

**MANAGING INTIMATE INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS.**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Title: MANAGING INTIMATE INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS:**

It is evident that there is fairly widespread disapproval of intimate interracial relationships. This thesis explores the experiences of those involved in such relationships, how they manage their relationships, and the kind of pressures they confront. It considered the ways in which the reactions and attitudes of significant others and strangers impact upon such relationships and, the adaptive processes people involved have developed. The thesis also explored a range of popular explanations of the motivation of those involved in intimate interracial relationships. Utilising qualitative research methodology the study used semi-structured interviews with 20 black men and 20 white women about their experiences and involvement in intimate interracial relationships. The main findings of the study were that:

- 1) People involved in interracial relationships develop, individually and jointly, a range of strategies that enables them to manage their relationship in the face of hostilities and disapproval from significant others and strangers.
- 2) The people involved (particularly the black partners) go through a personal crisis because their sense of identity and cultural affiliations are called into question by significant others and strangers.
- 3) People involved in the relationship look 'within' for support and reinforcement rather than seeking the approval and acceptance of their relationship from significant others and/or strangers.
- 4) There is often an attempt to control and manage information about the relationship; for example whom to inform and when to inform significant others.
- 5) People involved in the relationships develop friendships with people in similar type relationships.
- 6) Black women were deemed by people involved in the relationship to express the most vehement opposition towards interracial relationships

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## **Introduction**

### **Intimate Interracial Relationships: The Roots of Antipathy**

This study investigates the ways in which people involved in intimate interracial relationships experience and manage their relationship. The study analyses participants' experiences of being in the relationship; it explores the perceptions held about the nature of such relationships and considers the impact of significant others and strangers' reactions and attitudes upon the relationship. It also investigates respondents' reactions and responses to popular explanations of the motivations for entering such relationships. In this study 20 black men (5 Africans and 15 African-Caribbean) and 20 white women were interviewed.

The reason for excluding intimate interracial relationships involving other groups, white people and people from southern Asia or black women and white men, for example, is that according to the official census, interracial relationships consisting of black men and white women, constitute the highest proportion of interracial relationships in the UK. As a black African man married to a white English woman I was drawn to the study for personal reasons and because it is estimated that 50 per cent of black men involved in relationships are involved in interracial relationships as opposed to only 20 per cent of black women, (Coleman 1985, Modood et al 1997; Alibhai-Brown 2001). Moreover, my interest was also drawn to the fact that it is this type of relationship that appears to provoke the greatest disapprobation. (Ferguson 1982; Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Alibhai-Brown & Montague 1992; Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell 1995; Parker and Song 2001)

Before providing a brief overview of each chapter it is worth acknowledging that why people embark on interracial relationships has been the subject of fairly extensive popular and scholarly debate. There are assertions (popular explanations) that people embark upon such relationships for reasons that are different from those of people involved in mono-racial relationships. The nature of interracial relationships, the motivations that drive the relationship and the experiences of children born from such relationships are now an area

of interest not just for writers, opinion formers and social commentators but also, increasingly, academics. For example Parker and Song (2001), said:

‘The topic of mixed race can bring out the worst in people. From the vicious harassment of couples in mixed relationships to the hatred expressed on supremacist websites, few subjects have the same capacity as racial mixture to reveal deep-seated fears and resentments’. (Parker & Song 2001:1)

Taking account of the negative attitudes expressed about interracial relationships Katz (1996), in his discussion of the construction of the racial identity of children of mixed parentage asks:

‘Why do people from different racial groups form liaisons which produce children of mixed parentage, given the antagonism between races’ ... ‘What are the interpersonal dynamics in such liaisons?’ (Katz 1996:24)

Katz’s questioning exemplifies a common presumption that the motives of those entering interracial relationships, as opposed to those entering mono-racial relationships, require explanation. Katz’s questioning can be viewed as an acknowledgement that interracial relationships are subject to suspicion, antagonism and opposition from significant others and strangers.

### **A Counter-Rational Relationship**

The subtext of Katz’s (1996) questions is that interracial relationships are inherently counter-rational and illogical. The rationale of such questioning seems to be that since the people in the relationship are likely to experience hostility from significant others and strangers, why then would they want to embark on such a relationship and place themselves under such negative pressure? Katz’s questioning should not necessarily be viewed negatively; in fact, it could be seen as a positive development since it encourages a deeper examination of not just intimate interracial relationships per se, but the very nature of the wider, social relationship between black and white people. It is therefore evident that such relationships require explanation in part, at least, because of profound ambivalence on the part of the questioners towards the kind of social world the relationship appears to portend.

It is likely that for many people outside the relationship (that is both black and white people, be they passers by, significant others, social observers or commentators), the relationship may symbolise a threat to, or the erosion of their 'life world' because it challenges taken for granted assumptions about the types of relationships which are desirable for black and white people to engage in if an 'unstable' social mix is to be avoided and the 'racial balance' placed in jeopardy. In addition, the relationship can be perceived as a threat to a clearly demarcated binary world where the racial and cultural integrity of the respective groups can and should be preserved.

### **The Roots of Antipathy**

Habermas (1994), amongst others, has observed, that social science requires an historical perspective in order that the meaning of contemporary social phenomena might be fully understood. Clearly feelings and attitudes about interracial relationships cannot be understood outside the context of broader historical events, which have brought black and white people into close association, one with another, over the centuries and **chapter one** provides an historical overview of the black and white encounter. It chronicles and documents the history of black people in Britain as well as analyses the level and nature of the relationship between the two groups, from their initial contact to their current position. By taking an historical overview it locates the relationship within a broad historical context and explores the nature of the changes it impacts on interracial relationships. Looking at the attitudes towards interracial relationships and the people involved, it considers how changing social relations between black and white people in the United Kingdom also impacted upon intimate interracial relationships.

Habermas (1994) and Eagleton (1991) suggest that the oppression of any particular social or cultural group can only be comprehended in relation to the social totality. Thus, whilst, as already stated, the focus of attention in this study was the relationship between black men and white women, the study locates the relationship within the historical and social context that

gave rise to the initial social contact between black and white people and the subsequent developments of the relationship.

In other words it was only from documenting the initial social and residential propinquity and their shared (albeit sometimes privately recognised but often publicly unacknowledged) symbolic universe that intimate interracial relationships can be placed in its proper context.

### **Explaining Intimate Interracial Relationships**

The literature review, **chapter two**, considers both historical and contemporary sources on interracial relationships and the way the relationship has been investigated by academics and non-academics. By periodising available material the chapter discusses the shifting patterns of the encounter between black and white people and how changes in the socio-political and economic sphere impacted upon social relations, and subsequently upon intimate relationships. It highlights fictional (novels) and non-fictional, academic and journalistic, representation of interracial relationships. In addition to theatrical productions the chapter also discusses cinematic portrayals and other artistic representation of interracial relationships.

### **Popular Explanations**

There are, at least three types of popular explanations of the origins of intimate interracial relationships. These can be characterised as: (1) psychological and socio-structural accounts which suggest that the black partner, in particular, enters interracial relationships as a means of identifying with their oppressors and/or seeking acceptance and social inclusion, (2) rational choice/opportunistic accounts: these allude to the black partner's utilitarian and mercenary motivation for embarking on such a relationship. In this instance the black partners are often described as self-seeking opportunists who use the relationship as a vehicle for social and economic mobility and (3) colour and sexual curiosity explanations suggest that a particular form of sexual desire is the sole basis of the relationship, for the white partner in particular, although the black partner may also be deemed to be similarly sexually 'curious'. By analysing the content of the arguments it

has been possible to further sub-divide the three explanations to produce seven modes of explanations.

These seven modes of explanations (which were explored in the interviews and discussed in the findings, (see chapter six) are characterised as: i) racial denial or self-hatred; ii) The quest for cultural inclusion and social mobility; iii) the quest for economic mobility; iv) sexual and colour curiosity; v) revenge for racial and social oppression; vi) geographical propinquity and shortage of same race partner and vii) shared interest. These vernacular theories are advanced by significant others and strangers to explain the reasons why individuals from such different racial and cultural backgrounds would want to get involved in a relationship that is, in their view, inherently undesirable and **chapter three** provides a brief account of each of the explanations. The importance of these explanations for this thesis resides in the fact they provide the discourse of disapprobation encountered by people involved in interracial relationships. **Chapter four** discusses the rationale for the methodology and the research strategy utilised for the study and highlights the difficulties involved in recruiting black men. To understand the reactions of the black male respondents towards the study it is suggested that there is a connection between respondents' reluctance to participate and their previous experiences of the negative attitudes often expressed by 'others' towards interracial relationships.

The second half of the thesis concentrates on the findings and provides analyses of those findings. To simplify the process both the findings and the analyses are divided into two parts. For example **chapter five (findings part I)** reports the findings, thematically, and provides no analyses, discussions or explanation, rather the emphasis is on reporting back the responses of the respondents.

**Chapter six (findings part II)** focuses exclusively on reporting the popular explanation of motivations for entering interracial relationships formulated and detailed in chapter three. In the light of the responses reported in chapter five, part 1, the chapter explores the extent to which the popular explanation has resonance for the respondents and whether their explanations/motivation

for their involvement in an interracial relationship corresponded with the views that were commonly expressed. It is important to note that many of the explanations were directed, primarily, at the black partners rather than the white partners although some of the explanations are, clearly, of relevance to both partners.

The final three chapters offer an analysis of the findings reported and endeavour to locate these findings in the broader social, historical and racial-politics context. **Chapter seven (analysis part I)** offers an interpretation of how people involved in interracial relationships contrive to seek approval from significant others in the face of hostility towards their relationships. While they seek approval they attempt to manage information about their relationship in such a way that it is concealed from actual or potential hostile gaze.

**Chapter eight, (analysis part II)** analyses the ways respondents adapt and respond to hostility from significant others and strangers, and the strategies they have developed to help them manage the strains upon their relationship. The concluding **chapter (nine)** provides synopses of the major findings taking account of not only what was found but also the wider social implication.

## Chapter One

### Black People in Britain

As a starting point it is worth acknowledging that relationships between black and white people have a long and tortuous history. Importantly, it has not always been a relationship of the oppressed and the oppressor as is sometimes supposed. In their earliest contacts, in the early 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, there is considerable evidence of a relationship that was based on mutual respectful dealings and characterised by co-operation, and mutual regard and understanding (Fryer 1984; Mazrui 1986; Davidson 1984 and Oliver 1991). During the earliest phase of their encounter the overriding motivation for the relationship was trade and the quest to acquire inexpensive raw materials and develop new markets for products. Writing of the English presence in West Africa, Jordan (2000) wrote:

‘Usually English men came to Africa to trade goods with *the* natives.... Initially therefore, English contact with Africans did not take place primarily in a context which prejudged the Negro as a slave, at least not as a slave of Englishmen. Rather, Englishmen met Negroes merely as another sort of men’.  
(Jordan 2000:33)

Although commercial considerations were predominant, until at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it was evident that towards the close of that century the commercial relationship between black and white people began to change. This transformation involved a movement from what could be characterised as a non-exploitative pre-slavery era, to a period of slavery, imperialism and colonisation culminating in the current post-colonial era.

During the process of these transformations it was not only the trading relationship that changed, it was also the basic premise upon which black and white people had previously enjoyed social intercourse, which was transformed. This shift of perspective was to dominate the ways in which a majority white British people would view Africans and African Caribbean people up to the present day (Rex 1970; Davidson 1984)



## **The Black and White Encounter**

Fryer (1984) observed that; ‘There have been black people in Britain since Roman times when an African division of the Roman army was stationed near Carlisle, defending Hadrian’s Wall in the third century AD’ (Fryer 1984:1). Edwards (1992) points to the existence of an Afro-Romano-British community in York in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD, while Gundara and Duffield (1992), and Fryer (1984) have noted evidence of black Africans living in the Orkneys in Scotland during the same period and a landing of black people in Ireland in AD 62. Other archival materials (ancient chronicles and human remains found in old cemeteries) also point to the presence of black people in Scotland (Edinburgh) and the rest of the British Isles some 400 plus years after the Romans left Fryer (1984). These small groups of black people were the remnants of the conquering Roman army, and their presence created enough of a stir for them to be acknowledged in official Roman registers, *Notitia Dignitatum*, in ancient Irish annals and in the ‘Historical Augustae’ (Fryer 1984:3). The black people mentioned here were clearly small in number and they were located in different parts of the country, but as I go on to demonstrate, there was a steady growth in the number of black people settling in Britain as the exploration of Africa moved from the coasts and the outer regions into the interior. The penetration of the interior made it possible for the continent to be extensively explored and subsequently opened up.

Fryer (1984) informs us that, ‘the first known black person in London was the ‘black trumpeter’ a musician living in London in 1507. He was employed firstly at the court of Henry VII and later at the court of Henry VIII’ (Fryer 1984:4). How this trumpeter came to be in London is difficult to ascertain, but it is possible that since there was a black presence in Britain during the Roman occupation, and since Londinium (London) was an important stronghold, some black people would have settled there. Conversely the black trumpeter may have been a self-employed musician who came to England as a sailor and later took up employment as a trumpeter. It is widely believed that the same man was depicted in the ‘painted roll of the 1511 Westminster Tournament, which was held to

celebrate the birth of a son to Catherine of Aragon' (Fryer 1984:5). It may be that because of the 'exotic' value of his presence he would have provided an additional attraction in the royal household where, by all accounts, he was employed.

Shyllon (1974), notes that African slaves were first introduced into Britain during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and that John Hawkins and John Lok were credited with instigating the importation of the first batch of Black slaves onto British soil. In fact in 1555 it was reported that John Lok, an English merchant, brought a group of West Africans to London. They were believed to be five Ghanaians. The fact that Lok was one of the earliest importers of slaves would explain his introduction of the Ghanaians to England to teach them English and perhaps to act as his interpreters either in Ghana or in England. This suggests that they were being groomed as intermediaries in the administration of the slave trade and, perhaps, as teachers of English to the Ghanaian slaves. The extensive and pivotal role that black intermediaries and tribal chiefs played in the trading of slaves has only begun to be acknowledged by black and white historians Fryer (1984), Shyllon (1974) and Gundara and Duffield (1992).

The nature of the arrangement between Lok and the Ghanaians suggests that there were Africans who were not mere pawns in the slave trade but were active participants in helping white traders. It also supports the idea that prior to the change in relationship between the two continents, there was close collaboration between Africans and Europeans, particularly in the area of trade. Throughout this earlier period Africa was an important trading area for Europeans because it was rich in natural minerals and it also offered new markets for European goods and services. However, the evangelical zeal to 'civilise and humanise' Africans by converting them to the Christian religion and their subsequent enslavement soon followed.

## **Black Slaves in the Cities**

From 1570 onwards, black people were brought to England as a direct consequence of the slave trade and there is evidence that most of them lived in London working as household servants, courtesans and court entertainers. There is also evidence that there were a number of black people who were street sellers and were surviving outside the main structure of the slavery arrangement. Some were runaway slaves while others had bought their way out of slavery (Fryer 1984; Ethnic Minority Unit 1986). There are many references in odes, poems and travellers' tales, to plays performed by black people who were singers, musicians and 'merry makers'. Although there is little evidence, (from the way they were depicted), that these freed black people and the black slaves were sexually involved either with their masters or other members of the white population. However, evidence presented below suggests that black people were not just used as a source of cheap labour, but that amatory (sexual) relationships developed between the two groups, both forced and, in some cases, consensual.

In Kenilworth House (Hampstead, London) there is a painted panel of Queen Elizabeth I with a group of ten Black musicians and dancers. This depiction suggests the extent to which black people were an integral part of the upper class social milieu of 16th century Britain. Throughout the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there is evidence that in all the major cities and ports of Britain, London, Liverpool, Bristol, Birmingham, Hull and Cardiff there was a thriving market in black slaves (Fryer, 1984; Shyllon, 1974). The market system was so arranged that buyers would be very specific about the age, sex, strength and temperament of the 'commodity' they required. Slaves were advertised for sale in newspapers, posters and by word of mouth and auctions were held regularly throughout the major port areas to bring sellers and buyers together.

The owning of slaves was seen as a sign of wealth and because no wages were paid to them, and they had no rights, they did not pose the same kind of problem as poor white people whose conditions in some cases were not very different from that of the black slaves. However, unlike the poor white servants and maids, black people were considered sub-human by their

owners and masters, being thought to be one step above the animal kingdom and accordingly they were deemed destined to be slaves (File & Power 1981; Jahoda 1999). As Fryer (1984) observed:

‘To justify this trade, and the use of slaves to make sugar, the myths were woven into a more or less coherent racist ideology. Africans were said to be inherently inferior, mentally, morally, culturally and spiritually to Europeans. They were sub-humans, savages, not civilized human beings like us’. (Fryer 1984:7)

It was not uncommon for a family to have more than one slave within their household. As well as being used as domestic servants and as a show of wealth, black people were also depicted in paintings with their owners in poses, which reinforced their subjugated position and the expression of power and ownership by their White masters. As observed, Ethnic Minority Unit study (1986):

‘Rich people, to display their wealth and good taste, dressed their slaves in ostentatious livery or exotic dress. Many portraits of aristocrats show black boys and girls wearing jewels and dressed expensively who act as a foil or status symbol. In the portrait of the Duchess of Portsmouth, friend of Charles II, for example, a black girl is shown holding a branch of coral and her mistress’s jewel case. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Perth, James Drummond had his portrait painted with his black slave boy who wears a padlock around his neck. That Henrietta of Lorraine was a woman of some importance and wealth is evident from the richness of her slave’s attire. In these and many other portraits, the black slave is continually depicted in a deferential and awed attitude and her/his chattel-like status is obvious by the proprietary way the slave is usually grasped’. (Ethnic Minority Unit 1986:10)

David Dabydeen’s (1985) study makes references to the way black people were depicted in art in Britain during the 18th century, particularly by artists like William Hogarth (1738). In his study he suggests that their white owners used black people as little more than ornaments. Hogarth, in his paintings, depicted the lives of the upper classes and their relationships with the outside world. It is noted that Hogarth uses black people and lower working class whites as satirical devices to provide commentary on the sexual, cultural and economic life of the upper classes (Ethnic Minority Unit 1986). In these paintings there is evidence that black people were integral

members of the general population of 18th century Britain. Again, Hogarth's paintings are quite revealing about the level and positions of black people across the different classes, for example, in his painting 'Four times of Day-Noon' (1738) he showed a black man fondling the breast of a white woman, a woman who, from her appearance, is unmistakably lower working class.

Another work, 'the Rabbits' (1792) shows a black rabbit seller selling his wares to a white couple and, from their surroundings, the couple appear to be middle class. In a series of paintings (The Rakes Progress) William Hogarth depicted interracial relationships between white people from higher social classes and black people. As is now well chronicled the Rakes Progress is a story of Rakewell who, following his father's death, inherited money he had made in East and West India trade. The Rakes Progress is full of duplicity, irony, licentiousness, and subversion.

