



Families on the color-line: patrolling borders and crossing boundaries

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Abstract

Multiracial couples and families are becoming increasingly more common, yet opposition to these relationships still exists even if it is often hidden in color-blind language. In this lingering societal opposition to black-white unions, the strongest opposition often comes from the couples' families. The social institution of the family plays an integral role in reproducing the dominant ideologies of race that exist in society, and more specifically a racialized discourse that actively discourages interracial unions. Families reproduce racial boundaries, by patrolling who their members can and cannot become involved with. In our society where group membership is all-important and identity is based primarily on one's racial group, families object to individuals from different "racial" groups redefining themselves apart from their racial identities. Drawing from in-depth interviews with black-white couples, the responses of their white and black families will be explored to illustrate how families express opposition to black-white interracial relationships. In both white and black families, certain discourses are used when discussing black-white relationships that reproduce the image of these unions as different, deviant, even dangerous. Interracial relationships and marriage often bring forth certain racialized attitudes and beliefs about family and identity which otherwise are not expressed. © 2004 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Multiracial couples and families are becoming increasingly more common, yet in society there are complex, often conflicting messages about interracial couples especially in the media. For example, the September 2000 Newsweek devoted an entire issue to the "changing face of race" where "every day, in every corner of America, we are redrawing the color-lines and redefining what race really means." In particular, it was argued that American society is seen as undergoing tremendous racial transformation as a result of rising rates

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of immigration and intermarriage. Yet, even within the Newsweek article “[Love Without Borders \(2000\)](#)” which celebrates increasing societal acceptance of interracial relationships, the black–white divide remains. While championing the ways that intermarriage is changing America, an interethnic Asian couple are said to be “spared the obvious stares that white and black mixed couples sometimes face.” Herein lies the contradiction inherent in societal views on race, and even more specifically black–white relations. While arguing that the racial landscape is changing, there is no denial of the lingering opposition to black–white relationships. Is America moving to a color-blind society or are we still blinded by the black–white divide?

Despite media reports, this increased visibility of interracial couples does not necessarily signal greater acceptance of these couplings within the larger racial communities. Depending on the racial combination, the experiences and responses of families and communities are significantly different, particularly for black–white couples. According to the 2000 Census, interracial marriages account for 1.9 percent of all marriages. Yet the overwhelming majority of these marriages are white/Asian couplings (1.2 percent), while white/black couplings account for significantly less (0.06 percent). Therefore, in this research, I have chosen to focus specifically on heterosexual black African-American/white relationships, because there is a significant difference between these couplings and other “interracial” unions.

Opposition to interracial relationships between blacks and whites is still based on the belief that these unions violate the greatest taboo, the mixing of the races ([Dalmage, 2000](#); [Essed, 1991](#); [Feagin, 2000](#); [Frankenberg, 1993](#); [McNamara, Tempenist, & Walton, 1999](#); [Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995](#)). The “U.S. ideology of racial classification is grounded in a system of hierarchy and privilege maintenance originally designed to legitimate the subordination of African Americans” ([Johnson, Rush, & Feagin, 2000](#), p. 95). In the United States, the concept of race is not based simply on skin color or ancestry, but rather has social, political, and economic meanings and consequences, specific to the different racial groups. The strong emotions—such as fear and loathing—and negative visual images associated with blacks fuel anti-black attitudes and contribute to the emotional opposition of most whites towards black–white relationships ([Feagin, 2000](#), p. 209). Many studies have found that whites differentiate between an interracial relationship involving a black person, which is much less acceptable than with a Latino or Asian ([Davis, 1991](#); [Feagin, 2000](#); [Ferber, 1998](#); [Frankenberg, 1993](#); [Rosenblatt et al., 1995](#)). Similarly recent qualitative studies report that black–white couples and their children face negative responses from those close to them, have difficulty finding a place to live and encounter opposition at their workplace or other public places ([Dalmage, 2000](#); [McNamara et al., 1999](#); [Rosenblatt et al., 1995](#)). As [Rockquemore and Brunnsma](#) argue, “blacks and whites continue to be the two groups with the greatest social distance, the most spatial separation, and the strongest taboos against interracial marriage” ([Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2001](#), p. ix). Undoubtedly this contributes to blacks having the lowest rates of intermarriage among all racial groups, including Latinos and Asian-Americans. While these marriages and unions may be small in number, their significance is socially and politically great, serving as an indicator of the state of relations between blacks and whites in society. It also points to the fact that black–white intermarriages represent far greater racial transgressions than those between other ethnic and “racial” groups.

1. The role of family in societal opposition

Within this lingering societal opposition to black–white unions, the strongest opposition often comes from the couples' families. Since the meanings and attachments to racial categories are constructed and learned within the family, one's family is "the most critical site for the generation and reproduction of racial formations" (Hartigan, 1997, p. 184). This includes who is and is not an acceptable marriage partner. For example, white opposition to interracial relationships is often based on the social construction of racial differences as absolute and as families as monoracial (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 103). Yet many black families also oppose interracial unions, though the opposition has different roots. Within white and black families, certain discourses are used when discussing black–white relationships that reproduce the image of these unions as different, deviant, even dangerous. Interracial relationships and marriage often bring forth certain racialized attitudes and beliefs about family and identity which otherwise are not expressed.

Therefore, we can look at the role families play in constructing an oppositional discourse against black–white interracial relationships. The couples' experiences reveal how individuals and groups in society respond to interracial couples. Through these responses, we see how the interracial couples' relationships and everyday experiences are "racialized," meaning that the relationship takes on or is given a racial meaning within the context of American society (Omi & Winant, 1994). Also, the black–white couples' narratives illustrate how the responses of families and communities shape the couples' understanding and interpretations of their relationship and identities. Individuals have agency, constructing multiple identities and views, yet they also operate within a social structure and social groups such as the family which provide available "scripts" or discourses (Essed, 1991). In other words, couples make meaning out of their experiences in the available interpretive frameworks and often inescapable rules of race relations in this country (Josselson & Lieblich, 1995).

To explore what interracial relationships symbolize to white and black families, the experiences of interracial couples can be used as a rich source of information and provide insights into contemporary racial attitudes and practices of both white and black families that would be difficult to obtain otherwise. The ways that white and black families understand and respond to black–white interracial couples and the racialized discourses they use are inextricably tied to ideas of family, community and identity. White and black families' (and communities) interpretations and responses to interracial couples are part of these available discourses on race and race relations in our society. The ways that these couples provide the occasion for families to express and play out their ideas and prejudices about race and sex are integral to understanding the social construction of "interracial couples" within America today.

