did interracial couples in the current study respond to strangers' public reactions? Most of the responses can be broadly characterized as emotional, cognitive or behavioural responses (although these categories do have some overlap).

Behavioural responses. Perhaps because the reactions to the interracial couples were not overt or physical, there were few confrontational responses to societal reactions. For example, Dennis suggested that it was best *not* to confront "wackos", meaning members of White supremacy groups in Alberta. However, couples in public spaces often appeared to make conscious choices regarding their behaviour. As interracial unions are often assumed to be fraught with problems, partners made efforts not to have arguments in public, and to show that their relationships were normal and "just like anyone else's." There were different opinions about public displays of affection. Most couples held hands, but with the awareness that they would receive stares and other attention. Elizabeth, a White partner, suggested that she was *more* affectionate in public, as she wanted to show that she and her husband were together.

Emotional responses. Like Peter, who was furious at a racial slur, several participants, both male and female, expressed anger at "stupid" comments or racist remarks. Jacques (a Black male) stated that in certain situations, *"it's too much"* and, presumably, could lead to confrontation. Some participants also showed resignation or de-sensitization to the reactions. Typical phrases included: *"you get used to it"*, *"there's nothing you can do"*, and *"there will always be such people"*. One interviewee said, *"I think that even when we are 50, we're still going to have those people staring at us."*

Another emotional response was surprise about strangers' negative reactions, as well as feelings of hurt and injustice. For example, Elizabeth, a White female, said, *"And all that matters is that we love each other, and that we are not hurting anybody. This is not something that we are trying to do, to hurt anyone. It's because we love each other."* Similarly, Ela, another White female said, *"I think we are fairly decent people. We*

haven't hurt anybody. We are honest and, you know, so." Notice that both women state that their relationships are not harmful or threatening to others, yet they are potential targets for prejudice and discrimination.

Another emotional response was a lowering of mood when faced with unwanted attention in public. For example, Alice, who is Black, initially said in her individual interview that stares from strangers were not negative. However, at a later point, she said: *"But as soon as we hold hands, and I see that face staring at us, then I'm like, "What are they thinking about?" and it kind of ruins it a little bit."* Interestingly, her husband did not seem to know about Alice's feelings when she encountered such public scrutiny. In his individual interview, Curtis stated, *"Alice, in particular, finds it very funny usually, when someone has some off-reaction to us."* Alice, though, said that stares were "uncomfortable" and that she occasionally refrained from holding hands in public with Curtis in order to avoid negative attention.

Cognitive responses. Participants had various cognitive responses to reactions such as staring or negative comments. A very common cognitive response was to characterize the stranger having the reaction to the couple in derogatory terms. "Older people" were not expected to be accepting of interracial relationships (recall the quote by Alexandra where the man giving them a disgusted look was excused as "an old man.") Outsiders with negative reactions were also described as: *"ignorant"* (but not racist); lacking education; *"redneck"* from small-town Alberta, *"small-minded"*; and as a *"dinosaur"* that will soon die off. It was also interesting that the couples often characterized people reacting negatively in terms of mental incapacity. Dennis, for example, suggested that

such a person was morally and intellectually inferior. Other derogatory phrases included: *"dummy," "idiot," "retard,"* and *"uninformed fool."*

A common cognitive response was "not noticing" reactions. Peter, a White male, said, *"I have blinders on."* Other interviewees characterized themselves as being too naïve or thick-skinned to notice. Maria, a Filipino woman, suggested that she didn't notice stares because long association with White people had led her to sometimes forget that she is not White herself. For other participants, the choice of noticing versus not noticing reactions was more deliberate. Meena, who is South Asian, said that she chose not to notice because *"I'm too busy enjoying life."* Several White female participants noted that because stares from strangers were so uncomfortable, they did not want to see them. Consider the following quote by Ashley:

> *I think that I have learned, especially lately, I don't look at people any more. In the beginning, it really. I was looking, right? And now, I really, I kind of shut down. I don't, I don't like to notice.*

Participants also tended to attribute reactions from strangers to other causes. For example, stares were attributed to curiosity based on visible differences (*"we stand out"*). Such staring was seen as normal, and at least two people said that they would do the same thing (and one person suggested that I would do the same thing as well). One couple, Violet (Asian) and Tony (White) noted that because their appearance was similar, in terms of skin colour and hair colour, they did not *"stick out"* and so, fell *"under the radar"* of garnering a lot of negative reaction. Similarly, Alice suggested that the more the couple differs, the more intense the reaction will be:

> *"But the thing is, depending on how rare the relationship is, the more stares they're going to get. Like, us holding hands. For example, a homogamous couple holding hands over there, yeah, they're going to get looked at, and then that's it, right? And then us, we're getting a little bit more of a stare. And then if you have*

maybe a Chinese person and a Black person going out, they are going to get more, you know, bigger. Because it's more of a, "Oh, I've never seen a Black person and a Chinese person together". And, you know, when you have two, a homosexual couple holding hands and they'll really get stared at."