What is not clear from the paintings is whether the relationships depicted were based on artistic representation or factual observations. In other words it is difficult to ascertain whether the depictions showed relationships that were based on mutual consent, contractual agreements or an abuse of power. Hogarth is considered a satirical chronicler of life and events during his time and his paintings were a representation of a particular class of white people and their capacity for self-destruction and debauchery. His intention was to expose the contradictions and hypocrisies of the period. Although his more sardonic work lampooned the antics of the privileged members of the ruling class, he was aware of the plight of black people and how they were used and abused. His depictions of black people in his paintings are a testament to the extent of their involvement with white people and their presence in the social landscape.

The work of other writers and artists, John Collet (1760), James Gillray's (1786), throughout these periods further provided evidence of the extent of the social and sexual relationships between black and white people. For example a painting by John Collet (1760), 'May Morning' depicts a black man's involvement with the life of people in London. The scene suggests he

is an integrated member of the working class, living alongside white women. In James Gillray's (1786), 'A Sale of English Beauties', a shipload of English courtesans is being inspected before being auctioned. In the drawing it is evident that two women are being scrutinised on their physical assets, one above the waist the other below, while the bare breasted nakedness of a third woman is a source of excitement for a man next to her, however what is interesting and almost unnoticed amidst the sexual lustfulness is a black boy holding up an umbrella to shade the woman being inspected above the waist. This provides a further example of the presence of black people amongst white people under varying circumstances.

In essence what these portrayals and accounts suggest is that there is clear historical evidence that black and white people had an involvement with each other that extended beyond the confines of a master-slave relationship. It also demonstrates that at the individual and personal level, at least, black and white people were able to develop intimate relationships that transcended the prevailing social norms. (Fryer 1984; Henriques 1975; Dexter 1864)

### **Too Many Black People in the Country**

During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries there was no official record of the number of black slaves in the country. The reason for this was that there was no requirement to inform the authorities of the numbers of slaves who were shipped into the country or for households and slave owners to give the precise number of the black people they owned. However it is possible to extrapolate from documented accounts that their numbers were sufficient to cause concerns in many different quarters. For example in 1596, Queen Elizabeth I, in her letter to the Lord Mayors of England's major cities, wrote:

'.....there are of late diverse Blackmoors brought into this realm, of which kind of people there are already too many, considering howe god hath blessed this land with great increased of people of our own nation ..... those kinde of people should be sente forth of the land .....'( Fryer 1984:10)

There was little evidence to suggest that the subjects of Queen Elizabeth I responded to her call for the repatriation of the said 'Blackmores' from the

country or that the populace necessarily shared her concerns about the numbers of black people in the country. Indeed, one could deduce from the records that, the number of the slaves in the country must have actually increased further, since within five years of her letter to England's mayors she issued a proclamation calling again for repatriation. As with the first command of 1596 the second command issued in 1601 was also ignored.

It is likely that Queen Elizabeth I's commands were ignored because, as previously mentioned, slaves provided cheap labour for the running of households and they were cost effective for those who used them as unpaid labourers in their farms and businesses. The slave trade itself was a source of income and an investment for many members of the middle and upper classes. The slaves had no legal protection and black families were not able to take up, either individually or collectively, cases of abuse and injustice until after the Granville Sharp and Somerset case in the latter part of the 1700s. In addition, the slaves were thought to be less troublesome than indigenous white working class servants and labourers who demanded not just payment for their labour but also a degree of protection. The important contributions the slave trade made to the British economy was acknowledged by Malachy Postlethwayt (1745) who observed that:

'If we have no Negroes, we can have no sugars, tobaccos, rice, rum, etc..... consequently the public revenue, arising from the importation of plantation produce, must be annihilated. And will this not turn hundreds of thousands of British manufacturers a begging'. (Malachy Postlethwayt (1745) in Ethnic Minority Unit 1986:10)

The plight and condition of the slaves remained unchanged until the Somerset (1772) and the Sierra Leone expedition cases (1787) which proved a watershed. The judgements from both cases clarified the degree to which a slave owner could continue to exercise power and control over their slaves if the 'commodity' in their charge, as in the Somerset case, decided to run away.

In the Somerset case it was ruled, by Lord Mansfield, that slaves could not lawfully be shipped out of England against their will. The ruling followed

the case of a slave who ran away from his master and upon his recapture he asked not to be shipped out of England. The reason this was such an important ruling was that there were freed slaves in Britain, that is black people who had either purchased their freedom from their white masters or had been given their freedom by their owners, who were under constant fear of renewed slavery and deportation to plantations in the Americas and the West Indies. This ruling effectively removed such a threat.

The Sierra Leone expedition was principally a scheme devised by a Botanist called Henry Smeathman to get rid of hundreds of destitute black people in London by having them shipped to West Africa. Not only was Smeathman's scheme welcomed by many ordinary white people, his idea also had support from prominent and influential members of the government.

It is evident from documentary evidence that black people, white slave owners and abolitionists throughout the country followed both the Somerset and the Sierra Leone expedition cases very closely. Of course, following the rulings on both cases black people and white abolitionists all rejoiced at the outcome (Fryer 1984). The court's pronouncement reassured all those concerned that recaptured slaves could not be uprooted again to another country and perhaps be sold and or used as free labour in plantations in the Caribbean and Americas. The significance of the judgements is that they defined the relationship between black and white people, and set out the extent to which white slave owners could continue to exercise absolute power and control over black slaves who sought their freedom by running away.

It is important to note that, while the two cases cited above made a major contribution towards the emancipation of slaves, it was not only through the changes in law that freedom was won for black slaves. As Fryer (1984) observed:

'It was a period (18<sup>th</sup> Century) of transition. Black slaves in Britain were in the process of freeing themselves, largely by their own efforts but partly with the help of free blacks and sympathetic whites....The slaves resisted, as so many of their



predecessors... had resisted, by running away. Individual acts of resistance, multiplied many times over, became self-emancipation: a gradual, cumulative, and irreversible achievement which constituted the first victory of the abolitionist movement in Britain' (Fryer 1984:203).

A point reiterated by Lorimer (1984) who suggested that slavery came to an end not because of the Somerset case of 1772 or the 1833 Act of Parliament that abolished slavery in the colonies, but as a result of active resistance by black people who managed to organise themselves to fight against their subjugation. The point Lorimer was trying to make was clear, in that black people were not just passive subjects of white benevolence but that they themselves were active participants in fighting for their own freedom. However, it is more than likely that it was the combination of all these different factors that helped them to gain partial legal protection and a changed in the way they were treated by their masters.

At the beginning of the slave trade the scale of Britain's involvement was small. However, by 1772 Britain's wealth was, to a significant extent, determined by the slave trade. The works of Eltis (1987); Oliver (1991); Inikori (1981, 1992) and many others have helped to chart the centrality of the slave trade to the economic development of Britain and other European states in this period. It is evident that most of the major European powers benefited, directly or indirectly, from the wealth generated by the trade.

Shyllon (1977) highlighted how Britain became the chief source of the procurement, sale and distribution of slaves. He recalled that:

'The chief contract for trade in Africans was the celebrated 'Asiento' or agreement of the King of Spain to the importation of slaves into Spanish domains. The Pope's Bull of Demarcation 1493 debarred Spain from African possessions and compelled her to contract with other nations for slaves. This contract was in the hands of the Portuguese in 1600; in 1640 the Dutch received it, and in 1701 the French. The war of the Spanish succession brought this monopoly to England. This Asiento of 1713 was an agreement between England and Spain by which the latter granted to the former a monopoly of the Spanish colonial slave trade for thirty years, and England engaged to supply the colonies within that time at 144,000

slaves at the rate of 4,800 per year. The English counted this prize the greatest result of the treaty of Utrecht, 1713' (Shyllon 1977: 235).

So, in essence, Britain got the coveted privilege of the Asiento in 1713 and as Shyllon noted, 'The outcome was that England became the great slave trader of the world' (Shyllon 1974:235). This was an unprecedented achievement for such a small trading nation and the possession of the treaty ensured Britain's dominance of the slave trade.

### **Interracial Mixing**

As a result of the influx of greater numbers of black slaves into Britain there was inevitably a degree of interracial mixing at the social level, particularly between black people and poor working class white women (Ethnic Minority Unit 1986). Although there is evidence of the extent to which mixing took place at a social level, what is more difficult to ascertain is how and when social relationships developed into sexual ones. What was clearer was that during the slave period it was not uncommon for white male slave owners to use black women slaves for their sexual gratification. Indeed there was evidence of children being born from such sexual liaisons (Fryer 1984; Ethnic Minority Unit 1986).

There are no figures available of the number of children born from sexual relationship between black women slaves and their white masters, nor between poor black and white servants working in the same household. As George Best (1578) observed:

'I myselfe have seene an Ethiopian as Blacke as cole broughte into Englande, who taking a fair Englishe woman to wife, begatte a sonne in all respectes as Blacke as the father was....'  
(George Best (1578) quoted in Benson, 1981:62)

Other evidence also suggests that interracial relationships were not confined to any one social group, but in fact such relationships occurred across all social classes.

However, despite the occurrences of these relationships, the term relationship may have to be used with some caution. The term has a connotation of a mutual, consensual agreement between the people involved. In this case it was important to ask whether, or to what extent, people were willingly involved. Because of the nature of the master and slave relationship one would have to question whether total 'consent was freely given' and how much power and influence the subordinate partner had in choosing to become involved in the relationship. In other words, it is questionable if the slaves had the power to refuse, or were in a position to refuse the sexual advances and other demands of their white masters and mistresses.

However Henriques (1975) observed that perhaps the nature of the encounter should not be viewed in such restricted ways. What this suggests is that even with the imbalance of power and the lack of mutual consent in the development of such relationships, it is still possible to detect a complex sexual dynamism in play between those involved. According to Henriques (1975):

'Sexual intercourse between Negro slaves and White indentured servants can be explained in terms of their condition of life being very similar, but it does not explain the development of liaisons between master and slave. There are a number of problems to be considered here. Was it always a question of the slave-owner being able to exert...authority...What part did physical attraction play in such associations?' (Henriques 1975:49)

He continues:

'It would appear that authority, White prestige and attraction were all factors affecting Black-White liaisons.....The difficulty lies in attempting to assess the relative importance of these factors. Whatever analysis is made the fact remains that miscegenation between Black and White was widespread...' (Henriques 1975:49).

Henriques argued that it should not necessarily be assumed that sexual relationships between masters and slaves were devoid of mutual affection and sexual attraction, similar to that depicted by Philippa Gregory (1996) in

her novel, 'A Respectable Trade'. However it was likely that many of the amatory relationships remained fleeting, coercive and exploitative, amounting to rape, which was rife during the period of slavery.

As I have tried to suggest, there have been sexual relationships between black and white people from the onset of their encounter. Although the degree and depth of the 'mixing' can only be inferred, the sexual encounters involved both white men and white women. The known cases of interracial relationships tended to be relationships involving people at the middle and top end of the social hierarchy. For example, the champion of slaves, Lord Mansfield, supported his great niece, a mixed race woman, Dido Elizabeth Lindsay, the daughter of Sir John Lindsay. Dido's mother was an African slave. Although she was well received, well treated and provided for by the family, she was nevertheless a by-product of a sexual relationship between a black slave and her white master. What is difficult to ascertain, is whether her mother had any choice in the sexual encounter.

It was not only the male master - female slaves relationship from which mixed race children were born, freed slaves also formed intimate relationships with whites. As Tizard & Phoenix (1993) noted:

'Of the handful of freed slaves...who became famous in the eighteenth century as writers and leaders of the Black community, almost all married White women' (Tizard & Phoenix 1993:7).

Tizard & Phoenix (1993) observe that there has never been any legal restriction on interracial (sexual relationship) in Britain. Even during the period when slavery was at its height there were no legal obstacles to black and white people forming intimate relationships with each other, as indeed many did. However: 'the distaste for racial mixing was reflected in the names given by white people to children of interracial parentage. These names, mulattos, half-castes are based not only on the notion of a degenerate relationship, but they also had the offensive connotation of 'animal breeding' (Tizard & Phoenix 1993:2).

Tizard & Phoenix (1993) also noted that despite the social stigma attached to such relationships: 'In 1578, soon after the first Africans reached Britain, the first mixed marriages took place'. (Tizard & Phoenix 1993:6)

Tizard & Phoenix (1993) continue:

'...for the next 200 years, Black slaves were brought to England in increasing numbers.....Since the great majority of the slaves brought here were men (a reflection of the demand for Black footmen and male servants), sexual relationships and marriages with White women must have been frequent' (Tizard & Phoenix 1993:7).

That there was 'mixing and sexual relationships' between black and white people can also be gauged by the anger expressed against the relationship and the attempts that were made by some white people to discourage such relationships. The views and attitudes were vehement and unrelenting. In 1772 Edward Long was 'flabbergasted' by what he saw on his return to England from the West Indies. He observed:

'a venomous and dangerous ulcer that threatens to disperse its malignancy far and wide until every family catches infection from it....The lower class of women in England, are remarkably fond of the Blacks, for reasons too brutal to mention....By these ladies they generally have a numerous brood. Thus in the course of few generations more, the English brood will be contaminated by the mixture and ...this alloy may spread so extensively as even to reach the middle, and then the higher orders of the people, till the whole nation resembles the Portuguese and Moriscos in complexion of skin and baseness of mind' (Edward Long 1772 quoted in Alibhai-Brown & Montague 1992:8).

Some years later, 1804, William Cobbett expressed similar concerns when he fumed:

'who, that has any sense of decency, can help being shocked at the familiar intercourse, which has gradually been gaining ground, and which has, at last, got a complete footing between the Negroes and the women of England ..... Amongst White women, this disregard for decency, this defiance of the dictates of nature, this foul, this beastly propensity, is I say it with sorrow and with shame, peculiar to the English' (William Cobbett quoted in File & Power 1981:57).

While agreeing with Cobbett's observation of the peculiarity of this English phenomenon, an American, Professor Silliman (1806), wrote far more approvingly that:

'A few days since I met in Oxford Street a well dressed White girl who was of ruddy complexion and even handsome, walking arm in arm and conversing very sociably with a Negro who was well dressed as she and so Black that his skin had a kind of ebony lustre. As there are no slaves in England, perhaps the English have not learnt to regard Negroes as a degraded class of men, as we do in the United States, where we have never seen them in any other condition' (Silliman 1806 cited by File & Power 1981:57).

Professor Silliman was of course wrong about there being no slaves in Britain at the time, there were many freed slaves and this was no doubt what he was observing. Silliman's observation together with other evidence which has been reproduced in a number of publications, Little (1948); Banton (1967); Fryer (1984); Gundara and Duffield (1992), shows the extent of black people's position in the social structure. In sum this suggests that interracial sexual relationships were not uncommon.

The evidence also suggests that social, economic and sexual relationships between black and white people developed in parallel. The link that the two groups have developed with each other over the centuries, Shyllon (1974), and the physical closeness of that link, means that intimate relationships between them are but another aspect, or indeed an extension, of their deepening relationship. Even on occasions when black people were being depicted as members of a different species belonging to a lower order race, some commentators were still inclined to allude to the sexual possibilities.

As Thomas Hope (1831), wrote:

'There are in Africa, to the north of the line, certain Nubian nations, as there are to the south of the line certain Caffre tribes, whose figures, nay even whose features, might in point form serve as models for those of an Apollo. Their stature is lofty, their frame elegant and powerful. Their chests are open and wide and their extremities muscular and yet delicate. They have foreheads arched and expanded, eyes full, and conveying an expression of intelligence and feeling: high narrow noses, small mouths and pouting lips. Their complexion indeed still dark, but it is the glossy Black of marble or of jet, conveying to

the touch sensations more voluptuous even than those of the most resplendent White' (Thomas Hope 1831:24).

It is clear from this description that Thomas Hope (1831) was not offering a disinterested account. From his description it is clear that he was not only physically attracted to the women but he also found black skin sensuous and attractive. Considering that during the period that he was writing, slavery had not yet been abolished, his comments betrayed a longing that transcended the social convention of the period. His comments further reinforce the view that whatever the nature of the social and economic relationship between black and white people, as long as there has been close association between them, an intimate relationship has not been far behind.

Young (1995) has explored the connection between race, culture and sexual attraction and the way sexual desire runs through all aspects of black and white relationships. He writes:

'Sander Gilman has demonstrated the ways in which the links between sex and race were developed in the nineteenth century through fantasies derived from cultural stereotypes in which Blackness evokes an attractive, but dangerous, sexuality, an apparently abundant limitless, but threatening, fertility. And what does fantasy suggest if not desire' (Young 1995:97).

In an extraordinary example of contorted thinking, Count Arthur de Gobineau, who, along with Robert Knox, is often credited with having laid the foundation of contemporary racist ideas and opinions, suggested that one way of progress was through race mixture (Henriques 1975). In his view:

'It may be remarked that the happiest blend, from the point of view of beauty is that made by marriage of white and black. We need only put the striking charm of many mulatto, Creole and quadroon women by the side of such mixtures of yellow and white as the Russians and Hungarians. The comparison is not to the advantage of the latter.....' (Henriques 1975:23)

This of course stands in sharp contrast to his beliefs about the animalistic nature of black people. Black people, he suggested were on the same par,

morally, physically and culturally as animals. So his assertion that: ‘.....the people who are not of white blood approach beauty, but do not attain it.....’, (Henriques 1975:24), is more in keeping with his general views.

What is being suggested is that, throughout the early period of the relationship between black and white people, intimate sexual relationships existed. Evidence also supports the view that interracial relationships were not just a peripheral activity but in fact an open secret within society that, in particular white masters were inclined to have sexual relationships with their black women slaves. From the way the subject is discussed there is evidence of intrigue and interest in all that black and white sexual relationships suggests. However what is often stated openly, by historians, (Davidson 1984; Mazrui 1986), which also underlines all discussions and pronouncements about the wider relationship between black and white people, is the total subordination of the black population, be they slaves or ‘freemen’, to white people. For example it was noted that despite the 1772 Somerset case verdict, 18 years after the verdict a black woman was deported to the West Indies against her will. Similarly in 1792, another black woman was sold in Bristol and shipped to Jamaica. Also as Fryer observed; ‘As late as 1822, Thomas Armstrong of Dalston, near Carlisle, bequeathed a slave in his will’ (Fryer 1984:203). In all these examples the powerlessness and the inferiority of the black race was seen as self-evident and not worthy of consideration.