2. Theorizing black–white couples and their families

While there is no shortage of research on the issue of interracial marriage and relationships, the majority of these works can be grouped into a few categories. In particular, the research on interracial couples and families is often removed from the larger body of research on race, racial identities, racial formations and racism within which my work is

situated. Previous research has tended to examine interracial couples as a deviant marital form with a relative lack of attention to societal responses. Or, if societal responses are considered, a critical analysis of these responses is still lacking. In what follows, I will provide a brief review of previous literature on this topic, noting the lack of critical analysis of familial responses and highlighting how these works serve as a point of departure for this work. In particular the need to examine societal responses, such as within the family, and the racialized discourses families use is emphasized. I will then outline the theoretical framework and methodology used, followed by a presentation of the findings.

One of the major critiques of most existing research on interracial marriage is that it focuses exclusively on the interracial couple. For example studies have sought to identify the characteristics of individuals in interracial relationships (Gadberry & Dodder, 1993; Macpherson & Stewart, 1992; Monahan, 1970, 1971, 1973, 1976a, 1976b, 1977a, 1977b; Porterfield, 1982; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990), to account for the occurrence of interracial marriage (Blau, Terry, & Schwartz, 1982; Davidson, 1992; Davis, 1941; Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Kalmijin, 1993; Merton, 1941; Todd, 1992; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990), or to compare these unions to same-race unions. This is problematic on a number of levels. First this research relies on an assimilationist framework, using intermarriage as an indicator of assimilation of the minority group or a site of comparison with same-race couples. By doing this, these studies contribute to the idea of interracial couples as deviant, different from the “norm” of same-race couples. Second, much of the research is rooted in “essentialist” thinking about race, thereby reproducing uncritical conceptions of interracial couples. When researchers study interracial relationships without first acknowledging race and racial groups as socially constructed, they reproduce the idea of racial difference as a *real* and *natural* phenomenon: “discrete racial and ethnic groups are assumed to exist and engage in intermarriage” (Ferber, 1998, p. 159). Rather than challenging the racialized ways that groups in American society respond to these unions, they accept them as given that can be studied as an isolated phenomenon. To study the issue of interracial couples without examining the societal responses is problematic because it does not acknowledge how couples are constructed as “interracial” only within a social structure based on race.

Yet there is another body of more recent works on interracial relationships that does explore the experiences of interracial couples, and their interactions with families and communities. Still remarkably absent is a critical examination of how couples interpret and understand the responses of their families (Brown & Montague, 1992; Kaeser & Gillespie, 1997; Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992; McNamara et al., 1999; Root, 2001; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). For example, a noted researcher on multiracial issues Maria P. P. Root’s book *Love’s Revolution* looks specifically at the issue of interracial couples and familial responses, yet her emphasis is on understanding “how loving families could reject beloved daughters and sons” (2001, p. 17). Her main focus is on “what enables some families to expand their embrace to include a new member . . . (and) why do other families refuse to do this” (2001, p. 16). She specifically states that she “did not seek information on problems or issues commonly confronting these couples” (2001, p. 16). While addressing families and interracial couples, Root’s study is more concerned with what differentiates families who accept interracial relationships and those who do not, rather than tying in the familial responses to the larger societal responses and racial discourses that exist.

Unlike these works, my work explores the responses of black–white couples and families, emphasizing the role of race and perceived racial difference in the responses and discourses used by the white and black families. One of the few works on black–white couples that my research draws from for its critical analysis of the issue of interracial unions is Heather Dalmage's (2000) *Tripping on The Color-line*. Dalmage uses in-depth interviews with interracial families to explore "the ways in which multiracial family members' identities, politics, and communities both shape and are shaped by the color-line" (2000, p. 32). One of the main critical arguments Dalmage makes involves the language that we have to talk about race, a language which leaves little room for renaming our racial identities, and leaves many trapped in essentialist thinking about race, an issue expanded on in my work. Dalmage's work emphasizes the importance of how we talk and think about race and interracial relationships, as well as how black–white couples themselves discuss race and their experiences. Similarly an integral part of my research involves analyses of the discourses on race that couples and their families use.

3. Racialized discourses and color-blindness

A significant part of the theoretical framework which I draw upon to understand the couples' experiences and the responses of their families rely on contemporary research on racial discourses. While very few works on interracial marriage have used this approach, many recent works in the larger field of race relations have looked at the use of discursive strategies, such as "color-blindness" among whites (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2003; Feagin, 2000; Frankenberg, 1993). As critical race theorists argue, "our social world, with its rules, practices and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct it with words, stories and silence" (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). These words, stories and silence are not seen as simply individual talk, but rather "discourse is a prominent way in which ethnic prejudices and racism are reproduced in society" (van Dijk, Stella, Geneva, & Troutman, 1997, p. 144). Within my research, the everyday world of interracial couples is highlighted through the couples' narratives and familial responses, particularly emphasizing the ways couples are racialized through the responses of their families. Drawing on the symbolic interactionist tradition, interracial couples can be seen as constituted by the meaning it has for whom it is an object; the meaning is not intrinsic to interracial couples but arises from how the individual or group acts toward the interracial couple (Blumer, 1969). Therefore, the responses of couples' families and the discursive strategies used by both the couples and the families can be reviewed for the meanings attached to interracial relationships.

Thinking back to the media example cited at the beginning of the article, the significance of race in social interactions is often de-emphasized. Instead a "color-blind" discourse and ideology has generated widespread acceptance among American society. As Guinier & Torres (2002) argue, color-blindness is based on the belief that "[i]f we were to make people aware of racial differences, simply by noticing we would reintroduce the illusion of race and thus inevitably polarize and divide, or perhaps even worse, stigmatize" (2002: pp. 2–3). In her work on whiteness, Ruth Frankenberg identifies color-blindness as "color-power evasiveness," where race is viewed as increasingly less significant, emphasizing the importance of the individual. By ignoring racial difference, the assumption is that conflict

can be avoided (Guinier & Torres, 2002). Yet many argue that this color-blind ideology or color-power evasiveness is problematic because it ignores, even disguises, the power and privilege which characterizes race relations in this country (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2003; Frankenberg, 1993; Guinier & Torres, 2002). Guinier and Torres challenge this “so-called neutral stance” because it is impossible to be color-blind in a “color-conscious” society like ours (2002, p. 42).