It was interesting to note that the "visible differences" mentioned by the participants are not necessarily in terms of race or skin colour. In some cases, participants provided alternate explanations for the looks that they received. For instance, Ashley suggested that she and her husband Jacques receive attention because of their height difference: *"Sometimes I wonder if it's because I'm too short and you are too tall. ((Laughs))."* Meena said that she and her partner, Hashim, tended to dress in an eccentric manner, so were the recipients of stares from strangers.

Female participants occasionally attributed stares to their own physical appearance, not to the fact that they were part of an interracial couple. Esther (a White female) said that she would ask her husband, *"Have I got my lipstick on crooked or something? Is my hair funny?"* Other female participants stated that they assumed that they received stares because *"I look good"*, *"I look bad"* or because they were overweight.

White participants, on occasion, re-framed the negative reactions that their partners received, minimizing the events or suggesting that they were normal reactions. Their partners or other non-White people were sometimes characterized as over-sensitive, overly negative or as over-reacting. This can lead to the non-White partners becoming defensive or being silenced as to their own feelings and experiences.

One example of such silencing occurred in a conjoint interview during which Alexandra, a Black woman, mentioned that lots of people had racist thoughts. Instead of supporting her position, her husband Peter criticized her (*"you can't think like that"*) and urged her to *"dwell on the positive... You got to dwell on, like, what a great place this is."*

Although Alexandra's initial assertion was that, based on her heritage and experiences, she was the "expert" on racism against Black people (*"I've been this way all my life. So I know people"*), Peter's continued urging to have positive thoughts silenced her on the topic of racism and consequently, she shifted the conversational focus to other sources of discrimination (being overweight or lacking education) where she was not an expert.

Discussion

In the introduction to this paper, I noted certain societal "push" factors that tended to promote and celebrate Canadian interracial relationships – for example, polls suggesting greater acceptance of such unions, non-controversial exposure in the mass media to couples who are racially heterogamous, and so on. Yet, mixed messages exist in society. Counterbalancing the "push" factors are various influential "pull" factors that discourage or negatively impact interracial couples - such as opposition to their unions from family, friends, and co-workers and disapproval from the dominant White society and ethnic communities (Killian, 2001a). In the current article, I utilized the theoretical framework of stigma to investigate the powerful "pull" factor of societal reactions to interracial couples. As well, I examined the effects of such reactions on the individual couple members and their joint relationship. It is my contention that even though societal reactions in Canada seem benign, they still have significant emotional, cognitive and behavioural effects that cause undue hardship for Canadian interracial couples.

Are Canadian Interracial Couples Stigmatized in Public?

Do Canadian interracial couples face stigma in public? Are their relationships viewed by society as "inappropriate" (Gaines & Leaver, 2002) or as "marginalized" (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006)? Extrapolating from data elicited from the people in my

study indicate affirmative answers to these questions. Participants did, in fact, describe incidents, as a couple, where they had experienced negative reactions in public. For example, recall that Sunprop and Esther mentioned being scrutinized and treated coldly by a person in the service industry. Alexandra described an incident where she and her husband received a "disgusted look" when they were out jogging together. As well, observers often assumed that couples were not together (unless they had displays of affection, in which case, they receive more unwanted attention). Congruent with prior research, couples in this study reported various forms of staring as the most common public reaction to them in public. These examples are evidence that members of Canadian society do view interracial couples as violating norms of homogamy, and send them signals (both direct and subtle) that their relationship is unsuitable.

It might be argued that these types of incidents are very minor, and that interracial couples can hardly be classified as stigmatized, nor their relationships described as marginalized or inappropriate, based upon such evidence. However, negative societal reactions are not rare. Curtis, for example, mentioned that he and his wife were stared at "all the time."

As well, the effects on the targets are obviously significant. The reactions from the participants (hurt, anger, lowered mood, not showing public affection, deliberately not noticing, etc.) indicate that societal reactions are not trivial and are taken seriously by the couples. As I noted earlier, over time, repeated incidents of stigma can have major negative implications for an individual's (or a couples') health, happiness, and well-being.

Negative Reactions as Examples of Modern or Democratic Racism.