### **Power Relations**

The use of the term power in the context of a master and slave relationship can be argued to be relatively straightforward and unproblematic. Within the slave-trading environment that existed in Britain from the 14th century onward, the power relations and positions between black slaves and their white masters were both structural and social. At the structural level, the practice of slavery was both sanctioned and facilitated by the state apparatus, and indeed the trade was an important base structure to the economic well-being of the society. This legitimisation enabled the state to generate legislation, which effectively emasculated and disenfranchised those



enslaved. At the social level, enslavement involved the physical (and of course) subjugation of those to be enslaved. As Foucault (1976), amongst others, has observed, social interaction between people is crucially shaped by power relations, and the exercise of power is not only an ability to impose particular practices and relationships, it is also the ability to define another's reality. (Sarup 1993).

The nature and structure of slavery would appear to work against the possibility of mutual respect, understanding or justice because black people, in this case, were regarded as inherently inferior. The objectification and dehumanisation of the black slaves placed them beyond the discourse of rights and beyond the normal conventions of interpersonal relationships. Although the slave and master relationship is devoid of any reciprocal obligations such relationships of oppressed and oppressor nevertheless foster dependence. The explanation for this is that inasmuch as the slaves depend upon their master for their survival, the slaves' masters in turn depend on the slaves for their wealth and the maintenance of their farms or/and households. In this sense the power in this relationship is thus distributed between slaves and masters, albeit, inequitably.

Although the argument presented above suggests a degree of reciprocity, at least in the material sense, the important point is that ultimately power always resided with the white masters, so in reality the notion of mutuality is not only debatable but may not stand up to too closer a scrutiny, but there is a paradoxical aspect to the relationship, whereby there is evidently unequal distribution of power and a level of dependency. Nevertheless the total power that was exercised by slave owners was not dissimilar to the level of control that an animal owner would have over their pets. This power relation according to Rex (1970) is crucial to any understanding the contemporary quality of black and white relationships. The theoretical concept, which perhaps best explains the context and nature of such relationship, is drawn from the work of Franz Oppenheimer cited by John Rex (1970). In this analysis any understanding of the ways in which black and white people

relate to each other would have to take account of the context of slavery,  
hence:

‘inter-group relations have the form they do because the two groups involved were not originally one, but have been brought together into a single political (in the wider sense) framework as a result of the conquest by one of the other’ (Rex 1970:11)

Viewed in this way, subsequent relationships between black and white relationships were likely to be tainted with a perception of the black partner as a subordinate – in a way the ‘spoils’ of war compared to the victor, the white partner.

Yet these intimate relationships occurred even though they were subject to public censure, public humiliation and in some cases physical assault. This is an important point because it suggests that irrespective of the personal risks to the people involved, black and white people were still prepared to develop sexual relationships. (Dexter 1864).

### **A Changing Relationship**

The abolition of Britain’s active participation in the slave trade in 1807 and the subsequent emancipation of slaves in the British colonies in 1834 was the result of a number of factors, Mazrui (1986); Robinson (1983); Fryer (1984) and Eltis (1987) have chronicled the development and final demise of the trade. Each account of the ending of the slave trade considers the inter-connection between the socio-economic, the moral and the political factors that were instrumental in bringing the trade to a close. Some explore the alliances created by black abolitionists, white humanitarians and white working class radicals who brought pressure to bear on the slave traders and the politicians who supported the trade (Robinson 1983; Fryer 1984). Others concentrate on presenting the economic realities that made the trade unsustainable and the development of alternative economic avenues, which did not require the use of slaves. According to Eltis (1987):

‘Britain was the most successful nation in the modern World in establishing slave labour overseas. It was also the first to industrialise as well as the first of the major powers to renounce

coerced labour in principle and practice. These two developments, industrialisation and abolition, evolved more or less simultaneously in the late eighteenth century, but this was only after a century during which the exploitation of Africans in the New World had become the foundation stone of the British Atlantic economy. Indeed the British about face on the issue of coerced labour could be almost described as instantaneous in historic terms. By the early nineteenth century they had become so convinced of its immorality and economic inefficiency that they were running an expensive one-nation campaign to suppress the international slave trade. Throughout this process their economy underwent major structural change and, of course, continued to expand strongly' (Eltis 1987:4).

But as James (1938) mused:

'Those who see in abolition the gradual awakening conscience of mankind should spend a few minutes asking themselves why it is man's conscience, which had slept peacefully for so many centuries, should awake at the time that men began to see the unprofitableness of slavery as a method of production in the West Indian colonies' (James 1938 cited in Ethnic Minority Unit 1986:27).

For some commentators, (Robinson 1983; Sivanandan 1990; Curtin 1965), Britain's change of heart about the slave trade owes more to its limited ability for continued expansion, the trade's inefficiency and the cost ineffectiveness of the trade rather than any moral or humanitarian impulses on the part of the slavers and the British parliament. However, what is clear is that the ending of the slave trade had the effect of changing, to a degree, the social relationship between black and white people. This changed relationship took the form of colonialism in which Britain administered and policed the economic, legal and socio-political aspects of the African and Caribbean countries under its control through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The change from a master - slave relationship to a colonial relationship marked a changed status for previously enslaved populations to that of subject of the British Empire. This status conferred upon black people in the British Caribbean and African colonies many of the legal, political rights and welfare rights which white people in the 'mother country' already enjoyed. With this elevation to members of the British Empire came growing expectations from black people that they would be treated with dignity and respect both before the law and by white people at

home and in the 'mother country'. Legally, colonial peoples enjoyed the same rights and privileges as all other British subjects.

Thus all black colonial peoples who were settled in Britain and those who were in the colonies were now subject to the same laws and entitled to the same treatment as the indigenous white population.

### **New Industry, Old Ideology**

The new relationship brought with it economic, legal, administrative and political changes. However, the ideologies of racial differences supported by both science and social practices developed in preceding centuries meant that racist ideologies of subordination continued to inform many of the interactions between black and white people. From the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this was an ideology informed by the new science of eugenics, which claimed to have discovered evidence of the inherent inferiority of the black races and the superiority of the white races (Jahoda 1999). However, unlike the depictions of black people developed during the era of slavery, in the colonial period the depictions of black people as wanton, depraved, lewd and lecherous were far less overt. Not so popular racism, which perpetuated themes of biological difference in general and heightened sexual prowess and enthusiasms in particular. In the earlier depiction black people were described as savages, bestial heathens who were little more than animals and needed therefore to be saved:

‘They had no knowledge of God....they are very greedie eaters, and no less drinkers, and very lecherous, and theevish, and much addicted to uncleanenesse’ (Jordan 1974:18).

According to the new scientific racisms there was a variety of races and each had inborn intellectual, physical and moral characteristics. Kohn (1996). According to Tizard & Phoenix (1993):

‘Scientific racism thus involved not only a belief in the superiority of White people, but of the Anglo-Saxon ‘race’ in particular. The theory provided justification both for the expansion of colonialism that took place at this time, and for virulent discrimination against the Jewish and Irish ‘races’” (Tizard & Phoenix 1993:19).

This new explanation shifted the focus away from morally loaded notions of bestiality, savagery and wantonness towards differences based on biological 'fact'. These facts, being scientifically based, were considered indisputable and so discrimination came to be justified on the grounds of the necessity and desirability of different treatment for different races. It was not just in Britain that this view prevailed. Across Europe in the 1900's there were many who suggested that colonial policy should be based on the assumption of the inherent nature of these differences. As Mazower (1998) observed of the European politicking during the early part of 1900:

'The stronger race must prevail over the weaker; it would thus win the right to impose its own wishes upon the loser.....Equality in international relations was not taken as absolute; it was relative 'to the concrete value of the race represented by the state; in other words 'their natural superiority or inferiority'. Thus was justified the 'hegemony' of some races over others' (Mazower 1998:70).

Making the distinction between the different European powers, Mazower (1998) seems to suggest that unlike Germany, Britain did not 'really' believe in a racially determined biological hierarchy but instead their racism was more culturally bound. As he asserted:

'The ideological gulf between the two powers (Britain and Germany) was evident here too, and Nazi colonial planners harshly criticised the British for their excessively lax racial policies. Any alliance would therefore have involved the British abandoning their liberal imperialist creed (and belief in indirect rule) for hard-line racialism. Such an alliance was actually envisaged by Alfred Rosenberg, a leading Nazi ideologue, Britain and Germany together defending the white race by land and sea. It implied, however, an impossible transformation in British values; these were liberal rather than authoritarian, while British racism - which certainly existed - was based more upon culture than biology' (Mazower 1998:74).

Mazower's analysis is interesting but I would argue somewhat optimistic because Britain's position was not solely based on cultural differences it also relied on scientific racism to explain the differences and offer a justification for differential treatment of black people. However although the crude moralistic depictions of black people had given way to a 'scientific' or

pseudo scientific explanation, the underlying theme of inherent racial inferiority was still the same. At the intimate, social and sexual level the same sentiment that was expressed at the height of the slave trade was still being freely expressed following its abolition (Shyllon 1974).

In 1919, over 86 years after the official abolition of slavery in 1833, a former British colonial administrator, Sir Ralph Williams, in a letter to *The Times*, suggested that the race riots and physical attacks on black people like those which took place in Bute Town, Cardiff in 1919 were understandable and justifiable because, in his view, white men could no longer stand aside and watch their women getting involved in sexual relationships with black men, or as he puts it:

‘To almost every white man and woman who has lived a life among the coloured races, intimate association between black or coloured men and white women is a thing of horror ..... it is an instinctive certainty that sexual relations between white women and coloured men revolt our very nature ..... What blame to those white men, who seeing these conditions and loathing them, resort to violence?’ (Fryer 1984:311)

There were also riots in Newport, Liverpool and London. In these riots the primary targets were not only black people and their property but also white women who associated with them. In most instances homes belonging to black people were destroyed and their occupants attacked. Sir William’s naturalistic explanation of these riots was augmented by those rooted in an economic argument:

‘Some soldiers returning from the army felt that black people shouldn’t have jobs when they themselves were unemployed. There were oppositions, too, that some black people had married white people and that their families were living in the cities’ (File & Power 1981:70).

The link these returning soldiers were making between the numbers of black people in Britain and their own unemployment is a familiar and recurrent one, dating back to the Elizabethan period. Many white working class people, mainly men, saw their plight as being inextricably linked to the presence of black people in the country.

Although there were problems of employment, and their living and social conditions were dismal, many black people formed themselves into close-knit communities making a living as best as they could. Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the flow of black people from Africa and the Caribbean to Britain continued, so that by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a greater number of black people in the country than at any previous time. However, as mentioned previously, there were still difficulties in gaining their precise number in the country.

### **Fighting (and loving) for the Mother Country**

The First World War saw the mobilisation of black people into the British army and between 1914 and 1918 black people from the Caribbean and Africa, as well as those already settled in the country. According to figures released by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), during the First World War the British army recruited 180,000 African and 15,000 West Indian (Caribbean) soldiers into the armed forces. According to the MOD's records many black soldiers were brought back to Britain 'for treatment and to recuperate' (Ethnic Minority Unit 1986:45). Following the end of the war many of the black soldiers were demobilised in Britain and quite a lot of them decided to stay. By the end of the war it was estimated that the number of black people living in London had doubled to 20,000, with a smaller number living in and around the other major cities in the country. However black soldiers who had earlier been hailed for their courage fighting for the mother country were now subjected to discrimination, racism and physical assaults from white people (Ethnic Minority Unit 1986).

It was not until after the Second World War that an accurate estimate of the numbers of black people in the country could be made, though this still would need to be qualified. By 1945, the number of black people in Britain had increased considerably, so that by 1951 it was estimated that 17,000 Africans and 17,000 Caribbeans were living in Great Britain. The majority were born in the African and Caribbean Commonwealth. Many black people

stationed in Britain during the war decided to stay in order to build a life for themselves.

Following the war there was a massive programme of reconstruction and the shortage of indigenous workers meant Britain had to look to its colonies for labour to rebuild the 'mother country'. Naturally, the call went out again to Africa and the Caribbean for willing and able workers with relevant skills. In particular, engineers, nurses and general labourers were needed to fill the skills gap and the recruitment drive targeted these groups. Many people from Africa and the West Indies responded to the call for help from Britain. The now famous newsreel pictures of the Empire Windrush sailing into a British port with a shipload of black people, from the West Indies, provides testament to the connection people felt towards the 'mother country'.

By 1955 the need for migrant workers was so intense that special trips were made by government ministers to the Caribbean in an attempt to recruit more workers. As Hiro (1992) noted:

'The pressure on the West Indians to emigrate – or languish in the West Indies- was high. The British economy, on the other hand, surging ahead, needed as much labour as it could get. While unemployment in the West Indian Islands varied between 15 and 30 per cent, Birmingham alone had 48,000 job vacancies in 1955' (Hiro 1992: 35).

Despite the encouragement to black people to immigrate to Britain because of skills shortages and job vacancies, there was pressure from the white population for the state to regulate and regularise the intake of black migrants entering the country.

### **Controlling the Numbers**

The involvement of black people in the two world wars and their answering of the call from Britain for skilled and semi-skilled workers appeared to have done very little to assuage the negative view with which their presence was held by the many members of the indigenous white population. In fact, evidence suggests that negative and discriminatory attitudes actually hardened towards them, Hiro (1992) and Fryer (1984). Part of the problem



was the perception that there was a massive influx, which had become uncontrollable. Of course there was some justification for the perception because, compared to 1951 when the number of black people in Britain was estimated at about 34,000, the 1961 census revealed over 220,000 black people were now living in the UK (this figure does not include Asians or other migrants). The outcome of the political pressure generated by this perception was a series of even tighter statutory immigration controls.

It was in 1948 that the British Nationality Act for the first time specified clearly the formal status of colonial peoples and their relationship to the 'mother country'. The 1948 Act had secured for all citizens of the commonwealth the same rights as British subjects. The Act established a common citizenship of the UK and colonies. Colonial people had a right to enter and settle in the UK irrespective of where they were born. In 1968 the British MP, Enoch Powell, maintained that the 1948 Act was a dangerous piece of legislation. It was, he maintained, utopian in its attempt to integrate black and white people in the same place on a basis of equality. Secondly, it promised to enfranchise many desperate people with very little in common into a small and overcrowded country. Thirdly, it assumed, incorrectly, that people from the colonies would not exercise the rights, which were secured in law.

Powell predicted that because of the 1948 Act and what he perceived to be an already high level of migration into the country, there could be 'rivers' of blood flowing down the streets of mainland Britain, since the true inheritors of the country, white Britons, would rebel against such an influx and the only recourse they would have would be to vent their anger in an orgy of racial violence. There were, of course, many other voices that uttered similar warnings before Enoch Powell. For example some trade union leaders expressed their members' fears and concerns about the 'influx' of black immigrants who were seen as competitors for their jobs. In particular the Dockers and the Seaman's union were very vocal about their objection to a black presence in Britain.

Following the 1948 Act and the mass migration that followed, the Government became alarmed at the negative reactions of the indigenous white population towards the number of black people in Britain. Subsequent legislation on immigration took a stronger line against black people attempting to enter the country to settle. For example the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act withdrew the automatic right of Commonwealth citizens to come to Britain. The Act introduced for the first time the idea of a work voucher. It meant that any Commonwealth citizen wanting to come to Britain or the UK could only come to work if they possessed special permission in the form of a work voucher (Hiro 1992).

As the 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Act was making its passage through the Parliamentary process and Enoch Powell made his speech, the Economist magazine observed that:

‘Not in living memory have groups of workers across the country gone on strike in favour of a Tory politician, as they did for Enoch Powell....a Tory whose views on every aspect of politics apart from race and immigration they barely understand, and would reject even if they did’. (Economist 26 April 1968 cited in Hiro, 1992:246)

The 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Act, the 1971 Immigration Act and the 1981 British Nationality Act were interesting in the way in which they were drafted and in their primary intentions. The overriding connection between the three Acts, and also to some extent the 1962 Act, is that they were principally excluding Acts. They were first and foremost intended to exclude certain categories of would-be immigrants, and secondly they aimed to settle once and for all, those who had the right to come into Britain, those who had the right to stay indefinitely and those who were entitled to British citizenship. Having the right to stay indefinitely of course did not guarantee automatic citizenship. The 1981 Nationality Act for the first time set out clearly that being born on British soil did not automatically confer citizenship on an individual. The principle that one takes the citizenship of where one is born became obsolete. In other words the principle of “*ius soli*” (place of birth) no longer applied; rather citizenship was now to be

linked to descent, patriality (*jus sanguinis*). Thus a child born to parents, both of whom had conditional immigrant status, was no longer automatically a British subject. Furthermore, a child born in the UK in or after 1983 who was not a British subject was now subject to immigration control and therefore capable of being deported. According to Sivanandan (1990), the 1971 Immigration Act was Britain's attempt to fall into line with its European partners, because the Act, in effect, stopped primary and settler immigration from the 'New Commonwealth' and encouraged *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) labourers instead.

Sivanandan (1990) observes that:

'The purpose of the Nationality Act, in effect, was not just to tidy up the citizenship mess left by successive immigration acts but to rid Britain of its remaining obligations of Empire and bring it into line with Europe' (Sivanandan 1990:155).

He also suggests that:

'...the visa restrictions imposed on certain Black Commonwealth countries in 1985 and 1986, the fines made against airlines bringing in passengers without the required documents in the Carriers Liability Act 1987, and the provisions of the 1988 Immigration Act criminalising overstayers and making deportations even more summary, have more to do with the new Third World immigrations and refugees coming into Europe than Blacks already settled in Britain' (Sivanandan 1990:155).

The enactment of the 1993 Asylum and Immigration Act (AIA) made it difficult for people seeking a place of refuge to get help. The Act was an effective deterrent to potential refugees and asylum seekers. The 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act (AIA) went further, making it more difficult for people to claim benefit or be provided with housing and other basic necessities. For many commentators the 1996 AIA had little to do with saving money or streamlining provision and making it faster and fairer. For these commentators the 1996 Act was designed to deter asylum seekers and to tighten the immigration rules. According to Rights campaigning groups, such as the National Council for the Welfare of Immigrants and the Anti Racist Alliance, the Act had more to do with economics and racial politics

than concerns about the plight of desperate people and they believed that the Acts were aimed specifically at black migrants and Asylum seekers and were also a way of placating the reactionary Right Wing elements in the country.

Even though successive Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Acts between 1948 and 1996 attempted to control the numbers of migrants in Britain and to clarify the status of its dependent territories and its old colonies, the number of black people in Britain continued to increase. It is important to note that the increase in the number of black presence in Britain was not solely due to increased immigration because, as people settled in the country they naturally had children so that by 2001 it is possible to postulate that there are now fifth and sixth generations of black people.

The link between the discussion of the National Act and the main thrust of the thesis is twofold. Firstly, it is to indicate that hostility and ambivalence to black people ran throughout society and that the changes in the immigration rules had a profound effect on the very nature of the relationship between black and white people after World War II. Secondly, that political pressure for the restriction of black migration is an important consideration for politicians across the political spectrum, and this testifies to the strength and significance of race in the UK. In some respects it is not surprising that the willing coming together of black and white to form an intimate relationship is perceived as transgressing a fairly pervasive line drawn by sets of norms and values regarding what is considered an appropriate sexual relationship.