Yet there is also an alternate discourse of emphasizing race which has been discussed by a number of scholars (Frankenberg, 1993; Moran, 2001). Frankenberg (1993) identifies this emphasis on multiculturalism—celebrating or at least recognizing the role that race plays in individuals’ lives as members of racial and ethnic groups—as a “race cognizant” discourse. This race cognizance or color-consciousness is based on the idea that “the color-line still exists and cannot be ignored” (Moran, 2001, p. 2). Furthermore, O’Brien (2000) found that individuals can be race cognizant in recognizing racism on an institutional level yet exhibit a color blindness when it comes to their own lives, which she defines as selective race cognizance (2000, p. 53).

These ambivalent and contradictory discourses on race tell us that race is at once all and nothing, where the message is that “things” (race relations) are getting better yet the boundaries between black and white somehow persist. Nowhere is this complex intersection of racialized views and discourses more prominent than with the issue of black–white unions. Black–white relationships and marriage have long been viewed as a sign of improving race relations and assimilation yet these unions have traditionally brought forth oppositional responses from white and black communities. Though there has been a small increase in black–white marriages, the opposition to these relationships has not necessarily disappeared. Yet like contemporary racism, the ways individuals in society respond to interracial couples may have changed, with opposition becoming more subtle and coded within a “color-blind discourse.” Therefore it is important to consider the various discourses of color-blindness, race cognizance and those in-between which are drawn upon by black and white families, and even by black–white couples themselves when discussing the meaning and acceptance of interracial relationships.

Among a number of recent studies that have looked at racialized discourses such as the color-blind ideology and how it is articulated among individuals in society, the issue of interracial marriage was raised. For example, using qualitative interviews with white college students on their views on general race relations, Bonilla-Silva and Saenz found that though most students claimed that they were “color-blind on love matters, their own answers and lifestyle suggest that their approval of interracial associations is (1) conditional and (2) has little implications for their own individual likelihood of establishing primary associations with blacks” (2000, p. 27). Other studies on the racial views of whites have found that whites often articulate a color-blind ideology, particularly when answering questions on interracial couples (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Eliasoph, 1999; Feagin, 2000; Wilson, 1997). Whether discussing interracial marriage or other racialized issues such as affirmative action, it is argued that collectively whites from all backgrounds participate in racialized discourse, yet code it in color-blind terms, especially on an ideological level (Bonilla-Silva & Saenz, 2000; Feagin, 2000; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Gallagher, 1995; Wellman, 1993).

Another way to understand the color-blind discourse is through the work of Bobo & Smith (1998), who explain how among whites there is a growing belief in and expressed

desire for racial equality in group access to certain social institutions yet not necessarily a desire for interaction with African-Americans on a personal level. Therefore, whites may advocate a color-blind ideology when discussing general race issues, yet still express opposition to interracial marriage. These studies on whiteness and racial discourses provide an important framework for this study of interracial unions because it is within the white (and African-American) families and communities that the images, ideas and beliefs about interracial sexuality and couplings are produced. Unlike the large body of research on white attitudes, racial discourses and views on interracial relationships, there is not a significant amount of qualitative research data on the perspectives of African-Americans on interracial dating and marriage. Yet there is a rich and varied body of work by African-Americans which address the issue of interracial relationships. These works reference the painful history of miscegenation, the rape of black women both during and after slavery, and the brutality inflicted upon black men by whites over the accusation of interracial sexuality (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981; Hooks, 2000; Smith, 1998; Williams, 1995; Wing & Merchán, 1995), which undoubtedly influences contemporary discourses on interracial relationships among black families.

All of these works are important for establishing a framework of the collective response of black and white families to interracial unions and providing an understanding of the discourses on interracial marriage within the white and black communities. Therefore, the discourses that the couples and their families use will be studied to reveal the meanings that are attached to black–white relationships. Drawing from the works on racialized discourses, a critical analysis of the couples' narratives will explore not only how the couples' families responded but the discourses used by the families and the couples. Within the couples' narratives these frameworks will be used to further our understanding of the couples' experiences, families' responses, and the couples' interpretations of those responses. In particular, the two discursive strategies of color-blindness and race cognizance will be used to analyze and understand the complexities and contradictions surrounding the issue of interracial couplings and the words and practices of their white and black families.

4. Methods

This research draws from qualitative in-depth interviews with 15 black–white heterosexual couples, conducted over a one-year period from September 1999 to September 2000. The couples ranged from 20 to 69 years of age, and are all in committed relationships (nine are married, six are cohabiting) from 2 to 25 years. The sample is highly educated with all of the respondents having finished high school, 21 respondents had attended some college and/or received a bachelor's degree, and 4 respondents had advanced degrees. There were 11 black man/white woman couplings and 4 white man/black woman couplings. The couples lived in the Northeast region of the country ranging from Maine to New Jersey, yet many of the couples had traveled extensively and lived in other areas of the country such as Ohio, Florida, California and the South.

To identify couples, non-probability purposeful snowball sampling was used, including references through interviewees, references through personal and professional contacts, and couples encountered randomly in public. A semi-structured interview schedule that

consisted of open-ended questions was used to invite the participants to tell their stories not simply answer questions. There was not a pre-set list of interview questions, yet certain strategic recurring themes were addressed with each couple. The couples were asked about their experiences as an interracial couple, including what their families taught them about race and race relations as well as how their families responded to their relationship. The interviews generally lasted from three to 4 h.

For analysis, the interview transcripts were reviewed and coded into categories of responses, and the respondents' names were changed to ensure anonymity. The couples' discussion of how their families perceive their relationship and how their family have treated them was emphasized. Also, how these couples identify and perceive themselves, and how these perceptions have their sources in the perspectives of the family and community was also documented. While participants construct and communicate meaning out of their experiences, it is also necessary for the researcher to offer critical analysis of the research. Researchers have discussed how it is important to recognize what may be "culturally problematic" about participant's stories, and what may produce narrative difficulties, complexities, or inconsistencies (Altheide, 2000; Chase, 1995, p. 14). Identifying these inconsistencies or complexities is important not just for validity but also to place the couples' experiences within the larger contextual framework of society. The process of analysis and interpretation can be difficult especially when interviewees discuss an event or conversation that is explicitly racial yet do not identify it in racial terms. A number of researchers have grappled with these types of contradictions by contrasting the participant's statement or interpretation against the actual words used or actions taken, to illustrate that what the respondent reports may not reflect or be consistent with what they do or experience (Bonilla-Silva & Saenz, 2000; Essed, 1991; Gallagher, 1995). Therefore, within the analysis of the interview data, the couples' statements and interpretations of their families' responses are compared to the actual practices, choices, and other statements of their families.