Incidents such as those reported by the participants in my study are, in fact, consistent with "modern" forms of racism. None of the participants reported blatant forms of racism had occurred when they appeared in public as a couple. This is because shifts in societal norms over the last half-century have made direct expressions of racism, such as racial slurs, physical attacks, and so on (sometimes referred to as "old-fashioned" racism), less socially acceptable (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Beach, 2001).

Instead, according to contemporary theories of racism such as "modern racism" (McConahay, 1986), "aversive racism" (Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2004) or "democratic racism" (Henry & Tator, 1994), many White individuals in Western society hold ambivalent attitudes towards people of racialized minority groups: On one hand, these individuals embrace abstract principles (e.g. equality, justice, etc.) and believe themselves to be non-racist but, on the other hand, they hold negative feelings and beliefs about non-Whites. As a result, racism is often expressed in covert, indirect, and socially acceptable ways that maintain the person's non-prejudiced self-image – such as giving poor service to an interracial couple or through disgusted looks. Staring at racially heterogamous couples, for example, is not a neutral activity. Kalmijn (1993) has posited that such a reaction is a form of social control that punishes people from deviating for societal norms (in this case, from the norm of racial homogamy).

As modern racism tends to be expressed in subtle and ambiguous situations, this poses a dilemma for the targets. They are often unsure of whether racism has actually occurred, or whether the incident can be attributed to something else. (Recall, for example, that Sunprop and his wife disagreed on the reason for their poor treatment at the hands of the golf club employee – he thought it was snobbery, but she attributed it to

racism). Thus, individuals and couples may utilize a variety of strategies, often cognitive, in order to make sense of their experiences. In the current study, some of the strategies utilized by the participants included: denial that the incident was racism; excusing ("disgusted look" was justified because the observer was an old man); derogating the perpetrator (and thus, discounting their views); rationalizing the incident (curiosity is "normal"); attributing reactions, such as stares, to reasons other than the couple's interracial status (mode of dress, height differences, one's appearance, etc.).

Participants may have chosen to utilize such strategies as a way of downplaying the negative effects of the societal reaction, but they also provide a justification for not taking further actions. For example, by suggesting that it was snobbery and not racism that motivated a golf club employee to "coldly scrutinize" him and his wife, Sunprop justified not confronting the person for a possible racist action. Moreover, as societal norms tend to promote Canada as a tolerant and non-racist society, it is plausible that interviewees would utilize the socially available discourses associated with those norms, even when those discourses contradict their own negative experiences. However, the implication is that if racism is continually denied or explained away, it becomes invisible—both to the perpetrators and the targets, and racial inequality will continue to exist.

White Partners: Transference of Stigma and Effects on Interracial Relationships

Curtis and Peter, both White men, reported that they received stares and "disgusted looks" when in public with their non-White spouses, yet they did not draw attention when by themselves. Congruent with prior research (e.g. Killian, 2001), this finding suggests that stigma can be transferred from the stigmatized partner in an interracial relationship to the other partner. Thus, in this study, it was often the White partner who experienced

transference of stigma, and they expressed emotions, such as hurt, anger and shock, at being stigmatized. Although one might expect that the experience of being stigmatized would lead White partners to understand their partners' emotions associated with incidents of racism and discrimination, that was not always the case. For example, recall that Peter acknowledged, in principle, that his wife had encountered prejudice, yet his exhortation to his wife to only "dwell on the positive" devalued her lived experiences as a Black woman.

In fact, some of the White partners in the current study tended to be unaware of their partners' feelings when they encountered negative social reactions. Some people declared that they often "*didn't notice*" reactions, while others mentioned that they chose not to notice. For example, Alice, who is Black, said that she had a lowering of mood when she encountered stares, as she wondered what the observers were thinking. Yet, her spouse, Curtis, didn't seem to know about her angst, and in Alice's opinion, just "*brushed off*" reactions. Sometimes, White partners were even insensitive to what might actually hurt their loved ones. Both Peter and Dennis found it amusing that their non-White wives were mistaken for nannies, while it was obviously painful for the women.

These examples would suggest that even though an interracial couple may experience the same incident, their perspectives on the incident may be different. Killian (2001) notes that White partners generally have "rosier" worldviews (given their more privileged position in society) and are often able to ignore race. Consequently, non-White partners may be reluctant to articulate incidents as racism, for fear of being seen as "oversensitive" (or as Peter said, "dwelling"). Although this might result in tension in an interracial relationship, it is more likely that non-White partners will be silenced, their

experiences "trapped in the realm of the unspeakable" (hooks, 1995, p.12). The implication is that, for non-White partners, there could be a sense of double pain – pain from the negative incident, and then, due to lack of empathy from their partners, more pain from having to suppress their own responses. This may provide an explanation for the fact that interracial couples do tend to have a higher divorce rate than same-race couples (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002).