### **Demographic Data on Interracial Relationships**

The actual number of black people in Britain, excluding Asian and other minorities, has been and will always be difficult to establish. The reasons for the lack of precise information are complex, but they range from poor recording procedures to illegal immigrants avoiding detection. Though the mechanism by which data is collected continues to be improved, any figures produced must still be subject to some qualification. The last census 1991 estimated that there were 500,000 black Caribbean, 212,000 black African and 178,000 black 'other' people living in Britain. (Modood 1997)

As with the census figures the true extent of interracial relationships is also difficult to ascertain. As Coleman (1985), acknowledged:

‘Statistical sources on inter-ethnic marriage are rather limited. Country of birth, used in some earlier studies of inter-ethnic marriage and included in the population census, is becoming a poor surrogate for colour and ethnicity’ (Coleman 1985:4).

Aside from the problems highlighted by Coleman (1985), the available records for the numbers of people in interracial relationships is based on a system of calculation that, by its very nature, excludes quite a large number of people. For example the information available tends to be based on married couples and takes no account of cohabiting couples or people involved in interracial relationships but not living with their partner. It is unlikely to include people in mono-racial relationships who are involved in extra marital interracial affairs. Despite the lack of accurate data it is clear that in areas such as Tiger Bay in Bute Town (Cardiff), St Paul, Bristol, in Liverpool Eight and in many different parts of London and other major UK cities, there is visible evidence of the extent of interracial relationships. For example, though there are no precise figures available, there are a number of elderly people in their 70’s and late 80’s who are of mixed parentage and, since many were born in Britain, it suggests that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there were children being born whose parents must have definitely been involved in an interracial relationship.

Currently, in many areas of London, Lancashire, the Midlands, Wales and Yorkshire, there are substantial numbers of adults, adolescents and young children of mixed parentage and their numbers are estimated to be growing. Gary Younge (Guardian 1<sup>st</sup> June 1997) in his article on multiracial Britain highlighted that an increasing number of ‘Caribbean’ children now have one white parent. Moodod et al’s (1997) supports Younge’s observation that two out of five (39 per cent) of the children studied had one Caribbean parent and one white parent. Importantly for this thesis, they also found that ‘this was more often a black father and a white mother than the other way round’ (Moodod et al 1997:31).

### **The Extent of Interracial Relationships**

What is evident is that as the numbers of black people in the country have increased so has the number of interracial relationships (Coleman 1994). As a way of explaining the prevalence of interracial relationships in the early period it was often suggested that because of the insufficient number of black women in the country, black men sought 'comfort' in the arms of the available women who were white (Tizard and Phoenix 1993; Alibhai-Brown & Montague 1992).

It was also suggested that black men got involved in such relationships because they lived in predominately white areas and therefore they were unlikely to meet a partner from the same racial background. So, in essence, the prevalence of interracial relationships was perceived to be influenced as much by geography and lack of choice as by personal preference. Whilst this argument may seem plausible, it is, in many ways, difficult to sustain. Since the number of black people in the country has increased and the male-female ratio has evened out, the proportion of black people engaged in interracial relationships has not diminished.

The Labour Force Survey of 1981 (consisting of about 80,000 households in Great Britain with a total population of over 220,000 individuals normally resident in the UK), reported that of those surveyed just under 1 per cent of current marriages were between partners, one of whom was white and the other from an ethnic minority group. Of these it was noted that 20 per cent of married Caribbean men were married to white women and about 25 per cent of married African men were married to white women. The Labour Force Survey revealed that if estimations were made of the trends of ages of the partners, then the evidence is that, proportionately, younger black people (West Indians) are more likely than their elders to marry outside their own racial group. They noted that the trend also showed that older mixed marriages (interracial):

'might date from the early days when single men migrated to the UK intending to marry after they established themselves in

this country (Britain). However, a greater proportion of UK born married Black men (West Indian) were married to White partners than of the overseas-born Black men (West Indians)'. (Coleman 1985:7)

From the figures produced from the 1981 LFS it was estimated that overall 27 per cent of black British men and 14 per cent of black British women were involved in interracial relationships. In 1993-1994 the LFS estimated that there were 14 million couples in Britain. 'Of these 13.77 million couples involved men and women of the same ethnic group, leaving just over 200,000 couples in ethnically mixed relationships. The total number of black and white mixed couples is just less than 60,000' (Goodwin Guardian July 2 1994:6). By 1998 the figure had risen and is estimated that 50 per cent of black British born men were involved in interracial relationships. This figure does not of course include black men who are not British born and have or have had white partners, nor does it include countless black adolescent boys who are also choosing to form relationships with white girlfriends.

Overall, there is evidence that high proportions of black men are involved in interracial relationships. Evidence suggests that increasingly given the choice, black men were more likely to become involved in an exogamy relationship than a mono-racial relationship. Modood et al's (1997) extensive study of Ethnic Minorities in Britain revealed that despite the problems that many interracial couples experience there is a steady increase in their number. This is the latest study and it gives a clear indication of current trends in Britain, and its findings suggest that not only is there going to be an increase in the number of interracial relationships and children from such relationships, but also the trend is likely to affect other minority groups as well and this trend looks set to continue.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have attempted to chart the presence of black people in Britain and some of the ways in which this presence has impacted on the indigenous population and interracial relationships. I have considered how, throughout this encounter between black and white people, formal attempts

have been made to regulate and police the numbers of black people in Britain, and informal attempts have been made to prevent relationships between black and white people. I have documented how the wider relationship between black and white people has changed over time and the socio-economic, socio-political and social impact of such changes. Finally I have considered the demographic data and the extent of interracial relationships in Britain. What has emerged is that the historical legacy continues to influence the way in which black and white people relate to each other and the views held about interracial relationships. In the next chapter the focus shall be on conceptualising interracial relationships by presenting academic, fictional and theatrical works and cinematographic representation of such relationships.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter is concerned with the ways in which interracial relationships have been conceptualised in the social science literature. I am, however, mindful of the fact that while there is extensive American literature on the subject there is a paucity of such literature in Britain and increasingly the most significant and influential characterisations of interracial relationships are to be found in the arts, literature and popular culture. I shall therefore cite these additional materials and sources as I proceed. Moreover, as Foucault (1976) and others have observed, the dominant discourses of an era, or episteme, will necessarily pervade and to a great extent inform both the scientific and popular materials. These depictions of interracial relationships will, in turn, shape popular consciousness in crucial ways and describe the ideological terrain to be negotiated by the partners involved in an interracial relationship.

Thus, in this literature review I am concerned to account for both the gradual accumulation of social scientific data on this topic, and the sometimes dramatic ideological shifts in the politics of miscegenation which these changes represent.

#### **The Early Period**

In both Britain and America, but particularly in Britain, it is evident that as the nature of the relationship between black and white people has changed, from trader merchants, slaves/slavers, and colonised/coloniser, to post colonialism, so have the ways in which the relationships between them have been explored and characterised. Most early 16<sup>th</sup> century accounts tended to dwell on the unnatural nature of the relationship and how it disturbed the natural balance between the subjugated and subjugators. Fryer (1984) and Lok (1554). This earlier literature is exemplified by the work of Best (1578), and later by Edward Long (1770's), who refers to the bestial,

wantonness of the relationship between black men and white women. At the heart of these writings are concerns about sex and, in particular, the impact of accepting the naturalness of the sexual *relationship* between black and white people in the face of an ontological perspective that accepts racial hierarchy as the natural order of things. Without revisiting in detail areas already covered in chapter one, there are extensive examples of the way in which interracial relationships have developed between black and white people and how the relationship has attracted negative reactions in society. The negative reaction that the relationships have been able to attract over the centuries reinforces the notion that the colours, black and white, possess the ability to trigger negative reactions and projections from others (Dexter 1864; Reuter 1931; Merton 1941; Mumford 1997).

William Shakespeare played on these oppositional themes to great effect in many of his plays. For example, in his play 'Othello' there is a dramatisation of a relationship between a blackamoor (Othello) and a white woman (Desdemona). In this play both Othello and Desdemona had gone against the social convention by forming a relationship. But the fear that was expressed, in scene 1, in the conversation between Iago, Brabantio and Roderigo gives a clear indication of the kind of hatred such a relationship is capable of fostering. For example:

'Brabantio: What profane wretch art thou?

Iago: I am one, sir, that come to tell you, your daughter and the moor, are making the beast with two backs.

Brabantio: Thou art a villain.

Iago: You are a senator.

Brabantio: This thou shalt answer. I know thee Roderigo.

Roderigo: Sir, I will answer anything. But I beseech you if't by your pleasure and most wise consent, (As partly I find it is) that your fair daughter, At this odd even and dull watch o' th' night Transported with no worse nor better guard But with a knave of common hire, a gondolier, To the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor' (Harrison 1938: 27).

Shakespeare was fully aware linguistically of the trigger words that will evoke negative images. So in using Iago to remind Brabantio that he is a senator and that his daughter was *making beast* with the Moor was a sure way of not only evoking a particular image for the audience, but also provoking rage; despair and hatred towards the black moor and thus justifying Brabantio disowning his daughter. Also there is a connection being made here between race, sex and gender and the belief that the savagery and brutality of blackness (man) would contaminate and corrupt the purity of whiteness (woman).

The language that Shakespeare used in the exchanges between the three men, Brabantio (Desdemona's father), Iago and Roderigo offers a good example of the intensity of the feelings that interracial relationships are able to evoke. The point that comes across in these exchanges is that nothing is capable of inflaming jealousy and hatred in the same way as the thought that a black man and a white woman are engaged in copulation. Clearly there is a sub-plot underlying the drama. Thus, Othello was not a slave but a conquering army general who was recognised as a hero yet was deemed unacceptable for the daughter of one of the most influential Senators of the city. The play dealt with multiple layers of meanings, including prejudices, representations and otherness. Shakespeare was not only critical about racism and all its absurdities, he was, in effect, characterising a 'binary' world in which an individual's colour/religion became a determining factor for the kind of relationship they were able to develop and, as a consequence, their place in society.

What distinguishes Shakespeare's dramatisation from much of the literature produced between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries is that while he was somewhat circumspect about the categorisation of people into races, the approach adopted by others to talk about black and white people and indeed for exploring interracial relationships, relied on an ontological perspective that firmly juxtaposed black and white people at opposite ends of the racial spectrum. In the way the explanation is presented, black people occupy the least civilised of the three groups identified. From a different perspective

but still within the notion of how race is identified and classified Kohn (1996), for example, highlights the way in which humanity is conceived as a range of types rather than as interconnected types. He found that there was an ordering that:

‘..imposes a hierarchical order on the ‘human family’, though only in the formal sense that it uses a system in which the species is divided first into ‘great races’ -Europoid, Mongoloid, Negroid- and then into types within the grand division. (Kohn 1996:11).

The widespread acceptance of this racial hierarchy made it possible in the plantations during the period of slavery, for black people to be treated as commodities and catalogued in the same way as livestock. During the period when the fight for abolition was intensifying slave masters and merchants argued that; ‘African slaves were an equivocal race, between man and monkey, and that they were only half human’ (Hiro 1992:3). Whilst it could be claimed that the assertions of the slave masters and merchants were based more on crude self-interest, Hiro (1992), highlighted the premise from which black people were viewed:

‘At the intellectual level, religious and cultural justifications were often advanced to establish the inherent inferiority of Negroes as a race. It was argued that they were the descendants of Ham, the Black son of Noah. As such they were natural slaves, condemned forever to remain ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’. Besides, they were not only physically Black, the colour of Satan, but also morally Black. They were, in short, savage creatures who jumped from tree to tree...and eat one another.... (Hiro 1992:3).

The historian David Hume (1753) wrote: ‘I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites’ (David Hume 1753 cited in Hiro 1992:4). And according to Tizard & Phoenix (1993), Edward Long (1772) in his *Candid Reflection* wrote of:

‘.....scientific reasons for justifying slavery, on the grounds that Black and White people belong to different species, that hybrids between them are eventually infertile, and that Black people are closer to apes than man’ (Tizard & Phoenix 1993:15).

Two years later Long (1774) suggested:

‘We cannot pronounce them unsusceptible of civilisation since even apes have been taught to eat, drink, repose and dress like men. But of

all the human species hitherto discovered, their natural baseness of mind seems to afford least hope of their being (except by miraculous interposition of Divine Providence) so refined as to think as well as act like men. I do not think orang-utan husband would be any dishonour to a Hottentots female' (Long 1774 in Tizard & Phoenix 1993:15).

In the literature highlighted above as well as the depiction of black people as being at the lower end of the evolutionary chain, sex was also an important preoccupation. There were of course no concerns expressed about the social and cultural dimensions of the relationship since the superiority of the white race was taken for granted and was never considered to be in any doubt. The main problem, as it was perceived, was about the impact of sexual contact on the racial integrity of the two groups. There were fears that the development of intimacy between the two groups would not only result in 'mongrel' children being born, but that it would begin to erode the idea of a racial hierarchy.

In 'Miscegenation: The theory of the blending of the races, applied to the American White man and Negro', Dexter (1864) wrote that miscegenation is: '..founded upon natural law. We love our opposites. It is in the nature of things that we should' (Dexter 1864:28).

And he believed that:

'Notwithstanding the apparent antagonism which exist between Irish and Negroes on this continent (America), there are strongest reasons for believing that the first movement toward melaleuketic unions will take place between these two races. Indeed, in very many instances it has already occurred..... families become intermingled and connubial relations are formed between the Black men and White Irish women' (Dexter 1864:28).

According to his observation: ' White Irish women love the Black men, and in the old country it has been stated, that the Negro is sure of the handsomest among the poor White women' (Dexter 1864:30).

He expanded on his observation and revealed his negative attitude towards the Irish in particular by suggesting that:

‘The Irish are the more brutal race and lower civilisation than the Negro’ (Dexter 1864:30).

Similarly he asserted that the black man is: ‘....mild, spiritual, fond of melody and song, warm in his attachment, fervid in his passions, but inoffensive and kind and only apparently brutal when his warmest emotion are brought into play in his love for the White woman’ (Dexter 1864:28).

Setting aside the author’s use of language and the image that is conjured up from the description, what is noteworthy is the way in which Irish people are depicted in this instance and the negative description of the Irish as being of even lower rank, in the human chain, than black people. Of course both are ‘*subject*’ peoples of the British Empire occupying a similar status and were subjected to similar levels of subjugation. But as Pitts (2000), suggests, this depiction, which confers upon these two subject peoples some spurious equality of racial inferiority. It constitutes an attempt by the imperial power to create a hierarchical structure amongst those whom it has subjugated using their very subjugation as evidence of their racial inferiority.

Dexter (1864) went on to suggest that:

‘Mothers and daughters of the aristocratic slaveholders are thrilled with a strange delight by daily contact with their dusky male servitors. These relations, though intimate and full of a rare charm to the passionate and impressionable daughters of the south, seldom if, ever, pass beyond the bounds of propriety. A platonic love, a union of sympathies, emotions, and thoughts, may be sweetness and grace of a woman’s life, and without any formal human tie, may make her thoroughly happy’ (Dexter 1864:43).

Although there was no evidence to support the claim, nevertheless the author was certain that unlike the poor Irish women, the relationship between the dusky male servitors and the passionate impressionable daughters did not go any further than a union of sympathies. Unlike those who believed that:

‘.... White women had assignations with Negroes because the White man, by constant repetition of the allegations of the Black man’s extraordinary strength, and exhaustless sexual desire and passion, had created a virtual Black Apollo’ (Williamson, 1980:90).

What the literature of the early period revealed was that as well as the concerns that were expressed about sexual relations between black and white, the colours - black and white - have a symbolic significance that signifies meanings beyond the couples' relationship. For example it could be argued that the idea of black and white juxtaposed with the notion of good and evil, mind and body split as well the psychoanalytically inclined ego/id divide. In this case a Derridian deconstruction is projected in which the world is presented as a series of infinite dyad. In most instances the white aspect of the divide is that which is valued and considered 'civilised' whilst the black is not only demonised but also sexualised. The dynamics that are created by placing the two opposites alongside each other is of course recognised and has been put to much use.

### **The Scientific Period: Scientific Racism**

The periods that straddled the end of the pre-modern and the beginning of the enlightenment period had a profound impact on the human race as a whole and on black and white relationship in particular. During these periods, explanations provided in much of the literature ranged from the religious to the notion of uncontrollable natural instincts taking their course. The epistemological shift, from that in which explanations are revealed to that in which they are discovered, spans the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Great emphasis was placed upon explanations couched in the language of logic and protocols of the natural science which were arrived at using the protocols of the natural sciences. During this period there was a move away from what Hampson (1968) describes as:

'pessimistic certainties' towards 'new knowledge and new ways of looking at experiences which brought first doubt and then, gradually, unprecedented optimism concerning the nature of man and his ability to shape his material and social environment to his own convenience' (Hampson 1968:23).

In other words there was a belief in the notion of 'law' and that all would be discovered if the appropriate procedures, (positivism), and extensive observations (quantitative) and documentation were collated. There was an

acceptance that the power of inductive reasoning would be able to provide the 'definitive' answers to questions about the relationships between people. However, according to Tizard & Phoenix (1993) although there was widespread acceptance of the theory of the inherent differences between black and white people, it was not necessarily a universally accepted theory by scientists, at least not until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Up until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the visible differences and the perceived inferiority of black people were often attributed to 'environmental causes such as lack of education and Christian beliefs, ill treatment, a hot climate and poor diet' (Tizard & Phoenix 1993:18). For Tizard & Phoenix (1993), from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the climate of opinion concerning the importance of the environment in explaining the differences between black and white people changed profoundly. The reason for the change was partly due to the total acceptance of scientific ideas, and the idea that through science all human endeavours could be explained. The change in perspectives brought the re-emergence of the importance of heredity and a formal acceptance of the previously asserted explanation that there were different races with differentiated and inborn intellectual capacity, moral characteristics and physical attributes. And as already mentioned the main thrust of the theory was that black people were closer to apes than white Europeans, and since they occupied the lower end of the evolutionary spectrum they were therefore naturally less intelligent than white people. (Tizard & Phoenix 1993:18). By the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific racism had become more influential and provided the rationale for the ways in which many black people were subsequently treated.

The discourse of scientific racism holds that white people who became involved in interracial relationships were socially and morally degenerates being controlled by their 'animalistic instincts'. This scientific explanation reinforced and, indeed, provided legitimacy for a previously held belief about the hierarchical nature of racial differences. However, although there were expectations that black and white people should form relationships within their respective groups, there is evidence of people's involvement in



such relationships and that some people were not deterred or constrained by the prevailing negative views and beliefs.