5. Findings

Among the couples interviewed, a variety of family responses were discussed and a number of common issues emerged. In particular, certain discourses around race, racial identity, and the meanings attached to interracial relationships within families are identified. Illustrating the complexities of interracial black–white relationships, some readily admitted that their family had problems with the relationship, while others responded that their families were supportive. Yet the couples who described their families as accepting often discussed experiences which seemed to contradict this view of the family as supportive. The couples often had similar experiences yet the difference was in the ways they interpreted the response: the dominant ideologies or discourses on race that exist undoubtedly play a role in both the couples' and their families' views. There are two primary discursive strategies used by the couples, where couples either tended to emphasize or de-emphasize the importance of race in their experiences with family. To understand these two strategies we can apply Frankenberg's (1993) color-power evasiveness and race cognizance repertoires. Those couples who de-emphasize race are employing a color-power evasive discourse, exemplified in couples' statements like "love is color blind," and "I am a human being,

I refuse to be defined by my race.” Other couples draw upon a race cognizant discourse, describing race (and being an “interracial” couple) as encompassing all aspects of their life and particularly the ways others responded to them. In what follows, the responses of the couples’ families, the couples’ interpretations of these responses, and the racialized discourses used are highlighted.

6. Color-blind or blinded by color?

A number of the black–white couples reported that their families are completely supportive of their relationship. Yet based on the ways they describe their families’ reactions it would seem this comes from a color-power evasiveness that minimalizes any lack of familial support or describe it in non-racial and less-offensive terms. For example, Sandra and David, a “30-something” upper middle class, college educated couple, state that their families had no issues with the relationship, especially David’s black family since his father was remarried to a white woman. Despite this statement of support, Sandra later describes how her white grandparents felt:

Sandra (David): My grandmother had certain views . . . mostly from TV that made her uncomfortable . . . so they didn’t come to the wedding and it wasn’t until the baby was born (after 10 years of marriage) that she sent us a check . . . now we exchange Christmas cards but haven’t visited . . . I don’t know if I say it is that she *opposes* but she is just from that older generation that doesn’t understand . . . but that’s not how my mother was raised.

Similarly, Jill, a white 28-year old office manager hesitates when asked how her family responded to her relationship with Lee, a black 33-year old retail salesperson, but ultimately states that they were supportive. Yet, in further discussions she acknowledges that there are some in her family who don’t approve and that with others she may not know their “honest feelings, but they don’t say anything negative.”

Jill (Lee): I mean, my grandmother doesn’t really approve . . . and I just think that’s what their beliefs are and I love them and they’re around, but they’re not really in my life all the time, so it’s kind of like life goes on . . . She’s nice to (Lee) and I don’t necessarily think like she sees him and goes ‘I want to break this relationship up.’ I don’t think it is that big of a problem. My grandmother and grandfather are getting older and I don’t know if they know what’s going on anyway.

Lisa, a white 33-year old elementary teacher also feels her family has been supportive yet describes her father in the following way.

Lisa (Victor): . . . my father who is an actor anyways, so it’s not like he’s . . . he hasn’t been around. There was one time, those once a year visits where he happened to see the picture (of Victor who she was dating at the time) and his whole head and neck everything turned red. He was furious . . . Well, they . . . he and his wife use the “n” word . . . so I ended up putting a photo of us in his invitation to the wedding and if I could have been a fly on the wall then . . . but he didn’t respond even though I did write that this was going

to be one of the happiest days of my life and I'd love him to come if he could overcome his views . . . but I never knew what the real reason was, I mean he had always been an alcoholic asshole, so I never knew what he thought . . . but *you know with my situation it really isn't a race issue*, because he isn't a father to me anyway, so it's not like I'm expecting anything different, you know if I married an Irish boy with red hair, he still wouldn't be calling me or in my life.

Lisa chooses to interpret her father's reactions as due to his character rather than his views on race. She clearly states that he uses racial slurs yet does not want to acknowledge that the reason he missed her wedding was racial.

Kayla, a white 28-year old bar manager, is also ambivalent when discussing how her family reacted to her current relationship with Hank, a black 30-year old clothing store owner (as well as to her first interracial relationship with Jay, her ex-husband and father of her two children):

Kayla (Hank): I felt weird even having to tell (parents) he was black because really what's the big deal, but at the same time I did because if I didn't they would have been a little surprised . . . my mom especially, and *again not prejudiced* at all but just being like you need to make sure this is what you want to do and I want you to be aware of other people . . . Then they started worrying because they thought I only was around blacks now . . . and then I had to tell them I was pregnant (and not married yet) and my father just bawled, and my mother, *again who's not prejudiced*, just didn't speak, actually for two weeks . . . but my mom cried the whole time we got married, and not tears of joy though they were there for me when I needed them . . . then after all (the second baby, problems, and divorce) she was kind of happy because I said I wouldn't be with a black man again, now *she's not prejudiced* at all but just seeing what I went through and she hadn't seen it with white guys . . .

Later Kayla and Hank discuss how her family feels about their relationship:

Kayla: He's definitely like part of the family, and my parents accept him with open arms, so it's nice to see the support that way, just because he's been wonderful to me people don't see color anymore, and I think maybe it wasn't because Jay was black but because our relationship ended so badly.

Hank: . . . her family is cool, I feel welcome in the house, I mean I can't really say they have ever been disrespectful . . .

In general, these individuals use a color-power evasive discourse to minimize the opposition of the family and de-emphasize the importance of race, focusing on other reasons to explain the familial attitudes and behaviors. Kayla's use of language reveals the way she tries to balance out the seemingly oppositional words and actions of her mother by stating three times that her mother is "not prejudiced." She has a close relationship with her mother and seems to want to protect her mother's image from others as well as herself. Furthermore acknowledging that her family harbors racist views would implicate herself since she was raised by them and maintains a very close relationship with them. Also, when she discusses her family's feelings about her current boyfriend, her views of how her family reacted to her

ex-husband shift. She attributes their negative reaction to the bad relationship, even though they objected to him long before the relationship went bad.