Conclusions

Interracial couples are involved in their romantic relationships for the same reasons offered by any other romantic couple – they may be physically attracted, they may share common interests, they may want to have children together, they may be in love. As one participant said about her partner, *"he's just the man I'm in love with."* Thus, in private, a couples' interracial status may be completely irrelevant. Yet, as soon as the couple steps out of the private realm and into the public realm, that status may become highly salient, especially if the dyad is visibly different in terms of skin colour.

The present study extended the prior research to examine the ways in which Canadian interracial couples are treated in public, and in so doing, I have revealed a surprisingly seamy side to current attitudes regarding such relationships. In public, even in a multicultural country like Canada, the participants in the study – for the most part, well-educated, professional people – reported being stigmatized by strangers and the members are vulnerable to comments, rudeness, assumptions, and staring, as well as the possibility of violence. These societal reactions were not one-time incidents that were committed by ignorant red-necks, but a consistently occurring pattern of racially-motivated events. Such treatment makes it clear that, potentially, for a different-race

couple, their violation of the societal norm of homogamy is not trivial, as it trumps the societal norm of tolerance of diversity. In this paper, I have suggested that these societal reactions are a reflection of "modern" or "democratic" racism.

I also examined the impact of the various incidents on individual members of a different-race dyad. One could argue that being stared at or receiving an ignorant comment are fairly mild reactions, especially compared to some of the more extreme reactions to interracial couples that were noted in the literature (e.g. Killian, 2001a; Frankenberg, 1993) or are reported by American media. However, since the participants in this study did express feelings of emotional upset, I would suggest that the effects on individuals could be significant, and, over time, become severe.

Finally, I briefly looked at effects on the interracial relationship itself. Participants in the study described situations where stigma was transferred from the stigmatized partner to the other partner (usually White). Yet, White partners tended to be less sensitive to negative societal reactions, and on occasion, showed less empathy to their partner's experiences of racism. This may lead to topics related to race to remain unspoken, a situation I suggested might have serious negative consequences on the relationship.

Limitations and Future Research

In the present study, one of the limitations was the racial composition of the participants, as most of the couples were comprised of Black/White individuals. As this racial combination is relatively rare in Canadian society (Statistics Canada, 2006), this may explain some of the public reactions, such as staring. Also, every couple in the sample included a White partner. I would be interested in examining the societal

reactions that are reported when the interracial couple in question consists of *two* potentially stigmatized individuals (e.g. an Asian-Canadian and an African-Canadian). Would the fact that a White partner is not involved in such a relationship attenuate the reactions? Future studies, therefore, should ensure a more balanced sample in terms of racial composition, and also, explore the lived worlds of interracial couples whose racial combination is seldom encountered in Canada.

In addition, this study was conducted in Calgary, where interracial couples are not as common as in larger, more ethnically diverse cities such as Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver (Milan & Hamm, 2004). Some of the couples noted that they garnered less negative attention in large cosmopolitan cities. I believe that replicating this study in other cities might tease out what factors are societal and what factors are related to location.

Another limitation of this study was the relatively small sample size that consisted largely of educated professional people. It is possible that such a sample (perhaps, for example, better dressed) might receive different societal reactions than people with lower socio-economic status. More participants of varying social class might provide more heterogeneity of results.

In this study, I examined the responses of Canadian interracial couples to negative public reactions. A future study would be beneficial to investigate more long-term effects on the couple's relationship. For example, how do the experiences of stigmatization affect a couple's commitment and relationship satisfaction levels?

CHAPTER FOUR

General Discussion

The present research examined romantic interracial relationships from the perspectives of both "insiders" (that is, people who are members of different-race unions) and "outsiders" (people who are not interracially involved). My goal in doing so was two-fold: first, to explore outsiders' beliefs (e.g. attitudes and perceptions) concerning interracial couples, as expressed in the discourses they drew upon in talk on the topic; and second, to investigate how such beliefs and behaviours (e.g. public reactions) of members of Canadian society impact interracial couples.

For racially heterogamous dyads, outsiders comprise the social environments – the churches they attend, their places of work, the malls where they shop, and so on – within which these couples must live. Thus, my research is important because, eliciting the perspectives of both perceiver and perceived, it documents the societal beliefs and behaviours that different-race couples encounter on a daily basis and highlights how those beliefs and behaviours affect them. In this way, researchers and laypeople alike will have more understanding of the challenges faced by interracial couples, as well as the encouragement they receive.