In 'Ruling Passion: Race, Sex and Empire', Gill (1995), explored interracial relationships, not only from the point of view of the couples or the individuals concerned, but in the context of the British Empire. Here Gill suggests that beneath the puritanical veneer of Victorian ideology, throughout the empire there were intimate interracial relationships that were being formed that were counter to expectations of the colonised and the colonisers. In other words, even though the practices brought disgrace and possible dishonourable discharge from the colonial administration, many white people, men and women, formed relationships with black and Asian people in the countries where they were based. Gill observes that:

'The British Empire was the forum for the largest encounter between different peoples the world has ever seen. It was not an absolute melting pot, but the combination of local race and Europeans reached a high number of permutations: Euro-Africans, Anglo-Indians, quadroons and octoroons' (Gill 1995:161).

To make the point clearer as to the depth of intermixing, Gill (1995) highlighted the politics of colour and the experiences of the children from the relationship. Because of the taboos surrounding sexual contacts between the colonised and the colonisers, the children from the liaisons had to deal with mistrust and rejection from both sides. What was interesting was that:

'.....to the coloniser, the 'coloured' was a reminder that plenty of empire-builders breached one of the fundamental taboos and had sex with natives' (Gill 1995:162).

### **A Paradigm Shift**

In the literature, people involved in interracial relationships were treated simply as objects of study, in the manner of natural science. The reason for the objectification of the subjects was governed by the idea of an objective, unbiased process for explaining both the nature of interracial relationships and the 'motivation' of the people who get involved in such relationships. This approach was of course classical positivism because there was an assumption that human life, hence relationships, were subject to natural

causes similar to those discovered within the natural sciences. However the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a radical shift in the way interracial relationships were researched. Although concerns about the sexual aspects of such relationships were still evident wider concerns about race; culture and identity began to enter the frame. For example, concerns were expressed about the threat of cultural contamination, loss of identity and the fear of racial annihilation through miscegenation. George Findlay (1936) and Reuter (1931). This shift in the way the relationship was represented followed a political and ideological reassessment of the relationship between black and white people. The literature about the relationship during the early part of the 1900's emphasised issues about social and cultural differences as the main reasons for objections towards the relationship. Of course as noted in detail in chapter one, this was also the period when the British Empire was still at its strongest point. In Britain, newspaper articles and magazine features on interracial relationship (1910), tended to express the view that society objected to the idea of intimate relationships between black and white people. In these articles there are some attempts to provide a 'profile' of the couples involved in the relationship, but the approach taken tended to be negative caricatures of the people involved.

In 1936 George Findlay's, 'Miscegenation: a study of the biological source of inheritance of the South African European population', suggested that miscegenation (interracial relationships) can be classified under three main headings;

- 1) Primary miscegenation: The crossing of the pure stocks
- 2) Secondary miscegenation: The crossing of pure with mixed stock
- 3) Tertiary miscegenation: The union of different admixtures of mixed stock

What Findlay attempted to do was provide a terminology for the different permutations that can result from interracial relationships. And perhaps unintentionally he was able to highlight the sheer complexity that is involved in trying to classify such relationships. Findlay may have been

unaware of the existence of the 'one-drop' rule (in which one-drop of black blood makes a person black), which was put in place after the abolition of the slave trade in America, but his classification was still informed by the idea of purity and admixture. On the other hand Findlay may have chosen to problematise the rule as a way of trying to suggest that such simplification: '..... fails entirely to express the real purport of the supposed horror and aversion to miscegenation' (Findlay 1936:8).

In retrospect Findlay's categorisation is interesting for another, and perhaps more historical reason. Although his classification predates the policy of Apartheid (racial segregation) it nevertheless provided a foundation upon which the subsequent racial segregation experiments were developed. The attempt at classifying the different permutations of interracial relationships is, paradoxically, a tacit acknowledgement that interracial relationships do exist and that black and white people do develop relationships that are more than mere friendships.

Earlier in America, Reuters' (1931) work explored the struggle of ideas between those who support interracial relationships on the grounds that the mixture of the races lead to racial virility and cultural efflorescence, and others who believed that only through racial purity could civilisation advance. He asserted:

'The general public as well as many social students impute great significance to this amalgamation of the races. The prevailing note in socio-political discussion is one of pessimism. There is fear of racial degeneration, moral decadence and culture decline; an uneasy and unanalysed sense of impending racial and cultural disaster. In some cases, this emotional attitude has been expressed in formal and legal as well as in popular efforts to check the movement already accomplished or beyond control' (Reuter 1931:4).

In the 1940's and 1950's it was often people involved with the Christian and the Jewish religion who conducted researches into interracial, intercultural and interfaith relationships out of an interest in looking at relationships which crossed the religious divide, Kennedy (1943); Barron (1951); and Sister Lynn (1953), or intermarriages between Jews and gentiles (Slotkin

1951). Many of these studies attempted to explore the impact of the relationships on the couple's cultural, racial and religious group. The studies also attempted to provide an explanation for such relationships. In many respects the findings have resonance for current discussions about the relationships. For example Sister Lynn (1953), a nun, found that:

‘Many sociologists suggest that unbalanced sex ratio is a causal factor of interracial marriages. Others believe it is residential and educational propinquity, occupation and recreation contacts are other factors’, to take into consideration’ (Sister Lynn 1953:2).

Also Barron (1951) found in the work of Kennedy (1943):

‘.....that very little intermarriage occurred between persons residing in areas markedly different in social, economic and cultural traits and found a high correlation between residential propinquity and endogamy’ (Barron 1951:249).

The focus during this period of trying to understand why people get involved in interracial relationships also drew attention towards an attempted categorisation of the kind of people that they thought would want to get involved in such relationships. For example Slotkin, in an article on Jewish-Gentile intermarriage in Chicago suggests that there are 8 types of people who intermarry. They are;

- 1) an unorganised or demoralised person
- 2) a promiscuous person
- 3) an adventurous person
- 4) a detached person
- 5) a rebellious person
- 6) a marginal person
- 7) an acculturated person
- 8) an emancipated person.

Without going into great detail about the nature and character of each person, Slotkin was suggesting these ‘types’ within the context of a concern about Jews marrying out of the religion. He warned that this type of person would marry out and with slight modification, many may be adapted or

predisposed to marry interracially, seen to be an even less desirable outcome.

In the 1950's and 1960's, in both America and in Britain, the literatures on interracial relationship were much influenced by the changes that had occurred in the social field. Though there was still recognition for objectivity, the views, opinions, and experiences of the subject were not ignored and in fact formed the basis of the studies. This of course was a major shift from the way the relationship had previously been explored. In this period, certainly in the American context, the Parsonian *Functionalist* approach was to a large extent typified by the work of Barron (1951); Sister Lynn (1953) and Slotkin (1951). Their studies are perhaps good examples of an approach that is more contextual in its framework and followed the orthodox functionalist perspective. By taking account of the social environment from which the relationship developed, and at the same time exploring the experiences of the people involved in the relationship, this approach began to recognise the need to problematise the relationship rather than continue the previous reductive explanation. However the limited attempt to problematise the relationship, to some extent, highlighted the limitation of the functionalist approach towards such relationships. In their descriptions the studies betrayed the inherent analytical contradiction that exists within the perspective in that it is about continuation and social cohesion either through *manifest* or *latent* functions Merton (1957); Kennedy (1943); Baron (1951) and Slotkin (1951). What the studies illustrate is that far from interracial relationships being considered an important contributor to society and a positive influence for a cohesive society, they were in fact seen as being a *dysfunctional relationship* that threatens not only the social cohesion but also the very existence of society.

In analysing the works of Kennedy (1943); Baron (1951); Slotkin (1951) and Sister Lynn (1953) it is evident that whilst their ideas do not follow in a linear pattern, indeed there are clear differences in emphasis. For example whilst Kennedy (1943) and Baron (1951) highlighted the importance of geography as an explanation for the relationship, Sister Lynn (1953) added

the notion of unbalanced sex ratio to the debate. In her study she highlighted the idea that people look outside their racial and cultural groups for partners because of the shortage within their own group. For Slotkin (1951) interracial relationship is not about geography and lack of partners within, but about individual pathology and their inclination to pursue a relationship outside their racial, cultural or religious circle. Despite their differences and the incompatibility of their ideas what connects them is the belief that people involved in interracial relationships are driven into it by forces beyond their control.

### **Liberation: A Licence for Interracial Sex**

The 1960's also witnessed the emergence of the women's movement, gay liberation and also in its wake, an awakening of black consciousness. This period is considered by many to be the high point of black liberation because in America the civil rights movement made significant gains and in Africa many countries were fighting successfully for their independence. The emancipation of black people in America gave confidence to black people around the world, and in England in particular. The politicisation of black people's negative experiences and their reassessment of their relationship with white people enabled an analytical deconstruction that called into question the very basis of interracial relationships. This questioning resulted, for many, in the call for a cessation of contact between the two groups. Wallace (1990) has argued that in the wake of the black liberation movement in the USA in the 1960's, some black men came to believe that they should be able to enter sexual relationships with white women from which they had previously been debarred. Such miscegenation, she maintained, became a vehicle for upward social mobility for certain, relatively privileged black men. This view has become one of the orthodox explanations for interracial relationships and will be subject to closer analysis in this thesis. But what was clear was that there was a sharp move away from the Parsonian *Functionalist* approach, with its idea of continuity and social cohesion. Instead the 1960's emphasised social and personal

conflicts, social (dis) continuity and questioning of the social *structures* and *socially constructed* differences.

In 'Dusky Venus, Black Apollo', Bastide (1961), suggests that when looking at interracial (sexual) relationships, economic, structural, religious and sexual aspects need to be considered because they are inextricably linked. In his view, the question of race always provokes the answer 'sex'. As he observed:

'It seems then, in conclusion, that contrary to a widely-held opinion, closer relationships between the colours, whether in marriage or in simple sexual pleasure, are not a sign of absence of prejudice: the Dusky Venus hides the debasement of the Black women as prostitute; and the Black Apollo is seeking revenge on the White man. It is not so much that love breaks down barriers and unites human beings as that racial ideologies extend their conflicts even into love's embrace' (Bastide 1961:11).

The point that Bastide was making was that, irrespective of the emotional ties that bind a couple together, the issue of race and cultural identity is ever present in all aspects of their relationship with the outside world. I think this reveals that history and culture pervade and affect every aspect of interracial relationships in a much closer way than it impacts on mono-racial relationships. This suggests that interracial relationships are caught in a position of impossibilism, in which the relationship attempts to be characterised by authenticity, and uniqueness (like any other relationship) yet it is framed and constrained by structural and historical determinism.

It was in the latter part of the 1960's and the beginning of the 1970's that researches conducted on interracial relationships began to take a different approach. In essence it was during this period that subjectivism was accepted and accorded a degree of legitimacy, at least within the social sciences. Up to this period the research studies took the classic positivistic approach, as exemplified by the Findlay (1931); Baron (1951); and Sister Lynn (1953) studies mentioned earlier. In these studies and other literature on the relationship there was more consideration given to the social and cultural context in which the relationship was taking place and rather less

concerns given to the individual experiences of the people involved in the relationship. In other words there was little attempt to provide a first hand account of interracial relationships or analyses of the experiences of people involved in such relationships. This politicisation of interracial relationships was part of a wider debate about the kind of relationship that should be developed between black and white people, not only at the intimate level but also in the wider social sphere. For example, for many black commentators there needed to be not just a reassertion of black civil rights, but a renaissance of the black movement which emboldened black people to develop personal confidence and a sense of pride in themselves and also to challenge the integrationist ideas which were deemed to be detrimental to the very survival of black people. The outcome was the emergence of a fissure amongst black radicals and commentators as to how black and white people should relate to each other and the kind of society that would be more viable in the longer term for black and white people. The culmination of the 60's positivistic approach and political radicalism resulted in the assertion by Cleaver (1969) and others that black men should view intimate relationships with white women as a means of revenge for slavery, discrimination and the social oppression black people experience. In essence the fault line was between those who favour;

**Assimilation/Integration:** a 'melting pot' society characterised by the merging and eventual erosion of racial, cultural and genetic difference. Here there would not be any distinction between people and everyone would be able to form relationships with whomever they desired. The linkage of assimilation and integration is unfortunate since there are profound differences between the two positions. Assimilation concerns incorporation of the minority population into the social and cultural values of the majority population. On the other hand integration is about combining and adding together different groups to form a whole. This suggests or gives the impression that the majority population would not usurp the minority population but instead it would integrate the different social and cultural values in an expansive rather than in a reductive way. However for those



who espoused such positions within the context of black and white, the concepts tended to be used interchangeably.

**Separatism:** the advocates of this view assert that the history of black and white is characterised by oppression, racism, inequality and discrimination. For black and white people to progress there would need to be a clear separation between them. The idea is that black and white people would be self-contained with little or no contact between them. The expectation would be that people would look within their racial groups to find partners with whom to form an intimate relationship. Interracial relationships would be actively discouraged in order to preserve the racial purity and cultural authenticity of the different groups.

**Multiculturalism:** the advocates of this view accept that a totally integrated racial and cultural society is unlikely to materialise, but they assert that there can be a society that is pluralistic and respectful of the different cultural groups within society. Unlike 'acculturation' that advocated that it is inevitable that in an open society there would inevitably be a process by which a new racial and cultural identity would be forged as the two cultures negotiate with each other and on a basis of equality, multiculturalism restates and to some extent attempts to reinforce differences within a diverse environment. Under the slogan 'equal but different' the emphasis was on a pluralistic society where there is an acceptance and tolerance of racial, cultural and ethnic differences.

**Back to Africa Movement:** the advocates of this view advance a more radical solution than the separatist, though they are from the same stable, they advocate that black people should look towards returning to the land of their ancestors and that black and white should be separated not just within their immediate environment but also geographically.

This somewhat brief overview of these different positions describes the major strands of the discourses in which all relationships between black and white people were discussed in the 1970's, 1980's and into the 1990's.

Although the Back to Africa movement no longer enjoys the same level of support as it once did, some of its advocates have joined forces with the separatist movement in America led by Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam. Importantly for the purpose of this study, political activists, particularly those of the separatists persuasion, interracial relationships were viewed as distraction (for social and political struggle) and destructive for the black population because they would fragment and cause frictions and disunity within the black community.

### **The Relationship and Context**

In 'Interracial marriages in London, *a comparative study*', Kannan (1973) relied less on the voices of the respondents and more on his analysis of the nature and extent of interracial marriages in London. Although entitled interracial, the study included not only black and white relationships but also relationships between black and Asian couples as well. Reference was also made to interfaith relationships. An aspect of Kannan's (1973) discussion that was interesting, because it linked geography and context to the relationship, was that:

'Propinquity in residence has been long recognised as a factor influencing both intra- and intermarriage incidence and selection. Residentially segregated groups tend to intermarry among themselves. Those, which are dispersed, tend to intermarry more frequently. Furthermore, all other factors being equal, intra- and intermarry tend to take place between individuals who reside on the same street or in the same neighbourhood, community and natural area more readily than those who live at a comparatively great distance from one another' (Kannan 1973:155).

The impact and influence of propinquity was not really developed or explored in literature that emerged after Kannan's study. Much of the literature on interracial relationships that emerged after Kannan's study tended to focus not only on the socio-cultural aspects, but also on the kinds of experiences people in the relationship have to confront. For example, in 'Sexual Life between Blacks and Whites', Day (1974) highlighted the experiences of the white women involved in interracial relationships and in particular the impact that the negative reactions had on the women and their

children. While Kannan (1973) and Day (1974) relied on primary data sources for their study Henriques (1975) was interested in an historical cross-national analysis of interracial relationships. In his study, 'Children of Conflict', (a somewhat misleading title) Henriques discussed the problems of interracial relationships from ancient times up to the early part of the 1970's. Basing his study on archive materials his contention was that race mixture, miscegenation, in the United States of America, in Africa and the Caribbean was not a new phenomenon but indeed an aspect of the wider relationship between black and white people. In his analysis Henriques was concerned with the social situations, which precipitated sexual relationships between ethnic groups. He challenged the assumptions that Europeans were physically repugnant and sexually unattracted towards people that were dissimilar in terms of colour and culture to them. '

Similar to Kannan's (1973) qualitative research study, Alibhai-Brown and Montague's (1992) 'The Colour of Love' also looked at relationships that crossed the racial and religious boundaries. The authors attempted to give expression to the experiences of those involved in the relationship. Couples and individuals were able to give an overview of the ways in which people related to their relationship and how they, as individuals or as couples, made sense of the reactions towards them. The study looked both at high profile relationships as well as 'non celebrity' successful and unsuccessful relationships. In their study they concluded that in most cases, for those who go across the racial barrier to form a relationship, they are likely to experience contempt for their sexual liaisons. In their analysis there was unhappiness and a strong dislike towards people involved in interracial relationships and those involved were likely to experience disapproval from significant others and strangers.

In some studies it was the socio-political dimension of the relationship that was of interest (Pinnock 1990; Zack 1995 and Young 1995). In these studies interracial relationships are used as a metaphor or vehicle for looking at and exploring black and white relationship in its wider social, socio-political, and socio-economic context. This suggests relationships

have to carry a far more complex meaning than the people involved necessarily envisaged. As Pinnock (1990) observed:

‘In inter-racial relationships we see the intimate coming together of people who share a bloody history of colonialism and guilt that makes it difficult for us to communicate with one another. As James Baldwin said, ‘the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways and history is literally present in all that we do’ (Pinnock 1990:25).

In ‘Inside the mixed marriage, accounts of changing attitudes, patterns and perceptions of cross-cultural and interracial marriages’, Johnson and Wade (1994) provided the platform for people ‘on the inside’ to give their account of the relationship. In this publication married couples were able to discuss the changing sets of advantages and constraints involved in being in an interracial relationship. The couples in the study spoke about how the interracial aspect of their relationship has imposed a number of restraints on their relationship and their children. The focus was also on exploring the changes that have occurred over the lifetime of the relationships and the ways in which attitudes have changed towards such relationships.

Similarly in ‘Love in Black and White’, (Mathabane and Mathabane 1992), the emphasis is on profiling the development of the couple’s relationship by exploring the individual experience of each partner. This book is innovative in the way it traces the couple’s relationship from its inception and documents the reactions of significant others and strangers and the impact of the negative attitudes expressed towards the couple’s relationship. The couple said they found that: ‘There still is intense pressure not to date or marry across racial lines....individuals who dare to fall in love across the colour line find themselves caught in the cross fire. They’re doubly detested....’ (Mathabane and Mathabane 1992: 259). Similar experiences were highlighted by couples that took part in a study by Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell (1995), ‘Multiracial couples, *Black and White voices*’. In this study 21 interracial couples in a ‘committed’, heterosexual relationship were asked to talk about their experience of being in the relationship.

What was striking about this research was that the thematic approach adopted helped to contextualise the experiences of the participants and the minimal analysis meant the authors achieved the aim of allowing the *voices* of the subjects to come through undiluted. As the authors made clear in their introduction:

‘We think that Americans need to know what people in Black-White interracial couples have to say about their experience, because what they say signifies much about society and contradict societal stereotypes. An understanding that frames their experience with someone else’s terms would obscure their message’ (Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell 1995: 7).