It seems it is difficult for some couples, especially the white partners, to accept or acknowledge familial opposition. For example the family of Jennifer, a white 22-year old college student, had difficulty dealing with her relationship with Lance, yet this is the way she describes it:

Jennifer (Lance): Well my father told me . . . they'd always raised us not to judge people on the color of their skin, and my dad always said he didn't care if someone was purple, yellow, black whatever as long as they were nice . . . but he has a hard time dealing with my relationship (with Lance). . . my mother raises concerns like she will say, 'I'm not being racist, I'm not saying there is anything wrong with interracial dating but I want you to take into consideration the stress and impact it's going to have on you. It's not going to be a normal relationship,' she was just trying to clue me in to the problems it might cause in the future as far as children, buying a home and things like that . . . but I think they like Lance.

Jennifer has a hard time deciding how to interpret her parents' response. She first mentions how they raised her to accept everyone, so she struggles to understand their reservations about the relationship because it seems like a contradiction. It is difficult for her to reconcile what they told her growing up with how they feel about her relationship. Also, white parents' views on race often seem to change when confronted with a child who has become involved interracial. Interesting to note is the way a person's color is described as insignificant by the parents ("purple, yellow, black whatever"), because as Williams (1998) argues, people make these types of statements because skin color and race do matter, often most to those who espouse this color-blind discourse. Yet the ways these white families express their opposition, coded within a color-power evasive discourse that denies that race is a factor, allow the couples to interpret the responses in different ways.

7. Family responses: from ambivalence to opposition

Throughout the research, many of the interracial couples had trouble discussing how their family felt about interracial relationships. For the couples, the difficulty discussing their family's views on their relationship was either because the response was ambivalent, contradicted the way that they were raised or was hard for them to accept.

Couples discussed how their families opposed to varying degrees. Often, the family would ultimately accept the relationship or individual but still have problems and issues with interracial dating and marriage in general. Within the white families, the white individual often recalled racist remarks or actions growing up as initial signs that their family may not be completely supportive.

Kevin (Sharon): My father was blatantly racist, Archie Bunker style, and well my mom was more just passive . . . but both died many years ago so it wasn't even an issue, but basically my whole family (referring to aunts and uncles, cousins) disowned me for in general hanging out with people of color, I was always ostracized growing up but it made

me accepting because I saw all the lies (about why non-whites were inferior), so I was constantly battling my family about racist remarks.

Sara (Andre): . . . I shouldn't laugh but . . . I'm more comfortable with it now . . . my father and especially the way he's . . . what he speaks and what he says about other people of all kinds of other people has always been derogatory. I grew up thinking Puerto Rican was a bad word just from the way he said it . . . My mom doesn't have too many opinions on it but she . . . yeah I've grown up hearing that (racial slurs).

Sara, a white 21-year old college senior, further elaborates how her family reacted to her relationship with Andre in particular.

Sara: I knew presenting myself and my relationship with Andre was going to be . . . I knew it was going to be a challenge with my family but . . . it's more subtle than overt . . . I didn't experience the overt, you know 'you can't date him' I didn't get any of that. It's more subtle. It's more like, 'well you don't understand' . . . I'm close to my mom . . . I wouldn't really say she's supportive but she's not antagonistic . . . my mom's big thing is that she's trying to understand and I get frustrated. I'm like what are you talking about? What are you trying to understand you know . . . my mother's thing is that if I'm happy than she'll be happy for me but she . . . I think, can't understand how I might be happy in this way and I think that's what it is . . . and my mother's big issue is if I got married and had kids . . . My parent's disapproval or whatever . . . the first question is, well what if you marry him . . .

Sara's partner Andre, a 21-year old college student, describes Sara's family as unacceptable and offers this perspective:

Andre: I don't know how I feel about it . . . I think it's very insulting. I mean, that's an insult to me . . . I'm not really going to be out there trying to bridge gaps . . . not going up to the family, her parents or father and be overly in your face. Try to get to know me and accept me. I don't . . . that's not really my style . . . it's not my responsibility. Like I don't . . . I'm not going to sell myself to you.

Sara shifts between color-power evasiveness and race cognizance, which O'Brien identified as "selective race cognizance," or in other words acknowledging the role of race on the macro-level, yet not on the micro-level. For example, Sara acknowledges her parents have racialized views in general, yet qualifies the problems they have with the relationship as based on a lack of understanding and a concern for what the relationship may bring. Though she doesn't agree with them, she also doesn't confront them on their views, and even expresses an understanding of their concerns. Andre employs a race cognizant discourse, reading the parents' reaction as explicitly racial and based on a belief in the inferiority of blacks.

Couples often discuss how the white family may not express outright opposition but in more subtle ways will question the relationship, express concern, or make derogatory comments. This subtle opposition often comes as a surprise as Victoria, a white 28-year old social worker discusses her family's views:

Victoria: Well . . . how do I describe my family . . . I don't know it's hard . . . My parents have always said they have no problem with Chris being black, but I guess . . . they say

offensive things, without even knowing it, like not about us but whatever, blacks on talk shows or just little sarcastic remarks . . . hmm I'm trying to think like, 'oh what did they serve chicken and watermelon' (referring to a summer vacation they spent with Chris' family) but then in fairness, they get angry when others in my family like my aunts and uncles or cousins are disrespectful or say things . . . which was a big problem for us, because many in my family didn't acknowledge our wedding or come to it, and we aren't invited to certain family functions . . . though it's not my parents, but they get it and then again they don't . . .

Chris: . . . (laughing) well her family is crazy . . . I have to say her parents have been really supportive of us, I mean helping us out in a lot of ways, but I think they, of course harbor certain, you know ideas, or prejudices, and so it's hard . . . but the rest of her family basically we don't see because she's always been like if they don't accept me then forget about it and think that's where her parents get a problem because it breaks up the family and they sometimes place the blame in the wrong place (on Chris and Victoria) . . .

Even family members who are basically supportive, like Victoria's parents, still make derogatory comments or do not fully support the couple when faced with opposition or exclusion from other family members. This points to the complexity of interracial unions and the responses of families. When families employ a color-power evasive discourse to discuss their views on the relationship and issues of race in general, it makes their response more difficult to interpret. Yet even family members who seem supportive can still reproduce societal opposition and the idea that interracial relationships are problematic by raising concerns about how the couple will be treated or what will happen as a result of the relationship.