In the following sections, I expand on the importance and implications of some of my findings. The first topic examines how the societal discourse of difference impacts interracial couples. In the second section, I discuss how mass media influences discourses (such as the discourse of difference). The final topic investigates discursive strategies employed by White and non-White outsiders when talking about interracial relationships.

The Impact of the Discourse of Difference on Interracial Couples

My Study 1 analysis indicated that although "outsider" participants in this study occasionally drew upon "celebratory" discourses, they were more likely to utilize "cautionary" discourses that portray that interracial couples as very different from each other, likely to experience very difficult lives, and maybe even as somewhat deviant. As both celebratory and cautionary discourses are socially available, it naturally follows that interracial couples are also fully cognizant of the existence of these discourses in society. This proved to be the case as Study 2 "insider" participants did refer in their talk to various celebratory and cautionary discourses, noting, for example, that they were aware that interracial partners are often seen as "different" from each other by society. Thus, in this section, I'm going to specifically address the effect that the discourse of difference has on interracial couples.

Although participants in Study 1 suggested that interracial couple members were different from each other in terms of values, backgrounds, ways of thinking, and so on, I believe that the absent factor in this list is *skin colour*. Therefore, I contend that the emphasis by outsiders on visible differences (especially skin colour) is responsible for many of the societal reactions reported by the interracial couples in my study. This is important because as I described in Chapter 3, these reactions consequently impact the couples in emotional, physical, and cognitive ways.

There were several societal reactions from outsiders where the underlying focus was on the visible differences of the target. For example, couple members stated that in public, they were often assumed not to be together. For non-White women, there was also the painful possibility that they would be seen as nannies rather than as the mothers of lighter-skinned children. Congruent with Forgas' (1993) research, these cases provide

clear evidence that outsiders may not perceive the individuals as belonging to the same social units, a supposition made by outsiders as skin colour is the primary axis of differentiation for racially heterogeneous individuals (Frankenberg, 1993). More commonly, couples' visibly different appearances led to unwanted attention in public in terms of staring (itself a negative non-verbal discourse) and hostile looks.

Such attention obviously affected interracial couples. For example, Alice, who said that she was hesitant to hold hands with her husband in public because of the stares such an action elicited, also stated: *"I know that people perceive us as different, as a different relationship... that's what makes us feel like we are different."* Note that Alice's quote implies a private/public dichotomy that other couples described as well: in private, the differences (visible or otherwise) between interracial partners are not salient as the members focus on their similarities, such as shared interests, common values, or their love for each other. Yet, in public, they are instantly perceived by outsiders as separate, incompatible beings. The implication is that in a country where a colour-blind discourse of not "seeing race" or not "noticing colour" is popular and prevalent, the factors of race and colour are, in fact, very important and influential.

Media Influences on Socially Available Discourses

A societal discourse has been defined as "a repertoire of words, images, ideas, and practices through which meanings are circulated and power applied" (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 244). Participants in both studies referenced societal discourses in their talk and, yet, some of the "words, images, ideas, and practices" are obviously coming from sources other than their own experiences. For example, insider participants in Study 2 held definite stereotypes about the southern United States (e.g. Alabama, Mississippi) being

dangerous areas for interracial couples. They also expressed certain ideas about the treatment of interracial couples in the United States, suggesting that both Black and White groups would not be accepting of such unions (recall that a high proportion of my sample were Black/White couples). However, while participants talked about lynching, and White supremacist groups like the Klu Klux Klan or the Aryan Nation, they described relatively few negative experiences in the United States (and none that were confrontational). In fact, many of the interviewees had not even visited those places.

Moreover, I noted in Chapter 2 that most of the outsider participants in Study 1 had family or friends in interracial unions, but they rarely mentioned that these couples had encountered any problems from society or within their relationships. Yet, common ideas expressed by the interviewees were that interracial couples in Canada are stigmatized in society, will face many obstacles, and experience a multitude of problems in their relationships. Where did these ideas originate from?

One plausible explanation is that participants in both studies were drawing upon the socially available images, stereotypes, and ideas of interracial couples, specifically Black/White couples, portrayed in American media[12]. Indirect support for this theorizing is found in, for example, the fact that the outsider participants in Study 1 frequently used a Black/White couple as an exemplar of a "typical" interracial couple, and consequently, it is very likely that this racial combination was what participants had in mind when they talked about the various problems and hardships that beset different-race couples. More directly, several outsider participants also admitted that, as they had little first-hand experience with racially heterogeneous dyads, their views of them were garnered from music videos, movies, and television programs. Participants from both studies noted that

news reports from channels such as CNN and Fox News often reported discrimination against people of colour and interracial couples.