The point being made is important because it suggests that interracial couples’ views had not been included in discussions about their relationship. The same point was echoed in the ‘Colour of love’, Alibhai-Brown & Montague (1992) and in ‘Marriage across frontiers’, Augustine (1989). In these works the focus was on first hand accounts of the participants’ experiences of being in the relationship. Though the contexts of the relationships were discussed early in the book, they connected the couple’s experience to the historical social relationship between black and white people.

As I have already indicated there is a growing literature on interracial relationships per se, (Bode 1989; Augustine 1989; Alibhai Brown and Montague 1992; Mathabane and Mathabane 1992; Henriques 1975), and they have attempted to offer an insight into the ways in which the couple mediate between their everyday world (within) and the social environment in which their relationship is lived (without). These works take the relationship and the interracial aspects of the relationship as an important focus for consideration. However in most instances the analyses were one-dimensional with more emphasis on providing a defence for the relationship rather than an exploration of the couple’s management of their experiences. However some works attempt to provide an account of interracial relationships from the point of view of the individuals/couples involved in the relationship (Tucker, Mitchell-Kernan 1990; Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell 1995; Hilton 1990). But the difficulty with these accounts is that

they begin from the negative reactions of those outside the relationship (Alibhai-Brown & Montague 1992; Billingsley 1992). By taking this as their starting point they set a 'reactive' and negative tone and fail to analyse the interaction in the dyad and how the people in the relationship are perceived by both significant others and strangers. Instead, the couples are allowed to give expression to their experiences without the authors providing an overview or an analysis of the wider implication of their experiences. The result of this non-analytical approach is often a defensive, apologetic and reactive portrayal of the couple's relationship. However what the studies clearly depict is that people involved in interracial relationships are called to account and are asked to justify their reasons for entering the relationship and to explain the nature of their relationship. (Alibhai-Brown & Montague 1992; Mathabane and Mathabane 1992; Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell 1995). A striking example of this, but from a different angle, is Croder and Tolnay's (2000) study. The focus of their study was the perceived decline in the rate of marriage among black women. In their view, explanations for the retreat from marriage among black women have tended to focus on deficits in the quantity and quality of available partners. In their analysis, local rates of intermarriage among black men reduces the likelihood that black women will be married. In addition they suggested intermarriage negatively affects the marital prospects of black women because it affects the pool of economically attractive marriage partners.

### **Autobiographies and Headline News**

Much of the other materials on interracial relationships take the form of journalistic essays, Alibhai-Brown & Montague (1992), or newspaper articles Daily Express (1/3/68), Daily Express (29/8/93) Guardian (1999); Woman Today (6/10/93), Couples (1998) or is briefly mentioned in autobiographical writings, Ferguson (1982) and Bruno (1993). In some cases it is hardly mentioned at all. For example in Mason's (1997) autobiography, 'White Mischief: The True Story of a Woman who Married a Kenyan tribesman', she gave an account of the tribulations and bureaucratic difficulties of trying to get a black man she met on holiday in

Kenya, whom she subsequently married, to join her in England. Throughout her description of her relationship with her new husband she did not mention or explore the reactions or attitudes of significant others and strangers towards the relationship. Rather, she concentrated on the cultural difference between them and their minor idiosyncrasies. What was surprising was that she did not think it important to elaborate on the experience of a White woman marrying a Black Kenyan tribesman and living in Surrey. In this book interracial issues were not acknowledged nor was it considered relevant to highlight the views and opinions expressed by others about the relationship. Similarly Maggie McCune's memoir (1999), 'Till The Sun Grows Cold', following the death of her 29 year old daughter in Nairobi in 1993, made very little play of her daughter's relationship and subsequent marriage to a Sudanese warlord.

### **It's the Children: Culture Wars by Proxy**

The two decades between 1980 and 2000 has been one of the most interesting periods concerning interracial relationships because during the period much of the literature that emerged had little to do with the relationship itself but more about the children from the relationship. For example in 'Ambiguous Ethnicity: Interracial Families in London', Benson (1981); and in 'Mixed Race Children: A study of Identity', Ann Wilson (1987); 'Black, White or Mixed Race', Tizard & Phoenix (1993) as well as in 'The construction of Racial Identity in Children of Mixed Parentage', Katz's (1996); 'Psychology Beyond Western Perspectives' Owusu-Bempah and Howitt's (2000); 'Rethinking Mixed Race', Parker & Song (2001) and 'Mixed Feelings', Alibhai-Brown (2001), references are made to interracial relationships, but in these accounts it is the children who are the focus of the studies. These studies explore the children's identity, and the views that by dint of their dual heritage the children would suffer confusion and uncertainties about who they were and where they belonged. These studies also recognise the difficulties the children experienced as a result of the assumptions and attitudes displayed by others towards them.

It is evident from the literature that children of mixed parentage continue to attract most interest from writers, commentators and researchers. In a society that is divided by race and is based on perceived racial differences (Miles 1990 and Kohn 1996), there is concern about how to define and classify children whose parents are of different ethnicity. (Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Okitikpi 1999; Okitikpi 1999b; Owusu-Bempah & Howitt 2000; Parker & Song 2001 and Alibhai-Brown 2001). The contention according to Maxime (1986); Banks (1992) and Barn (1993) was that children of mixed parentage being looked after by local authorities should be described as 'black' and every effort should be made to link them to their cultural heritage by welfare workers in their capacity as *locus parentis*.

The explanations advanced for such categorisation are numerous, but, at root, they are all variations upon the 'one-drop' rule, in which one-drop of black blood is deemed to render a child non-white, and that being non-white, then renders the child 'black' (Root 1992). Taking their cues from the 'one-drop' rule, but with different intentions from racists, many commentators and academics, Small (1986); Maxime (1986); Banks (1992) and Barn (1993) have attempted to redefine the one-drop rule by affirmation rather than contamination and have argued that because white society regards all non-white people as if they were black, if children of mixed parentage are to develop a strong positive identity, they must be encouraged to proudly embrace their blackness. Although Gill and Jackson (1983) recognise the need for self acceptance on the part of the child, they were dissatisfied with this view that:

'.....although this might well be the way that society regarded such children it may not be the way the children perceive themselves, or how their parents see them' (Gill and Jackson 1983:15).

Yet despite Gill and Jackson's (1983) explanation, Small (1986); Banks (1992) and others made the point of strongly objecting to the term 'mixed race' when referring to mixed race children placed for adoption. Small, in particular made clear his disapproval when he said:

'The concept of mixed race, which has become part of conventional social work language, is misleading because it causes confusion in the



minds of transracial adopters. It can lead them to believe that such children are racially distinct from other Blacks. Consequently, they may neglect the child's needs to develop a balanced racial identity and thereby a well integrated personality. The term 'mixed race' should therefore not be used by administrators or professionals, and should be discouraged amongst people who want to provide homes for *Black* children' (Small, 1986:90).

What Small (1986); Maxime (1986); Banks (1995) and Barn (1993) are in fact proposing, is that the child should be encouraged to develop a black social and cultural identity which effectively denies the existence of a dual racial and other cultural heritage. For these writers the classification of children of mixed parentage as black is part of a broader socio-political project as such thus an extension of what was known in the USA as the culture wars (Shor 1986). As the Association of Black Social Workers & Allied Professionals (ABSWAP) asserted in their submission to the House of Commons Select Committee (1983):

'The most valuable resource of any ethnic group are its children ..... the Black community cannot possibly maintain any dignity in this country ..... if Black children are taken away from their parents and reared exclusively by another race ..... Transracial placement poses the most dangerous threat to the harmonious society to which we aspire ..... It is in essence 'internal colonialism' and a new form of slave trade, this time only Black children are used' (ABSWAP cited by Gilroy 1987:65).

In an attempt to place the views of Small and others in context, Alibhai-Brown and Montague (1992b) note:

'With the development of black political awareness (and some clout) in the 1970's and 1980's, it was decreed that mixed-race children were to be called black'. (Alibhai-Brown and Montague 1992b: 14)

But as Gilroy (1987) pointed out:

'Both ABSWAP and Small (1986) reject the term 'mixed race' not because they believe there is only one 'race' which therefore cannot be mixed, but because the term is said to imply 'the superior race quotient' and carry with it an implicit notion of domination and subordination' (Gilroy 1987:65).

However as Gilroy (1987) warns:

‘they reduce the complexity of self-image and personality formation in the Black (mixed race) child to the single issue of ‘race/colour’ (Gilroy 1987:66) ..... ‘the definition of ‘race’ which informs these arguments elides the realms of culture and biology in the same way as the .... new-right preoccupation with ‘kith and kin’ (Gilroy 1987:65).

In so saying, Gilroy recognises how all too often the discussion about mixed race children quickly moves from racial essentialism through cultural absolutism to an implicit genetic determinism. What can be detected here is the process of inversion in which culture is transformed into genetics and genetics becomes politics (Pitts 2000). Thus the child with ‘one-drop’ having become ‘black’ is ascribed a genetic penchant and a feeling for things African even though, as Gill and Jackson (1983) suggested, the child and his parents may have a very different opinion about themselves.

I would suggest that in this debate the identity of children of mixed parentage serve as a vehicle by which the ‘culture wars’ between the protagonists of this debate continued to be fought. Although the discussions were about the children’s identity and their racial and cultural affiliations and about how ‘separate’ cultures were to be made to remain separate, in reality, at a deeper level, it was also about interracial relationships, about race and culture and about black and white people.

In essence through the discussion about the children, academics and social commentators, significant others and strangers have all:

‘remained locked symbolically in an antagonistic relationship marked out by the symbolism of colour which adds to the conspicuous cultural power of their central Manichean dynamic – black and white. These colours support a special rhetoric that has grown to be associated with a language of nationality and national belonging as well as the languages of race and ethnic identity’ (Gilroy 200:439).

The nature of the discussion about the children suggests that interracial relationships and all that is associated with them is problematic because it is not just about the social context and the experiences of the people concerned, the very language used to define, understand and explain it is also contested.

### **Interracial as an Artistic Genre**

As mentioned previously it is important to note that as well as the scholarly literature there are also other media that have been used for exploring issues to do with interracial relationships. It is often at the popular cultural level, including the arts, cinema and the theatre that the greatest number of materials about interracial relationships are to be found. As Sollors (1997) observed:

‘There is a considerable body of work in all genres in which interracial couples, biracial individuals, or their descendants are crucial, central or otherwise noteworthy’ (Sollors 1997:4).

For example, in plays (*Skins* 1990, *Romeo and Juliet* 1999), the emphasis is on trying to convey the love and passion that is contained in the couple’s relationship as they attempt to live in a world that shuns them. And the film, ‘*Birth of a Nation*’, one of the earliest films ever made that makes reference to interracial relationships, made its opposition to such relationships clear in the way it demonised the black male who was attracted to a white woman.

For example it was noted that:

‘..the most provocative scene in the film concerns a black man in sexual pursuit of the White heroine, played by Lillian Gish (a celebrity known for her *New Woman* style). Rather than succumb to the Black Beast Rapist, she attempts suicide, but is eventually rescued by her father’ (Mumford 1997:159).

From a total starting base and with a different slant two films ‘*Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*’ and ‘*Flame in the Street*’ 1965, approached the subject by attempting to highlight the experiences of the couples concerned as they tried to forge a relationship in a harsh and antagonistic world. In these productions it is possible to detect an assimilationist ethic, or a nascent multiculturalism. In “*A Fight for Jenny*” (1986), a real life dramatisation, the experience of an interracial couple whose life in the Deep South of America in the early 1950’s is explored. It is the couple’s attempt to gain custody of the white woman’s child from a previous monoracial marriage that is the focal point of the film. The film depicts the hatred directed towards the couple, however, it does not fully explore or provide an

explanation for the reactions nor does it engage with the couple's attempt to cope with the negative reactions.

In contrast to these earlier films Spike Lee's 'Jungle Fever' (1994) picked up where Birth of a Nation left off by playing on the sexual stereotypes associated with such relationships. Although Lee's film came after the civil rights movement of the 1960's and the rise of the black power movement in the 1970's and indeed after the culture wars of the 1980's, it is its radical separatist position that links it to the much earlier Birth of a Nation film. Although there is clearly more than 80 years between the two films, what connects them is the negativity with which they both viewed interracial relationships. Also, although they each deploy a different point of focus and they were very much operating within their social period, their central point was unmistakable, in that the relationship was a mismatch and if left unchecked it would destroy the racial and cultural heritage of the couples concerned.

For Spike Lee the starting point is not to demonise the black men, as was the case in the Birth of a Nation, but to ridicule them and treat them as a 'lost sheep' who had fallen prey to the scheming seductiveness of white women. The essence of Lee's assertion was that white and black partners are too preoccupied with the sexual novelty and sexual experimentation to consider the incompatibility of their relationship and the dangers it may cause their respective racial group. In his view to fully comprehend the motivating factor for 'all' interracial relationships it is necessary to recognise the importance of sexual curiosity. There was an explicit advocacy for people to form relationships with partners from the same racial and cultural group. This position is of course part of an old tradition and can be traced back to John Lok (1554); Dexter (1864); Edward Long (1772); Booker T Washington and Marcus Garvey, discussed earlier in chapter one.

In contrast to all the films described so far, three films, 'The Bodyguard' (1990); 'One Night Stand' (1996) and 'US Marshall' (1998), had two main

leads involved in an interracial relationship, yet the story line did not treat the relationship as being different from monoracial relationships or extraordinary in any way. The approach taken, which could be deemed to be 'colour blind', appears to accept such a relationship as any other relationship and there was no attempt to touch on the complications that the relationship generates. It presents what can be described as a 'post-modern' world, which is cosmopolitan, sophisticated and uncompromisingly hybrid. These films depict a world of complex identities and relationships where friendships, equality, mutuality, (race and gender), and fairness are given a different treatment from the usual antagonistic and oppositional approach.

In depicting interracial relationships as normal and not worthy of special comment, this group of films may be vulnerable to the accusation that they are naïve and to some extent racist. The charge could be that they fail to recognise the racial conflicts that exists between black and white and they present an uncomplicated world in which people are judged for who they are rather than their colour. But in 'reality' the feelings that race is able to evoke cannot be underplayed or ignored because they shape the very nature of black and white existence. In taking such a 'colour blind' approach, it could be argued that these films have done little to advance our understanding of the nature of interracial relationships and their non-commentary silence on the issues is part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. The reason for such an assertion can be found in the unspoken rule that an explicit and unequivocal statement about race and racism has to be made in all matters concerning black and white people and failure to do so, renders whatever else that follows, at best naïve and at worst racist Shahrazad Ali 198.

The colour-blind approach, which incidentally is a political and administrative position rather than a scholarly one, is defined within the anti-racist perspective as an approach or way of dealing with black people whereby their racial difference is not acknowledged or taken into account. In other words, they are looked upon as being devoid of colour with the implied assumption that everybody is the same and should therefore be

treated the same. However it could be suggested that far from taking a simple 'colour blind' approach, in these films, the stance is self-consciously and 'ironically' colour blind. In taking this approach these films are deliberately 'normalising' the relationship, this in turn makes them, paradoxically, not just political but in fact politically radical. In framing the relationship in this way it could be argued that these films challenge the audience to witness a world in which interracial relationships, and hence all, relationships between black and white people need not be based on an assumption about a racial hierarchy. They question the predictably degenerative way in which interracial relationships are often presented as they depict a world in which such relationships are normalised.

This approach transgresses an earlier orthodoxy, which appears to hold that black and white intimate relationships could not be portrayed on film in the same way as mono-racial relationships. The approach has been dismissed and criticised as being unrepresentative of the experiences of people in such relationships, and it has caused some commentators to chide the film industry for portraying interracial relationships in such a positive light. (Shahrazad Ali 1989). One of the chief protagonists, Shahrazad Ali, expressed the view, shared by others, Biye (1994), that there is a need to critique the positive representations of interracial relationships in films and other mediums. She and others argue that these positive representations do not adequately emphasise the inevitable fissures and damage that such relationships cause both to the families of the couples involved and to their respective racial groups. For these commentators, interracial relationships are abhorrent and the unworkable nature of such relationships needs to be acknowledged and publicised. For them the relationship is detrimental to the racial and cultural integrity of the couple's respective communities. As Biye (1994) asserted:

'In billboard and bus posters, on TV commercials, fleeting on an ever growing list of dramas, soaps and comedies – episodes of *Surgical Spirit*, *Soldier, Soldier*, *A Touch of Frost*, *All or Nothing At All*, *The Bill* etc, - the promotion of miscegenation spreads untempered. And what do we do except empathise when we hear constant conversations on the bus, the tube, in various meeting halls and at work, vitriolically berating the trend?' (Biye 1994:5)

she continues:

‘Whites may say in their defence that miscegenation does occur in large numbers in Britain today. A very true point. But these numbers do, in fact, remain in minority. To depict it as the norm or suggest it is desirable shows a not uncommon lack of understanding or care for what the black public really feels. And it is as much a symptom of ours that some of us are moved to seek an antithesis to ourselves for a mate’. (ibid)

It is the ability of the relationship to evoke such negative views that led Sollors (1997) to comment that ‘Black–White interracial love....is a subject likely to elicit censure and high emotion, or at least a certain nervousness’. (Sollors 1997:4) The film ‘Last Dance’ (1999) challenged the censure and nervousness that Sollors observed by depicting a relationship between two young people whose love for each other transcended the racial divide. The film was about a young black man and a young white woman from the ‘hood’ whose friendship developed into an intimate relationship. Although there were set speeches that picked up on the negative attitudes, censure and deep unhappiness about such relationships, the film was quite bold in challenging the orthodoxy about interracial relationships. It highlights and discusses the issues and concerns that have been expressed by others about such relationships, however, unlike Spike Lee’s ‘Jungle Fever’ it was unafraid to allow the boy to get his girl.

There have been a number of television programmes in the UK that have attempted to explore interracial relationships, The Bill, East-Enders. Many of them concentrate on the couples’ relations with their immediate neighbours and the consequences of the negative reactions towards them. The first programme that looked at the relationship in a way that was sociological was the infamous ‘Man Alive’ programme (1968). It was infamous because it showed a black groom kissing his white bride following their wedding at their local church. The controversy it raised resulted in the Radio Times refusing to use the image of the bride and groom kissing on its front cover.

### **United in Conflict**

What these artistic representations of interracial relationships reveal is that the relationship is considered significant and worthy of attention and comment, (Biye 1994; Sollors 1997) and that its existence needed to be depicted and an attempt made to locate it in a social world that is racially and culturally diverse. What is evident from analysing the themes pursued in these different representations is the lack of cohesion and agreement over how to treat the subject and the polarised views that the relationship engenders.