8. "But what about the children?"

One recurring theme that emerged from the couples' narratives about their families' responses was the issue of the children. This "concern" for or "problem" of the children was described by the couples interviewed as characteristic of their families' responses, regardless of whether or not they had children. White partners like Danielle, Sara, Kayla and Jennifer all mentioned how their families expressed concern about the children, with Kayla's parents even going so far as to suggest abortion as the best solution rather than bring a biracial child into the world.

Kayla (Hank): . . . they told me they didn't think it was a good idea because all the things I would have to go through raising an interracial baby in Maine . . . that other people would be too cruel and that I had to think of the child and that it is not fair to bring a child into this world, interracial knowing what was going to happen. They told me if I had the baby I was selfish . . .

Danielle (Keith): . . . my parents . . . and they have been okay . . . but they did talk about worrying about the kids that was before we had (their daughter) and it was wanting to be sure I understood how "difficult" it would be to raise darker-skinned kids being white

and maybe some of it was they were worried what our children would be like, look like, or even how *they* would be with black grandkids . . .

Black partners like Aisha (Michael) and Keith (Danielle), also discuss how their families mentioned the children as an issue.

Aisha (Michael): My mom said, ‘What do you think kids will be like . . . it is wrong to bring kids into a situation like this, kids will be confused, I DON’T WANT POLKA DOT GRANDKIDS!’

Keith (Danielle): My family didn’t really have a problem with us together but their main concern was with how are you going to raise the children . . . mainly they asking are you gonna raise them black? Because I don’t think they could picture having some white grandbabies or just that they couldn’t relate to . . .

This common practice of naming the children as a reason to question interracial relationships reveals the complicated and layered meanings, as well the ways that opposition is coded. This argument takes the emphasis off the relationship and focuses on potential problems or harm to the children who may be produced. It can be understood as a color-power evasive discourse where a reason like the children is used to deflect attention from the real issues of race and perceived racial differences. Furthermore when the issue of children is raised, white family members tend to discuss the “problems” the children will face in *society*. Yet they exclude themselves from *this society of others* who will mistreat the children and reveal their inability or unwillingness to construe race relations as something they participate in or can change. This is an integral part of socialization which involves “generating norms—that is making things seem to appear natural and timeless so that people accept situations as well as particular ideologies without ever questioning their socially and politically constructed nature” (Rodriguez, 1998).

Biracial individuals (who are both black and white) are a threat to racial boundaries, as well as a social institution like the family because their very existence undermines the assertion that race is a mutually exclusive grouping. The opposition to biracial children has a historical basis which has been justified with various excuses such as biology, the absoluteness of racial differences and the existence of distinct and separate cultural communities (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 126). Whites have always maintained that children from interracial unions are to be considered black rather than white which comes from social and legal traditions that constructs the white race as a biologically pure group (Davis, 1991; Spickard, 1989). The “concern” for the children expressed by whites comes out of this racial ideology where the children produced through racial mixing are believed to be flawed (Davis, 1991; Spickard, 1989). Though it is no longer argued that biracial children are physically inferior, the image of these children as mentally inferior or “mixed up” still persists. This is seen in the familial responses as well as numerous academic studies on biracial children that focus on the problems they encounter, often identifying biracial individuals to study from psychiatric or counseling centers (Brown, 1995; Gibbs, 1987; Lyles, Yancey, Grace, & Carter, 1985). Historically black families and communities have welcomed individuals born from black–white unions as members of the black community (Collins, 2000). Yet the contemporary trend for these individuals to identify not as black but biracial is seen as a

way to be “less black” and an internalization of white racism, thereby weakening the black community (Dalmage, 2000; Reddy, 1994).

9. Black–white differences in familial opposition

Beyond the issue of the children, the black partners also discussed oppositional responses among families and communities, yet there were some key differences from white opposition. Within the responses of the black partners’ families, the idea that black–white relationships are particularly unacceptable for oneself and one’s family emerged.

A number of the black partners stated that their families had problems with why they chose to date or marry interracially. In particular, they cited the family’s concern with the motives of the white partner or the depth of the relationship. The belief that the white partner would at some point, especially during an argument, use racial slurs was mentioned, especially from the families of black women.

Aisha (Michael): My mom told me she thought Michael would call me a ‘black bitch’ or some other racist slur.

Sharon (Kevin): My grandmother was completely against it, she said it’s just like slavery, he must be using you . . . my parents didn’t really care, not like a big issue but I guess a little shocked.

Sharon, a 47-year-old office worker, also discussed how her brother and sisters would never be involved interracially and had mixed feelings about her marrying a white man.

Sharon (Kevin): My brother has white friends so he really didn’t say anything but my sisters, well, my older sister was shocked and my younger sister accepts the relationship but not interracial in general . . . She just doesn’t think white and black should be together, she always says (imitating her sister) ‘it is hard for me to relate to someone of a race that has killed, belittled and continues to come into the black community to break it up, I couldn’t do it.’

Kayla (Hank): Jay’s family was totally against us getting married, they didn’t fly in for the wedding . . . They just thought blacks should be with blacks and whites white . . . and when we did visit and our oldest daughter was one and a half they made comments about me the whole time, just I couldn’t cook, I spoiled my daughter.

Gwen, a “40-something” university professor discusses how her family responded (years earlier) when she brought Bill, a “50 something” high school teacher, to her family’s house for Christmas and told them they were getting married.

Gwen (Bill): I told my mother that he and I were getting married and my mother continued to talk as though I’d never said anything. That surprised me because my mother would always tell us that you don’t judge someone by what they look like, you judge by their character . . . it was something about marriage, it’s a totally different ball game. so not only did my mother have difficulty, I think she made it so that my family had difficulty with it, so the only people who would acknowledge his presence was my father and younger

brother (who was 11–12 at the time) . . . no one but me and my father would give him a Christmas present . . . and (Bill) would sit downstairs with my parents and watch TV with my brothers and they'd act like he wasn't there. They'd carry on a conversation and wouldn't include him . . . and there were all these little statements being made, not to us so much, as to each other and then my little brother would tell me everything so we found out what was being said from my little brother because he hated it.