Both samples of participants are potentially bombarded with media messages from the United States. Yet, during their respective interviews, I believe that the participants in Study 1 and Study 2 had different reasons for accessing images, stereotypes, and so on from American media. Insider participants, for example, did not say that American interracial couples *were* different, but that they were *treated* differently from same-race couples (in terms of being targets of hate crimes). For the Study 2 interviewees, focusing on the negative treatment of interracial couples by racially-motivated hate groups in some parts of the United States could be a way of simultaneously derogating the United States, while promoting the concept of a tolerant multicultural Canada. It is, for example, unlikely that the majority of American interracial couples have ever had contact with White supremacist or radical Black groups. Yet demonizing the United States might justify the couples' choice to live in this country despite the better opportunities for career advancement in the U.S. (as several participants mentioned).

For outsider participants, especially the White interviewees, many of them have not thought deeply about interracial relationships as they have not been an integral part of their lives. Therefore, when I asked them questions about such unions, it might have been cognitively efficient to access knowledge based on the media they are familiar with.

The utilization of American media-based images and ideas by participants from both studies raises some concerns. They are basing their attitudes and perceptions on images or ideas that may be biased, out of date, incomplete or flawed. For Study 2 insider participants, this may result in an idealistic picture of Canada as free of racial problems,

and consequently, they may deny that incidents of racism have occurred to them (e.g. as was found in Malhi & Boon, 2009).

For outsider interviewees in Study 1, the media representation of interracial couples may reinforce the individuals' personal beliefs (which may have already been influenced by societal discourses, such as the discourses of difference, deviance, and difficulty). As a result, they might hold negative attitudes towards other interracial couples or it could make them unwilling to even consider the possibility of entering into romantic interracial relationships themselves. Both of these situations contribute to the persistence of the societal worldview that interracial relationships are problematic.

Ways of Talking About Interracial Relationships – White and Non-White Outsiders

Although White and non-White outsider participants in Study 1 referenced the same societal discourses, White participants utilized negative discourses more frequently (about 50% more often) than visible minority participants. For example, almost all of the interviewees who directly stated that people with different cultures would also have different values, morals, and ways of thinking were White. Similarly, White participants comprised a majority of the people who believed that interracial couples would experience more problems in their relationships than same-race couples. As well, three White interviewees were the only ones in the study who stated or implied that they did not find members of other races physically attractive. This data provides evidence for the prior research literature that posits that White members of society support interracial relationships in principle, but are unwilling to actually become interracially involved (Childs, 2005). In both the present study and in Childs' research, White participants

mentioned lack of attraction, and potential difficulty of the relationship as reasons for not dating or marrying interracially.

There may be several reasons why White participants were more negative about interracial relationships than non-White participants. First, as I discussed in the previous section, they may have accessed stereotypical images and concepts about interracial couples from media, and these images gave them distorted beliefs about such relationships. Second, while visible minority participants often had family members in successful interracial unions, the White participants usually had friends who were interracially involved. If these latter relationships were transient or conflictual, the White participants may have gained negative impressions of interracial relationships in general. As well, the White participants in my study may be unfamiliar with people of other races and have stereotypes about them as well as interracial couples. Although this latter explanation sounds unlikely, given that the participants are in a University setting, Childs (2005) has noted that White members of society are often able to exist in social worlds that minimize contacts with non-Whites (for example, all-White high schools, sports teams, and so on).

While people may be reluctant to enter into interracial relationships, societal multicultural ideals discourage overt disapproval of them on racial grounds, though as I showed in Study 1, they may be disapproved on non-racial grounds, such as incompatibility of values. Instead, both White and non-White participants in the current study, like those in extant discursive research (e.g. Childs, 2005; Feagin & O'Brien, 2003), tended to use discursive strategies, such as distancing or disclaimers, when expressing negative opinions about interracial relationships[13].

Distancing was a strategy employed by participants in Study1 that attributed opposition to interracial relationships to society or to other people, not themselves. Therefore, society was blamed for stigma towards interracial couples or strangers were accused of seeing different-race unions as "bizarre." Although it is possible that participants had good reasons for objecting to interracial relationships (perhaps because of the experiences of family and friends in such unions), only a small number provided any concrete examples. Childs (2005) suggests that the emphasis on anonymous opposition is a discursive move that allows participants to avoid talking about their own attitudes or taking responsibility for their personal opposition.