What are not lost on the authors of these dramas are the conflicts, social and familial fissures and the powerful emotions that the relationship is able to evoke. Indeed some films, novels and theatre productions relied heavily on the ability of the relationship to raise such strong feeling in the audience.

### **Interracial in Popular Fiction**

Interracial relationships have also been a subject that novelists have tackled but as Nabokov (cited in Mumford 1997) observed, the treatment of the relationship in novels is not objective because there are underlying tensions and reader expectations that authors appear to adhere to. In his view there is the belief that the theme of a Negro-White intermarriage which is a complete and unglamorous success resulting in lots of children and grandchildren is utterly taboo.

Nabokov's point was vividly illustrated in Andre Brinks' (1976) novel, 'An Instant in the Wind'. The central plot of the novel concerns a white woman, and her black male slave. The story revolves around a couple's attempt to live in an environment that is hostile to their relationship. While Brinks at least laid bare the difficulties that the couple encountered, in 'The Mixers' (Gicheru 1991), every effort is made to avoid the potential scandal that the relationship would have cost the young couple concerned. Here, the author did not allow the young black man and his young white woman friend to go beyond mere friendship even though it was clear that an intimate relationship was what was uppermost in their minds. Rather, the author



settled for a platonic relationship between the young couple. Although there is every reason to believe that there were emotional, physical and sexual feelings between the couple they were not given the opportunity to explore the dynamism that was generated. The representation of the relationship was not of course devoid of a context and it is the context, with its pervasive constraining elements, to which Nabokov was drawing attention. Even novelists who challenged the orthodoxy by depicting a black man who actually gets his 'white girl', there is still reliance, to some extent, on reinforcing the preconceptions. This was vividly illustrated by Mae West's (1937) novel, 'The Constant Sinners'.

In the novel (*The Constant Sinners*), the white woman showed no reservation about the views others may have about her and her relationship with a black man, he was making money as a prize-fighter, that was all that mattered to her. The relationship between Babe Gordon and the black pugilist, Money Johnson, was not complicated at all. Here the author was transparently stereotypical in her depiction of the couple's relationship and their experiences. For example, although the black partner was portrayed as a caring man who loved his white partner, they were still presented as caricatures, because he is a hoodlum from 'lowlife' Harlem and she was; 'a broad who would not have known what a moral was if it could be made to dance naked in front of her....seducing and discarding lovers according to whim' (West 1937: 52).

From a totally different starting premise and 52 years after West's novel, the character, Keith (a white male) in Martin Amis' (1989) 'London Fields', said:

'the enigma was this: How come you often saw black guys with white girls (always blond on their arm? always presumably for maximum contrast – gain) what is it about them? And never saw white guys with black girls?' (Amis 1989:5).

This point was never fully explored in *London Fields* whereas 'Atomised', by Michel Houellebecq (2000), created considerable controversy in France on publication. The novel is about two-step brothers and their contrasting

lives, one a molecular biologist, a thinker and idealist and the other a libertine. Although a fictional work, the novel tries to dissect our atomised society, where religion has been superseded by meaningless encounters and fluid new age philosophies. The important point here is that, in his endless search for hedonistic fulfilment, one of the brothers (Bruno)

‘looked through a copy of *swing*-‘pleasure is right’.... he had bought at Angers. He had no intention of really replying to any of the small ads; he did not feel up to *A gangbang* or a *sperm* fest. The women seeking single men were generally looking for black guys and, in any case, he did not come close to the minimum size they required’ (Houellebecq 2000:118).

Again the image being presented by Houellebecq, through the character Bruno, is a familiar one. It plays on the sexualisation of colour and the assumed sexual prowess of black men. The assertion is that women want men with ‘well proportioned’ sexual organs and for this they look towards black men.

While Amis asked the question Houellebecq dispensed with the euphemism and made the connection between race and sex. This was, to a large extent, the phenomenon for which Bastide drew attention in 1961 and it was an area he was trying to explore. By asserting that an interracial relationship cannot be taken as it is, because for many people it still signifies lust a transient relationship concerned primarily with sex and devoid of emotional attachment or indeed affection. In Updike’s (1994) ‘Brazil’, the young couple in the relationship descend into, what may be described as, the underbelly of human existence. The story is about a young couple in an interracial relationship who attempt to go against the white girl’s family’s wishes and social convention, because of their love for each other. However because of the vehement opposition to such a relationship, they found privation, violence, captivity and poverty instead. The proposition the book was trying to advance is that significant others and strangers do have an important influence on how people live their lives. In this particular case the impact of significant others and strangers proved far too powerful and damaging for the couple and their relationship to such an extent that ultimately, they could not survive or exist with that level of negative

onslaught. This again reinforces Nabokov's succinctly expressed view that social taboos govern much of the way in which interracial relationships are discussed and explored in novels, and, by extension, in the wider society.

The novel, 'A Respectable Trade' (1996), (mentioned previously) adapted for TV in Spring 1997, set in Bristol of 1787 at the height of the slave trade, explored the relationship between a white woman who is married to a crude, but up-and-coming trader, and an African slave to whom she was required to teach English and enough 'manners' to enable him to be sold on for profit as a house servant. With little sentimentality, it tells the story of how the couple reconcile their feelings towards each other and the harsh realities of their social environment. Similarly, in Catherine Cookson's (1998) 'Colour Blind' a white woman from the North of England, having been away for sometime, returns to her family with her black husband. An early 1900's period drama, the reaction of the woman's family was negative but the more substantive point, which forms an interesting analytical backdrop, was the impact of the external and significant others on the relationship and the extent to which couples are able to cocoon themselves and withstand prolonged and systematic negative reactions.

In 'Crossing the River' Phillips (1993), as with other novels it is the intricacies of the dyadic relationship and the way the couples manage their relationship in the face of hostile reactions they encounter from significant others and strangers that is the central focus of the story.

In a more urban and contemporary setting Adebayo's (1997) 'Some kind of Black', addressed the relationship from the point of view of an Oxbridge educated black man who moves from one interracial relationship to another. Here social class is mixed with race and laced with gender issues. Still, what is highlighted, and became an important question that had to be considered, was to what extent colour should determine with whom one forms a relationship and the pressures from friends and families to conform to what is considered as a mono-racial bliss. Again, in a very similar way to the artistic representations discussed earlier, these fictional representations

also rely on the emotional and psychological impact that the relationship is able to evoke.

The authors understand that the introduction of interracial relationships can trigger emotional dynamics that are able to recreate the uncertainties and difficulties significant others and strangers have about such relationships in 'real life'. In their different ways the academic materials and the fictional depictions of interracial relationships both recognise the impact the relationship can have on 'others' and the feelings it stirs in people. But despite the similar evocation of the emotion that the relationship is capable of releasing, the earlier depiction of the relationship of the 1930's differs from that of the 1990's in a number of ways. Firstly, the earlier depiction relied on a demonic representation and an assertion of brutality and unnaturalness, while in the 1990's the relationship is sexualised, in some instances and ignored or treated with suspicion in other cases. Secondly, and perhaps in the realm of Foucault's episteme notion, the wider social relationship between black and white people had gone through profound changes and the prevailing discourse does not allow for brash and crude depictions of black people as was the case in the earlier period.

### **The Magazine Rack**

Increasingly there are magazines (*Interracial monthly*, *New People*, *AMEA network*, *Inter-Race*, *Society of Interracial Families*), which cater specifically for people involved in interracial relationship. The differences in style notwithstanding, these magazines share a similar perspective on interracial relationships, starting from the premise that the relationship itself is not a problem, although the reactions of significant others towards the couple and their children may be. All of them aim to provide a forum in which people involved in interracial relationships can express their views about the kinds of problems they encounter as a result of being in the relationship. They are given advice about emotional and personal difficulties, and given information about how to enable children from the relationship to develop a positive bi-racial identity. The magazines are responsive to the overriding concerns of the contributors, which are often

about the attitudes and behaviour of those outside the relationship to interracial couples and the way children from the relationship are viewed and labelled. Other mainstream magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *O K*, *Company* and the recently launched *Couples* (1998), periodically run features that specifically explore interracial relationships.

As well as these adult magazines, teen magazines such as *17* and *Sugar* have also touched on the issues of interracial relationships. In these magazines the relationship regularly appears in the letters page in the guise of young girls seeking advice about what to do because their parents do not approve of their black boyfriend, or their friends are not supportive or are hostile towards them for having a black boyfriend.

### **Interracial.Com**

In addition to the fictional novels, magazines and scholarly literature there is also an increasing number of Internet web sites dedicated to matters to do with interracial relationships. Some of these sites attempt to provide an open forum for people in interracial relationships, as well as people of mixed parentage to exchange ideas about their personal experiences. Some sites are structured and take a discursive approach and follow an ongoing debating format. Others are more 'informative' providing advice, information and a supportive environment for people involved in interracial relationships. There are a number of pornographic sites that provide both hard-core and soft-core interracial materials. Putting aside the substantive debate about the nature of pornography, the availability of such sites suggests an interest in what is perceived as the sexual frisson inherent in such a relationship and that it is possible to turn such a relationship into a form of objectified sexual fascination and interest. Birkett (1999) in her Guardian article 'Let us have a proper porn' noted that:

'Pornography is a challenge to Britain's conservative censorship lobby. It's a truly popular form of entertainment, which threatens established prejudices, often pioneering sexual practices considered taboo. Gay and interracial sex have long been prolific in porn when absent almost everywhere else, prompting feminist commentator

Paula Webster to say: 'Pornography implies that we could find all races, genders, ages, and shapes sexually interesting' (Birkett 1999: 5).

Although the discussion is about pornography and censorship in Britain, Birkett's assertion, supported by Webster, is that the pornography industry recognises the existence and potential of interracial relationships and that, whilst the idea of a sexual relationship between black and white people is discouraged in the mainstream society, pornography pushes at the boundaries challenging the assumptions underlying the views about such relationships. While the underlying point being made is understandable there is a flaw in the argument because of the bondage, sexual violence, humiliation and subordination inherent in most pornography. A more serious minded site (<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~kdown/multi.html>) provided a comprehensive list of publications and useful information not just about the relationship itself but also about all aspects of interracial relationships. For example it provides a list of publications that address the social experiences of children from interracial relationships, it documents abstracts that explores trans-racial adoption and its implications, it highlights people in public life who are from interracial backgrounds, it lists newspapers and magazines that have tackled interracial issues. It provides lists of films, television programmes and theatre productions that have used the relationship as the main topic. The important point to note is that whilst many of the web sites about interracial relationships attempt to provide engaging and accessible information, the discursive papers and data available are often idiosyncratic and polemical. As a rule the Internet is a free access medium where anybody can express his or her views and opinions without censure. As a result much of the materials on the web that look at interracial relationships will not have been subjected to the same rigorous screening as the academic literature. As with the scholarly literature, the highest number of internet web sites are American, and they tend to be preoccupied with their 'internal debates' about how such relationships should be viewed and where such relationships are to be located within American society, and the impact of such relationships in a pluralistic but racially divided society.

What the availability of these sites suggests is that interracial relationships are a major area of interest not just for commentators and academics but also certain kind of entrepreneurs who see a market for interracial materials. Whilst these sites provide a forum for people who are involved in the relationship and people outside the relationship to discuss and exchange ideas, the negative comments left behind in many of the sites suggests that interracial relationships are still viewed with considerable scepticism and indeed antipathy.

### **A Problematised Relationship**

Much of the current literatures and materials attempt to have an analysis of the relationship, which emphasises people's experiences of being in the relationship and although reactions of people outside the relationship is highlighted and considered, it is rarely analysed in any great detail (Ferguson 1982; Roots 1992; Mathabane and Mathabane 1992).

The implication being that people involved in the relationship are rational beings whose lives are structured as a result of their circumstances. They make choices, however limited and ill considered, it is their *personal* interpretation of their experiences that gives meaning to their existence and therefore shape their beliefs and motivations.

This current approach is in tune with contemporary discourse about social relations and the shifting paradigm of 'truths' and 'reality' (Foucault 1988). The point being made is that current literature and depictions of interracial relationships, both in Britain and in America, appear less critical of the existence of the relationship and more willing in their depiction of interracial relationships, to entertain the idea that they might be positive relationships. Part of the explanation for the change in the way this relationship is explored is that much of the recent literature has not taken a pathological view of the relationship from the outset (Zack 1995; Gill 1995 and Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell 1995). Instead they have pursued, unintentionally perhaps, an approach which problematises (this is paradoxical, but very post modern) all previously taken for granted popular

and scientific categorisations of the relationship as no more than linguistic constructs. In other words, the ways in which the relationship is currently depicted and categorised in some quarters suggests an unquestioning acceptance of an individual's freedom to pursue their 'love interest' with whomever they choose. There is an acceptance, and indeed a celebration, of diversity and the subsequent hybridity that such relationships portend.

### **Conclusion**

What is interesting from this review is that since the development of the initial contact between black and white people interest has been shown in the nature of interracial relationships. Although I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that there is a dearth of British material on interracial relationships, there are extensive North American materials. The situation is changing in that there is a growing literature concerning the experiences of British people involved in such relationships. What is striking is that it is only fairly recently that people involved in interracial relationships have begun to produce first hand accounts of their experience of the relationship. Their approach is, of course, more autobiographical than analytical, but they have been able to convey in a lucid way, the attitudes of others towards them and their relationship. They also discuss the emotional, psychological and social cost of being in the relationship.

What is evident from the literature is that people involved in these relationships are increasingly moving from being the objects of study to being subjects of self-reflection. Although a number of people are giving first hand accounts of their experiences there is still a lack of material to explain the strategies people involved in interracial relationships use to counterbalance the negative reactions of significant others and strangers.

Overall what has emerged in considering the growing and diverse body of literature and other materials about interracial relationships is that changing times have brought about different ways of exploring the relationship. For example the underlying nature of black and white relationships and the



research instruments used to investigate the relationship are influenced by the prevailing episteme, and this is evident both in popular literature and in the scientific works observed. As I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, because of the historical connection between black and white people, the prevailing norms and ideas have had a major effect both on the perceptions and in the way interracial relationships are researched. It is evident from the literature that as there have been shifts in political, economic and social outlook so these have been accompanied by a changed relationship between black and white people.

It is possible to periodise, characterise and contextualise these shifts and patterns as they have occurred and to analyse their impact on the way interracial relationships are conceptualised, researched and discussed. This literature review has shown that there is a lack of material about the strategies people involved in interracial relationship use to counterbalance the negative reactions towards their relationship. Furthermore there has been very little analysis of many of the assumptions that are held about the relationship and there is little evidence that the views some people hold about the relationship have gone through any process of close scrutiny.

In chapter three, below, I shall set out and discuss in brief the popular explanations offered about interracial relationships by significant others and strangers. Following the presentation of the findings (chapter five-part I), I shall then revisit these popular explanations (chapter six-part II), to discover whether, in the light of the data collected, they related to respondent's experiences.

## Chapter Three

### Popular Explanations of Interracial Relationships

#### Introduction

This brief chapter elaborates on the popular explanations often asserted about interracial relationships. The explanations are derived from an interrogation of the implicit and explicit accounts of the motivations of those entering such relationships within the literature and in popular discourse.

I chose to explore these explanations in the interviews because they continue to dominate the contemporary discourse of interracial relationships. Furthermore because these definitions of the situation presume to describe a social reality they are often all too real in their consequences.

#### Popular Explanations

Both academic and common sense theorisations of the motivations of people entering interracial relationships have tended to characterise them in the following seven ways:

*i. Racial denial and self hatred:* Shahrazad Ali (1989) has argued that the black partner's embrace (both metaphorical and actual) of a white partner represents a denial of their blackness. This view owes much to the writings of Franz Fanon (1952) and in particular to his idea that the black partner entering the relationship is possessed of an unconscious desire to become *white*, and that this can only be realised through forming a relationship with a white partner. This is a view shared by Achille who, in his report to the interracial conference in 1949, asserted that:

'Insofar as truly interracial marriage is concerned, one can legitimately wonder to what extent it may not represent for the coloured spouse a kind of subjective consecration to wiping out

himself and in his own mind the colour prejudice from which he has suffered so long.....' (Achille LT 1949 in Fanon 1952:9)

He continued:

'Some men or some women, in effect, by choosing partners of another race, marry persons of a class or a culture inferior to their own whom they would not have chosen as spouses in their own race and whose chief asset seems to be assurance that the partner will achieve denaturalisation and 'de-racialisation'. (ibid)

*ii. The quest for cultural inclusion and social mobility:* Wade (1993) and Warren and Johnson (1994) have argued that a black person seeking inclusion in the socio-cultural mainstream of predominantly white societies may express that desire through a willingness to conform, and in some cases over-conform, with the dominant values of that society and the implicit 'ranking' of racial groups within it, by forming a relationship with a white partner.

*iii. The quest for economic mobility:* Ferguson (1982) has highlighted the often argued point that a black person seeking economic advancement in a predominantly white society may attempt to achieve this by acquiring a white partner. This explanation is based upon the demonstrable reality of the poor economic circumstances of a majority of black families in the UK, vis-à-vis their white counterparts and racial discrimination in the job market (Modood et al 1997; Jones et al 1998). This argument holds that certain black people, particularly black men, believe that if they adopt the trappings of 'whiteness', an inter-racial partnership being key amongst them, and minimise their 'black' affiliations, they will be better able to penetrate the white economic world and, as a result, gain access to enhanced career and business opportunities.

*iv. Sexual and colour curiosity:* This explanation holds that sexual and colour curiosity, with its attendant fantasies about 'black' and 'white' sexuality, is the key motivating factor in the formation of interracial relationships. This view is articulated most clearly in Bastide's (1961) essay *Dusky Venus and Black Apollo* and forms the central motif in Spike

Lee's film *Jungle Fever*. These sexualisations of colour, in which fanciful, exotic sexual characteristics and possibilities are attributed to the other race partner, are deemed to be operating at both the conscious and unconscious levels. The thrill of transgressing implicit social taboos and legal prohibitions in societies where there are anti-miscegenation laws, it is argued, may lead to a craving for that which is mysterious and prohibited. Wolfe (1998), for example, observes that the American State of Georgia has always been integrated after dark despite legal and normative prohibition. Thus, interracial relationships are destined to take on a predominantly fetishised form in which there is little likelihood of an authentic meeting of persons. Similarly Gill (1995) suggests that the basis of such relationships is rooted in racialised sexual fantasy rather than a 'meeting of persons'.

*v. Revenge for racial and social oppression:* Cleaver (1968) has argued that, as a result of the historical legacy of slavery, colonialism, racial discrimination and social oppression, black men may become involved in interracial relationships as a means of avenging the injustices, degradation and oppression that has befallen not just them as individuals but black people as a race. In this account, the interracial relationship is the forum in which black men demonstrate to white men that they now have the social and sexual power to appropriate their most prized possession, white women. Moreover, having appropriated the white women, black men then proceed to defile 'them' thus reasserting their mastery, as men.