Gwen describes her mother's response and contrasts it with the way she was raised citing the significance of marriage. Though her mother had raised her to accept all people—like some of the white parents—when it came to marrying interracially, her mother's acceptance changed.

Another aspect of the opposition within black families that the black partners discussed is the image of selling out. Interracial relationships are often seen as a sign that one is removed from the black community, and more importantly has a negative image of oneself as a black individual and the black community in general. To many within the black community, an interracial relationship signifies a lack of economic and moral commitment to the black community and even a rejection of their family.

Furthermore according to the interviews, black families often have a hard time accepting a family member getting involved with a white person because of lingering racism and a distrust in whites in general, especially since interracial sexuality has a painful history within the black community. A number of black partners, particularly the women like Gwen, Sharon and Aisha recount the importance of this painful history of race relations in their families' views of the relationship. Black families, and more specifically black women, often frame their view of intermarriage within this historical context of slavery, sexual abuse and exploitation (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981; Essed, 1991, p. 93). The idea of a black woman engaging in a relationship with a white man can open up these historical wounds (Collins, 2000), since black women were physically and sexually abused by white men. For example, many black writers discuss their personal family histories and the legacy of miscegenation: Patricia Williams (1995) recounts how her grandmother who was a slave bore children by her white slavemaster (who used her for sexual practice and eventually gave her to his future wife).

Black women particularly feel that when black men engage in interracial relations they are rejecting the black race (Collins, 2000). Various black women have written about these feelings, such as writer Gloria Wade-Gayles who describes how seeing a black man with a white woman makes black women feel "abandoned . . . A pain passed on from generation to generation because the circumstances that create the pain have remained unchanged" (1996, p. 110). The resentment and opposition toward interracial unions is expressed as an issue that effects black families, which is not just felt today but has been learned, especially among black women. Among the couples, the black male partners such as Mark, Lee and Chris discussed how their sisters or female relatives often felt offended by their dating white women and saw it as a rejection of them. Chris' statement exemplifies this:

Chris: My family likes Victoria as a person and they respect her . . . but I can't say that they don't wish she was black . . . or really that I married a black woman on a number of levels . . . my younger sisters especially feel hurt by my choice because they feel all too much they can't get a date because all the (black) guys are dating white, so I think it's

hard that I did . . . and then it's about thinking whites are just different-oh white people cookout, they don't barbeque, they're uptight, they can't get their groove on, and all that . . . so I think they feel sort of confused at why I married a white woman, like don't I like my own people . . .

Like Chris' sisters' views, it has been documented that black women often represent the strongest opposition within black families and communities to intermarriage (Collins, 2000; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; see Spickard, 1989; Staples & Johnson, 1993). Interracial marriage, along with incarceration, drug abuse and homicide, is viewed as the source of the shortage of marriable black men (Dickson, 1993). This makes intermarriage further resented because it is seen as responsible, at least partly, for the large number of single women in the black community.

Also, since black men were lynched, and killed because of the implications of an interracial encounter, many black families cite concern about the safety of black men involved in interracial relationships as the reason for their opposition. Brittney, a white 26-year-old waitress and Mark, a black 32-year-old construction worker, have a particularly complex story and their experiences are undoubtedly effected by these longstanding stereotypes and racial images, involving black men and white women. Yet neither Brittney or Mark acknowledge the role race plays in the actions of Brittney's white family as they recount recent events:

Brittney: As long as he treats me well. That's all they . . . they don't care if he's purple, green or blue, you know what I mean? As long as I mean . . . a white guy can be just as bad as a black guy can be just as bad . . . so as long as he was good to me and I was happy they don't care . . . they love him to death, you know nana and papa and yeah, they all say it doesn't matter . . . when they saw (our son) in the hospital for the first time everyone was like "I can't believe how beautiful he is" . . . and I guess they had been unsure because he was biracial how he would look . . .

Mark: . . . well, my outlook on her family . . . they're just down to earth people . . . nobody treats me differently than they would treat their own . . . It's just at that time there was a lot of things going on and nobody wanted to face up to it, so they had to put the blame on somebody and I was the most likely candidate . . . in a way I do think it was racial . . . but I don't know, if it wasn't race or anything it was because who am I . . .

Mark is referring to a very serious incident that occurred less than a year before the interview when Brittney gave birth to their son prematurely and the baby tested positive for cocaine. Mark and Brittney were together but were living 2 h away from each other because Mark had not yet been able to relocate with Brittney. Upon finding out that Brittney had been using drugs, her mother turned Mark into the police, claiming he was a drug dealer, and made unspecified "racial" remarks. Similarly Brittney's grandparents (her deceased father's parents) also expressed serious concern that because Mark was black that he was also involved in drugs, despite Brittney's denial.

Mark: (the mom) tried to use the drug situation against me to the point where she had the whole family about ready to . . . *let's go get a rope and a tree and let's get that joker*

... but they've all come around to the point where I'd do anything for those people ... and I'm pretty sure they would do the same for me.

What is striking about Mark and Brittney's assertion about her family being completely supportive was how the issue of race is never considered seriously as a factor in her family's reaction to the drug problem. The family came around only after the baby was taken from Brittney and Mark, Mark was subjected to three months of random drug testing which all came back negative, and he regained custody of the baby. Mark's reference to a lynching connects their relationship with the history of black men being lynched for sexual relations (alleged or actual) with white women: this imagery is in stark contrast to his assertion that they treat him like family. Since we do not have the perspective of Brittney's family, it is impossible to know her family's motivation. Yet it seems that the way the situation was racialized and Mark's character was challenged despite the absence of any evidence of drug use makes their claim that race did not play a role difficult to accept.

For Mark and Brittney, Mark's lower socio-economic status undoubtedly played a role in Brittney's familial response, and their perception of him as a drug dealer. Among the other black partners, there is some acknowledgment that their socio-economic status may influence the response of their partner's family. For example, Gwen discussed the role that her education and career played in the response of Bill's family.

Gwen: I would say that the relatives I've met [of Bill's] were very nice. So he had more trouble with my family than I did with his family, but also by the time we spent time with his family ... I had a Ph.D. and I was at [an Ivy League University] so my credentials sort of "wowed" them.

Gwen views Bill's family as accepting her because she was highly educated and had a prominent position, yet if she did not have these "credentials" the support may not have been there.