Interviewees also used disclaimers - "discursive buffers" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) that allowed people to express negative opinions about interracial relationships without being accused of racism. (Recall the common disclaimer in Child's study: I don't have a problem with interracial couples *but*," followed by reasons why such relationships don't work). In the following quote from Study 1, the participant provided "credentials" as evidence that he is not prejudiced then stated an opinion that a listener might construe as racist (that interracial couples have insurmountable differences):

> *"It's difficult for two cultures to mingle...I'm not trying to be prejudiced at all. I don't think I am. I went to a very multicultural school. I have many friends who are non-Caucasian. I spent a week long with Aboriginals last week, practicing their own beliefs, so I mean I'm pretty open. But I just think that ultimately the foundation of people is ingrained in them."*

Conclusion

I began this paper with a statement that laws against "race-mixing" were abolished in the United States fifty years ago. Yet, in October 2009, Judge Keith Bardwell, a Justice of the Peace in Louisiana refused to perform a marriage ceremony for an interracial

couple because in his opinion, such unions did not last and he was concerned for the potential children the couple might have (CNN, 2009). Judge Bardwell stated that he was not a racist and was just following his conscience. This news item is especially intriguing because it indicates that despite societal norms of tolerance in Canada and the United States, issues concerning interracial couples can still arise and be hotly debated.

In fact, such issues will become more and more relevant over time. As Canada's various ethnic visible minority populations increase in numbers and interact with the dominant White group and with each other, more opportunities for "social blending" are created. The present research represents an important first step in examining some of these issues within a Canadian context, and provides valuable insights into the social worlds of interracial couples and the challenges faced in their daily lives.

Thus, my "insiders" study documented a consistent and continual pattern of racially-based incidents that were perpetrated against the interracial participants, incidents that were ostensibly mild but still significant enough to cause the couple members some distress. Furthermore, the "outsiders" study found that, along with a few "celebratory" discourses, participants often drew upon negative "cautionary" discourses that were remarkably similar to those of the previously mentioned Judge Bardwell.

In his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, Dr. Martin Luthor King Jr. said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character." Although there are some encouraging signs of positive change in the form of potentially liberating discourses, in present-day Canada, in my opinion, Dr. King's dream has not yet been realized.

END NOTES

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[1] The 2006 Census data show that 3.3% of all Canadian couples were in marital or common-law unions involving a visible minority person and someone who was not from a visible minority group. As well, 0.6% of Canadian couples were in unions consisting of people from two different visible minority groups. (Statistics Canada, 2006)

[2] Recent television programs such as *Battlestar Galactica* (Eick, 2004) and *Heroes* (Hammer, 2006) have featured attractive interracial couples as normal romantic pairs, without fanfare. Often, such programs are in the science-fiction genre, which tends to "push the envelope" more than other genres.

[3] Interestingly, in the United States, media depictions as well as scholarly attention have tended to focus almost exclusively on these rare, socially disapproved Black/White unions.

[4] Thus, while the combination of an African-Canadian woman romantically involved with a Euro-Canadian man would be considered as an interracial couple, according to most participants, a man of Korean descent with a woman of Japanese heritage would not.

[5] Four White participants also said that it was unlikely that they would become interracially involved. Two people cited family disapproval. Two White women said that they did not find non-White men attractive.

[6] On a personal note, I found the remarkable degree of convergence between the prior literature and my own results to be rather disheartening. Frankenberg, for example, interviewed her participants in the 1980's, Feagin and O'Brien (2003) in the 1990's. Both of these studies interviewed White people in United States, and the conversations usually discussed White/Black relationships, which are considered by American society as the most taboo of all interracial romantic unions. Yet, many of the same negative discourses present in the aforementioned studies were being drawn upon by both White and non-White Canadian participants, even twenty years later.

[7] Interestingly, the multicultural discourse has been found to be utilized by visible minority people who feel aligned with Canadian society and espouse societal norms (such as multiculturalism) even when the discourse contradicts their own experiences of racism (Malhi & Boon, 2009).

[8] Other similar contemporary theories of racism include "modern racism" (McConahay, 1986), and "symbolic racism" (Kinder & Sears, 1981). However, these two theories focus more on how racism may be manifested through acts of political conservatism, which does not seem applicable to the current study.

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9 This quote originates from the judge's verdict in the 1959 court case of *Virginia v. Loving*, in which an interracial couple was convicted of miscegenation ("race-mixing") in the state of Virginia.

10 British writer Oscar Wilde was accused of homosexuality, convicted on a charge of gross indecency and died in poverty and disgrace

11 This does not include incidents of institutional racism. For example, almost 50% of the couples reported negative experiences with Canada Customs and Immigration officials.

12 Participants in Study 1 and Study 2 did not specifically talk about portrayals of interracial couples in Canadian media. However, as so many movies and television programs are imported from the United States, the influence of Canadian images and ideas about interracial couples is likely to rather slight (and probably even less pronounced for the younger Study 1 sample).

13 Another less common discursive strategy was to express opposition to interracial relationships using "hedging" language. For example, when I asked participants whether they would date or marry interracially, instead of outright refusals, two participants used phrases such as "I'm not ruling it out" and "It's not like I'm definitely 'no'."

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APPENDIX A

Study 1 (Outsiders) Interview Questions

- How would you define an "interracial" couple? Please give an example.

- What do you think the general attitude of society is towards interracial couples?

- Can you think of stereotypes of interracial couples that exist in society? Please elaborate.

- Interracial couples are fairly rare in Canada. Why do you think that is the case?

- What do you think attracts people to others who are of a different racial group?

- Do you think that an interracial relationship is "different" from other romantic relationships? Why or why not?

- What do you think are the unique strengths of interracial couples?

- What kinds of unique challenges or problems might interracial couples have?

- How do you think that interracial couples deal with negative reactions to their relationship?

- Do you have any family or friends who are involved in interracial relationships?

  - Please describe the couple (i.e. male is Caucasian, female is Oriental)

  - Have they faced unusual problems or negative reactions from other family members, friends or society in general?

  - After contact with this couple, would you consider dating or marrying interracially?

- How strongly do you identify with the ethnic group that you specified you belong to?

APPENDIX B

Study 2 – Insiders (Individual Interview) Discussion Guide

In this interview, I hope that we will explore your experiences, both positive and negative aspects, of being a partner in an interracial relationship. Some of the topics that we could discuss include:

❖ What first attracted you to your partner and how your relationship proceeded from the initial attraction

❖ Reactions to your relationship from other people (including friends, family, community and the broader Canadian society)

❖ If you have encountered negative reactions to your relationship, strategies that are helpful to you in dealing with them

❖ Ways in which you and your partner incorporate your respective family/cultural beliefs and traditions into your relationship

❖ Any concerns about being a partner in an interracial relationship

❖ Any concerns about the current or potential children of your relationship

APPENDIX C

Study 2 – Insiders (Individual Interview) - Detailed Probes

The following questions could be asked by the interviewer in order to initiate particular

topics of interest, or to keep the conversation going:

Attraction

- How long have you been romantically involved?

- How did you first meet?

- Were you hesitant to begin a relationship with your partner? If so, what were your

  reservations?

- How long was your courtship?

- Was your relationship known to your friends and family?

- What did you find most attractive about your partner when you first met? What do

  you find most attractive about them now?

Reactions - Family

- What did your family say or do when you told them that you were serious about your

  partner?

- What were the reactions of your partner's family?

- What is your relationship with your own and your partner's family now?

Reactions - Friends

- What were the reactions of your friends to your relationship? Partner's friends?

- Since you have been romantically involved, what circle of friends do you socialize with? (i.e. mainly your friends? Mainly your partner's friends? Friends that you have made after becoming a couple?)

Reactions - Community

- What was the reaction from the community?

Reactions - Society

- What attitude do you think society in general has towards interracial relationships?

- Have you ever encountered negative reactions in public to you and your partner? If so, what were the circumstances? How did you feel, and how do you think your partner felt? How did you respond in this instance?

- How do you (or would you) deal with negative reactions towards you as a couple?

- Do you and your partner discuss incidents of negative reactions against you individually or as a couple?

Special Concerns

- Are there ways in which your relationship is different from other romantic relationships?

- Have you encountered any particular struggles or challenges in your relationship?

- What do you feel are the strengths of your relationship?

- What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of interracial couples?

- What advice would you give to another interracial couple?

Children (if applicable)

- Have your children encountered any negative reactions to their ethnicity?

- Are the children comfortable with the beliefs and traditions of both you and your partner?

Ethnic Identity

- How strongly do you identify with the ethnic group that you specified you belong to?

APPENDIX D

Study 2 – Insiders (Conjoint Interview) Discussion Guide

In this interview, I hope that we will explore your experiences, both positive and negative aspects, of being partners in an interracial relationship. Some of the topics that we could discuss include:

❖ How you would define an "interracial" relationship

❖ Your ideas about possible stereotypes that exist in society about interracial unions, and what might motivate people to become involved in an interracial relationship

❖ Why do you think interracial relationships (especially marriages) are relatively rare in society?

❖ What you think are the characteristics or features of your relationship

❖ What you see as the major milestones of your relationship

❖ Experiences in how you have negotiated differences between your respective cultural beliefs and traditions

❖ Any concerns about being a partner in an interracial relationship

❖ If you have encountered negative reactions to your relationship, strategies that are helpful to you in dealing with them