Based on these couples' experiences, if the black partner is highly educated or of a higher socio-economic status, the white family's level of acceptance may increase. Yet, among black families, the ways that socio-economic class status effects familial views may be more complex, based on the belief that successful black men tend to intermarry and remove themselves from the black community (Wade-Gayles, 1996). For example, Keith, a 26-year-old factory "supervisor" states that his "working-class" status, his refusal to "act like (he's) better because she's white" and their choice to live in a lower income predominantly black neighborhood make their relationship more acceptable to his family and community. This is also a reflection of the role of gender in the familial responses, and how black and white families may view the relationship differently based on gender. For black families, the idea that white men may mistreat black women, or have ulterior motives for engaging in the relationship is raised as a concern, whereas the concern when black men engage in relationships with white women is that white communities may mistreat the black man (not so much the white woman herself). Furthermore, black families may oppose a black male relative becoming involved interracially because it is viewed as weakening the black community. In white families there seems to be more concern when a white woman becomes involved interracially. This gendered concern draws from the longstanding tradition of protecting white womanhood and preserving whiteness by not allowing a white

woman *and* her white family to be tainted through interracial sex or marriage, which helps maintain the white patriarchal system.

10. Black, white, and shades of grey

Listening to the couples' narratives and the familial responses, the importance of family and their influence is clear. It is evident from the ways the couples' families respond to their relationships that an oppositional discourse against interracial relationships still exists. The social institution of the family plays an integral role in reproducing the dominant ideologies of race that exist in society, and more specifically a racialized discourse that actively discourages interracial unions. Since the family is the earliest and primary defining aspect of an individual's identity, an individual begins to learn the codes of their group and folkways of their community by definitions within the family. The family (and community) acts as a "gatekeeper," generating certain beliefs about race and reproducing an oppositional discourse against interracial marriage. Yet just as contemporary racism is often expressed in subtle ways (Feagin, 2000; Johnson et al., 2000), families may articulate a color-blind ideology while still engaging in practices or making statements which reflect their underlying opposition to interracial relationships. This opposition to interracial relationships, whether subtle or explicit, is based on the social construction of racial differences as absolute and as families as monoracial (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 103).

The couples' interpretations of their families' responses range from race cognizance to color/power evasiveness yet all the couples recounted experiences within their families that illustrate opposition even if the couples had trouble acknowledging the words or behaviors as racial. The couples themselves also draw from these discursive strategies to negotiate being in an interracial relationship. They either deny the role race plays and the ways they are perceived differently because of race or they emphasize the role of race in others' views which serves as a source of empowerment and bonding. Beyond the importance of discourse, gender and class also have an effect on familial responses. Gender plays an important role not only in the couples' experiences but also how the families respond. Also, the socio-economic class of the couples undoubtedly plays a role in the experiences of the couples and the responses of their families, yet there is also remarkable similarities across class lines among the couples interviewed.

According to the couples' experiences, many white families had difficulty accepting the black partner, though their "concern" was often described as non-racial. Family members objecting to an interracial relationship was not interpreted as racist or even racial; instead the racial aspect was often minimized or justified by explaining it as a preference, concern, or natural. These familial responses clearly demonstrate how images of oneself and one's family is linked to this concept of race and otherness, especially within the construction of families, both white and black (Feagin, 2000; Johnson et al., 2000, p. 99). White families often object to the relationship before they even meet the black individual. The oppositional response is not based on overwhelming "racial" differences, but rather their preconceived ideas and beliefs about interracial relationships and blacks, in general. For example, Kayla's parents objected to her relationship with Jay, her first husband before they even met him; many couples' families had a problem with the

relationship even though the black partner was highly educated, successful and a good mate.

While the couples discussed their families' responses in different ways—either emphasizing or de-emphasizing the importance of race—all couples seemed to have more difficulty discussing family members (as opposed to others in society) as racist or oppositional towards the relationship because of race. Many white partners had difficulty reconciling the views of their families as “good” and “loving” with their families' responses and reactions to the relationship. These views explain how some white partners described how their families raised them to be accepting of all people yet had difficulty accepting the black partner. It seems many whites will often advocate a color-blind ideology as a general principle but draw the line at intimate relations within their family. Regardless of personal attributes, a black individual was often not viewed as “qualified” to become part of a white family because of *perceived* irremediable, alienating differences (Frankenberg, 1993), despite the color-power evasive discourses these families espoused. By rejecting the idea of interracial marriage for oneself or one's family, racial boundaries are secured by reproducing the image of blacks as not the same as whites.

Like white opposition being centralized in the family, the black family also plays an important role in discouraging interracial marriages. According to the research, black families and black communities, in general, may feel that marrying a white person is rejecting the black race and buying into the dominant belief held by whites that blacks are inferior. Based on the couples' narratives, a number of black partners recount the importance of the painful history of race relations in their families' views of the relationship. Since interracial marriage is seen as contributing to the shortage of marriable black men (Dickson, 1993), these relationships are further resented because it is seen as responsible, at least partly, for the large number of single black women and the deterioration of the black community. This idea was addressed throughout the research, in particular in the narratives of black partners like Chris or Gwen.

Yet despite the existing opposition, most couples stated that black families are more accepting generally than whites (see also Dalmage, 2000; Frankenberg, 1993; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). According to the couples, blacks are still more likely to accept a white individual despite any negative views than whites are to accept a black individual. Since white family members' opposition is based in an opposition to blacks and a belief in racial differences, it is more difficult for whites to overcome these views. Whereas black families' opposition is primarily based in a belief that whites are racist and interracial relationships are not based in love, it may be easier to accept a white individual who does not fit their negative image. Black families who accept the white individual can be seen as realistically aware of white racism but able to accept their family member's judgement (Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

Therefore, through looking at both the experiences of interracial couples and their families' views, the ways that interracial relationships are constructed, and still serve as boundaries between blacks and whites is emphasized. Furthermore, it is evident how the family (and community) reproduces these racial boundaries, by patrolling who their members can and cannot become involved with. Despite the media and popular opinion polls that report an increasing acceptance of interracial marriage, an oppositional discourse still exists even if it is often hidden in color-blind language. While most of the couples' families taught them to accept others regardless of race, these same families were oppositional on some

level to their own child marrying outside their race. In our society where group membership is all-important and identity is based primarily on one's racial group, families object to individuals from different "racial" groups redefining themselves apart from their racial identities. In sum, interracial relationships evoke certain responses from white and black communities, both reflecting and reproducing the oppositional discourse that still exists against black–white unions.

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