*vi. Geographical propinquity and shortage of same race partners:*

Kannan (1973), Sister Lynn (1953) and Kennedy (1943) maintain that as black and white people find themselves sharing the same social space they will inevitably develop a closer relationship and become more comfortable in each other's company. However the central tenet of this explanation is that the combination of geographical propinquity coupled with the shortage of partners from within the ethnic group makes interracial relationships more likely.

*vii. Shared interests:* This explanation holds that the shared interests common to both partners is the motivation for the relationship. It suggests that rather than being motivated by the kinds of socio-political factors identified above, in fact those involved in the relationship find that their interests, views and attitudes coincide with those of their partner, and this shared interest provides the basis for the relationship, Duck (1993).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the key popular explanations, and their suggested sources and it suggests that these popular explanations are discussed openly by significant others and strangers as ‘commonsensical’ even though there has been no evidence that they have ever been systematically scrutinised to ascertain their generalisability. Following the discussion of the methodology, research strategy (methods) and the processes involved in conducting the study, (chapter four), and having presented the overall findings in chapter five, chapter six revisits these popular explanations and discusses the extent to which they corresponded to the experiences of the respondents.

## Chapter Four

### Research Methodology and Research Strategy.

*As inquirers and researchers, we create worlds through the questions that we ask coupled with what we and others regard as reasonable responses to our questions' (Steier 1991:1)*

### The Research Strategy (A Qualitative Approach)

#### Introduction:

This study, as previously set out, aimed to investigate the way in which people involved in interracial relationships experience and manage their relationship. It is also interested in exploring the reactions of the respondents towards the popular explanations presented in chapter three. Because of the nature and focus of the study, the approach adopted was qualitative. Prior to conducting the interviews I designed an interview schedule (see appendix i), to elicit data of sufficient range and depth to allow the opportunity to explore respondents' experiences of being in an interracial relationship and their reaction to the popular explanations of the motivations for such relationships. As already indicated in chapter two, much has been written about interracial relationships but the most persuasive accounts tend to be those that utilised qualitative strategies. One of the reasons for their persuasiveness is that they allowed the research subjects to speak at length about their experiences (Rosenblatt, Karis & Powell 1995; Mathabane and Mathabane 1992; Root 1992; Alibhai-Brown & Montague 1992.) Importantly, these studies have given us access to the 'meanings' people involved in interracial relationships ascribed to their relationships and the ways in which they have made sense of and managed them. As McNeil (1990) has observed:

'If we are to explain some event in the social world, our explanation has to take into account what people involved feel and think about it. We must not regard them simply as helpless puppets'. (McNeil 1990:119)

Wilkinson (1986) made a similar point when she suggested: '*If you want to know why a person did what they did, ask them, they might just tell you*'. (Wilkinson 1986:5) Thus, my research strategy aimed to identify the

thoughts and feelings experienced by people involved in the relationship, and the attendant 'vocabularies of meaning' ascribed to such thoughts and feelings. The approach used to operationalise the schedule owed a great deal to Silverman's (1993) 'interview conversational' technique. Using prompts, which set out the theme for discussion, and probes, which either redirected the conversation or pursued a particular line of thought in depth. The interview schedule 'guided the interview conversation' and helped to focus respondents' responses.

This approach has its roots in phenomenological and ethnomethodological and 'interpretative' approaches developed in the social sciences by Garfinkel (1984) and Schutz (1976). These methods of investigation 'share a set of subjective assumptions about the nature of lived experiences and social order' (Holstein and Gubrium 1994: 262). My approach did not share the positivistic method of investigation, which aimed to establish law like generalisable cause and effect relations (Popper (1959). Because the subjectivist approach to social phenomena is concerned to investigate the social construction of meaning and the consequences of such social constructions for 'social action' (Giddens 1976, 1994) it rejects:

'the belief that the methods used in mathematizing science of the external world were possessed of some inherent virtue and that all other sciences would achieve comparable success if they followed the example and accepted these methods as their model. ...It became dangerous because it combined with the second assumption that the methods of the natural sciences were a criterion for theoretical relevance in general' (Voeglin cited in Levy 1981: 3).

This has strong echoes of Merleau-Ponty's (1965) early criticism of positivistic and empiricist approaches to understanding human behaviour. Merleau Ponty was concerned with the way in which a social science informed by a philosophy of subjectivity can explore social existence in which the subject's *being-in the world (dasein)* represents the prime data from which an understanding of human existence can be gained. As Howe (1987) has observed:

'Meanings are generated within particular social contexts, such as marriage, the family, the school and the legal process. We also learn to recognise and understand ourselves in these intimate social settings.

Our reality is therefore socially constructed' (Howe 1987 cited in Barratt 1993:29).

This perspective injected a new dynamism into the social sciences because not only did it validate human subjectivity and the ascription of meaning by human subjects as a legitimate concern of the social sciences, it also introduced to the social sciences the Kantian notion that human reflexivity, the capacity to reflect upon one's own social condition and, as a result, to strive to change that condition, was central to the study of social life. It recognised, in other words, that subjects have agency, (Giddens 1984) and that in as much as they are *acted upon* by the world, they also act upon it.

### **The Research Instruments**

The point being advanced by Merleau-Ponty (1965); Giddens (1984) and Holstein and Gubrium (1994) was that far from ignoring the subjectivity of the subjects, its expression in essence becomes a *prima facie* data to illuminate their 'lived' experiences. So in devising a research strategy and the research instruments with which to operationalise it, I strove to produce an account, which was, in as far as it was possible, true to the research subject's *being in the world*. However, there are a number of problems with research strategies, which attempt to derive the bulk of their data on the basis of the research subjects' subjective experience of situations and the events that shape their lives. For example:

- (a) Qualitative research is necessarily selective in the data it collects. While it is committed to letting the research subject 'tell it like it is' what is told may vary from day to day or week to week as a result of changed feelings about oneself, others, the world or the weather. Thus when, as researchers, we engage the subject and ask them to 'tell it like it is' to us, how are we to know that the story we are told, at that particular juncture, is the authentic, 'true' account?
- (b) What is 'told' may be internally contradictory, in which case we are faced with the problem of which account we should believe?



- (c) The account may also be at odds with verifiable social realities ‘out there’ in the world. Are we then, as researchers, to accept the word of the research subjects because despite the contradictory evidence they believe something different?

Implicit within qualitative ethnomethodological research is the assumption that research subjects not only understand the significance of their experience, but that they are able to articulate both their experiences and its significance to the interviewer without prompting. Also they are able to express themselves in conversation with the researcher in a way that enables meaning to be ‘teased out’ from their experience. Ethnomethodology as a radical form of qualitative research, for example, is particularly opposed to such intrusiveness by the investigator.

Moreover within the literature there was a well-established and influential perspective (Waddington 1974 and Solomon 1998) that holds that subjects bring to the interview, in both research and clinical settings, a wealth of ‘unconscious’ material. Similarly the Marxist notion of ‘false consciousness’ alerts us to the ways in which ‘ideology may distort our perceptions of ‘reality’ and how people have an inaccurate perception of themselves through the internalisation of social structures (Waddington 1974). The interpretation of these materials constitutes a legitimate line of enquiry upon which to base conclusions about motivations and the dynamics of the relationships. Thus qualitative research is under pressure to include a psychodynamic and critical dimension with which to understand the inter- and intra-psychic processes which serve to distort the subject’s perception of self and others (Solomon 1998). From a different perspective but following the same theme Flyvbjerg (2001) highlighted Lowentín’s concerns about social science when he opined that:

‘It is frightening to think that social science is in the hands of professionals who are so deaf to human nuance that they believe people do not lie themselves (and to others) about the most freighted aspects of their own lives’ (Lowentín’s 1995 quoted in Flyvbjerg 2001:2).

Taken together, the criticism raises important questions about whether, and to what extent, the responses of research subjects constitute an authentic voice and whether the subjects really know themselves to the extent that they are able to provide the researcher with an accurate account of their lives. This, in turn, raises the question of whether the subjects are, in fact, the best people to tell us about their lives and their experiences or whether a more accurate account might be gained through talking to the people around them. However, if one was to follow this line of argument to its logical conclusion, one must regard respondents as ignorant and poorly informed about their 'own' lives. And this was, of course, precisely the point of the criticism levelled by black and feminist critiques of the social sciences that, they maintain, have denigrated the subjective experiences and denied their ability to represent themselves and their interests in their own voices. As May (1993) observed:

'Given this feedback of research into social life, researchers have to make connections between the language which is used in social theory and the methods of interpretation which people already use in attributing meanings to their social environment. Social theory, in other words, must take account of people's everyday understandings'.  
(May 1993:26)

This was more Schutzian than Freudian, in that the everyday experiences and language that people use have to be both the starting point from which the research takes its form and within which the interview has to be conducted. So in essence the research instrument has to place the subject's life experiences and their everyday world into a framework that was meaningful and understandable to both themselves and the social scientists.

### **The Necessity and Fragility of Human Subjectivity**

We may willingly accept, with the phenomenologists, ethnomethodologists, black activists and feminists critique as well as post-modernists that the research subject's subjectivity must be central to any account of their lives. We may also accept that most people, most of the time, are not deceived, self-deceiving or deceitful and that their lives will make sense if we only have the patience and wit to hear what they are saying (Matza 1964).

However, given the limitations of human subjectivity, identified above, and of research strategies, which draw upon such subjectivity as the sole source of data, we are inevitably drawn towards some interpretation of the accounts offered by research subjects. Moreover, in order to establish the ‘honesty or truthfulness’ of these accounts some triangulation, i.e. some recourse to alternative, complementary data sources with which to verify material generated in interviews with research subjects is not only important but also imperative. It will be evident from this assertion that this author is not persuaded by the claims of recently popular forms of relativistic subjectivism which falls roughly within the domain of deconstructionism, post-modernism or the new historicism. The danger is that in their insistence on the validity of all human subjectivity, however much it might appear to be at odds with ‘social reality’, and their denial of the significance of inter-subjectivity, (Habermas 1987) any analysis of experience or generalisability of such experiences would be rendered meaningless. And, as Said (1993) and Pitts (2000) further warned to accept the validity of all human subjectivity irrespective of the prompting of social reality may presage a collapse into nihilism. In other words, Pitts and Said’s repudiation of unmediated subjectivity was in essence a plea for interpretation and this was an important aspect of this study.

### **The Problem of Interpretation**

In arguing that triangulation and interpretation are necessary accompaniments to ethnographic investigation, it was the case that a major criticism of qualitative research in the social sciences has been its routine recourse to interpretation in the face of inconsistent, contradictory or unverifiable data (Blaikie 1993). As I have argued above, this criticism was, in part, rooted in a misunderstanding of the objectives of social science. However, as I also mentioned earlier, to view the qualitative approaches to social research in this way was to misunderstand both its nature and its promise. Nonetheless, those mounting such a criticism might reasonably criticise the present thesis on the grounds that it represents no more than the arbitrarily assembled anecdotes of people engaged in interracial relationships and that, as such, it was unlikely to advance our

understanding of the social phenomenon of interracial relationships in Britain in the current era. In response one would argue that the problem was not about the interpretation because this was a necessary aspect of all scientific investigation in both the natural and the social sciences. The issue was, rather, whether the interpretation was reasonable in the light of the available data, and whether it was made explicit that what was being presented was an interpretation of the data and whether it was even-handed, offering alternative interpretations of ambiguous data.

This said, it behoves the social researcher to interpret systematically and within strict boundaries, concerning what might and might not be deduced from any particular response. In this thesis, therefore, there was no attempt to 'deconstruct' or provide a discourse analysis of the responses of the research subjects, either psychoanalytically or in Marxist terms. There are several reasons for this. Principally I felt neither competent in the area of psycho-dynamics nor confident that, in this study, scrutiny of the inner worlds of the research subjects would be either practical or helpful. As to false consciousness, this suggestive theoretical construct has the disadvantage that we can find ourselves in a situation of infinite regress when we attempt to operationalise it.

In essence, the ideology underpinning my approach was informed by Psatha's (1973) view that people's reality and their lived experience are of crucial importance. The adoption of the qualitative methodology acknowledges the ontological and epistemological position that: 'People's knowledge, views, understanding, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality.....' (Mason 1996:39).

In accepting the principle of subjectivity the criticism still remains that there is a danger that my analysis and interpretation are more about my personal bias rather than an objective exploration and description of the data. This, of course, was Borg's (1981) point with regard to the response effect, where interviewers seek out answers to support their ideas or the

respondents reply in such a way as to reinforce what they *think* the researcher wants to hear. As a black African male interviewing both black African and Afro-Caribbean men and white women I was aware of the dynamics that the racial, cultural and gender similarities and differences can create. I was also acutely aware of how my presence could adversely affect not just the interview process but also the quality of the information obtained. As a result I believe my sharpened sense of awareness of the dynamics involved enabled me to work with the complexities of trying to obtain peoples' experiences, while at the same time maintaining a degree of distance and due regard and respect for people's experiences.

When interviewing the women respondents I was also aware of my maleness and the potential misunderstanding of my intentions because of the intimate nature of the subject under discussion. However both my professional role as a social worker and my role as a researcher have taught me the importance of recognising sexism, inequalities and oppressive practices and how they are manifested. The need not to abuse the position of trust that the interview situation created and the need to obtain data for the research enabled me to stay focused and to keep the relationship at the appropriate level.

As well as acknowledging the complexities of the interview process I paid close attention to the research instrument (interview schedule) so that respondents had the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences. The interview strategy I adopted, 'interview conversation' technique, was based upon a protracted interaction with research subjects. At times I summarised what I believed they have been telling me in order to 'check out' with them what I 'thought I was hearing'. There was an ever-present danger inherent in such 'intrusive' techniques, that the 're-presentation' of feelings and experiences can shade into the 're-construction' of those feelings and experiences in accordance with the explanations I was exploring. As a result I have only resorted to this technique when I have been confused, or uncertain, about what I am being told. In the main my interventions were geared to getting research subjects to elaborate and supply further information about the questions on the interview schedule. In doing this, I,

in almost all cases, limited myself to 'what' and 'how' rather than 'why' questions on the assumption that in telling me more about 'what' happened and 'how', 'why' it happened would be made explicit. Also not asking 'why' would minimise and limit the temptation for respondents to interpret their experiences.

### **Triangulation**

In adopting an approach that asks 'what' and 'how' rather than 'why' the interview conversation was able to deal in some depth with the questions highlighted in the research schedule. The utilisation of both the tape recording equipment and the transcription of the tapes enabled a methodological triangulation of the data collected. In this case the tape was replayed and the themes that emerged were categorised for analysis. After this process the transcript of the tape was also placed under the same procedure. So in essence, the same interview was put through two different processes.

From listening to the tape recordings and then cross-referencing the interview conversation with the data contained in the transcripts, a number of themes emerged. And whilst I understand the point that Jones (1985) was trying to make in that the essence of the interviews are lost in the transcripts, I do not agree with him that transcripts add nothing to the quality of the data generated. In my view the combination of listening and reading the data allows for an opportunity to see what Psathas described as: 'whether the results of an inquiry fit, make sense and are true to the understanding of ordinary actors in the everyday world' (Psathas 1973 cited Walker 1985:56). It also afforded me the opportunity to verify whether the interpretation I laid on the data, was merited.

Because I recognised the risks and dangers contained in the interaction and the possible *mis*-apprehension of the data, the strategy of tape recording the interviews and typing the transcripts meant I retained the data in as unsaturated a form as possible and as a bulwark against biases based on

recollection of what was said in the sessions rather than what was actually said.

### **Locating Research Subjects**

The subjects were located in a variety of ways. The strategy adopted for locating subjects for this study was primarily the snowball approach, although adverts were placed in various locations to attract an initial interest (see appendix v). Initially upon meeting people that fitted the research subject profile I gave them a brief overview of the study and asked whether they would be interested in taking part in the study. Those who showed interest in being involved were also given a letter (see appendix vi), which set out what the study entailed, the rationale, the required level of their involvement, and the time scale involved.

### **Snowballing**

Usually at the end of the interview I asked the interviewee whether they knew of other people who fitted the research profile. On a number of occasions it was the interviewee who asked whether I would be interested in interviewing people in similar relationships with whom they were in contact. The interviewee would give a pen picture of the individual or couple/s they had in mind and offered to contact him/her/them with information about the study and the researcher. Once potential subjects had been informed they would either telephone me directly or give their permission for their phone numbers to be given out. Upon receiving their call or their number they were contacted and a convenient location (usually their home) and date as well as time was then arranged for the interview.

### **Recruitment Problem**

I initially contacted an organisation, 'Harmony', that provides support and social events for people in interracial relationships with the view to gaining respondents. However, on reflection I decided not to use them as a means of locating respondents. My decision not to locate respondents through this avenue was taken because there is a long tradition of writers and researchers gaining access to subjects via this organisation (Alibhai-Brown & Montague

1992; Alibhai-Brown 2001 and Tizard & Phoenix 1993). Although the organisation, on been contacted, were willing to provide me with names and addresses of respondents, I decided against taking up their offer partly because of the problem that they might be 'knowing subjects' and the problem of data contamination. Because the organisation is so well used by researchers and commentators, there was a danger that respondents were well versed in their understanding and awareness of the issues involved and hence the data provided may be informed by academic and political debates to which they may have been party. By not using respondents attached to this group, I was attempting to avoid a population who may have had opportunities to develop well thought out view about their experiences as a result of one or several similar interviews and discussions in which they may have been involved. I was more interested in finding respondents who may or may not have 'raw' and un-crystallised data, but had not been part of an organised group who may already have been the subject of a previous research study.

### **Respondents' Reactions to the Research**

Upon being approached, all respondents who eventually participated appeared to be, initially, generally uncomfortable with the idea. However after a brief discussion of the research aims and the process involved, together with a description of the sorts of questions that would be asked, people became less apprehensive about being involved with the study. There were many potential respondents who, despite the reassurances about confidentiality and a more detailed explanation of the research strategy and operationalisation, declined to be involved. In general six out of every ten of the white women approached agreed to take part in the research project but only about 1 (one) in every 10 (ten) black men agreed to be involved. What was consistently evident was that upon being approached to participate in the project, both black men and white women moved from an initial wariness and uncertainty towards an interest in the research. However, following the initial interest there was often a marked difference in the way black men and white women consequently responded to the invitation to be interviewed. For example, upon being approached and



informed of the research, white women generally showed interest and said immediately that they would like to be involved. They were also keen for their partners to take part and in some cases they asked whether they could be interviewed together. However it was striking that subsequent contacts to arrange convenient dates and times for the interview were often met with a dramatic change of attitude. The response was either that white women were happy to continue with the project, but without the involvement or consent of their black partners or they were unable to proceed because their partners were unhappy with their involvement in the study.

For this study the experiences of the black men and the white women were of equal importance throughout, but the marked differences in their reactions when approached to partake in the study was of great interest. The women were less suspicious of me and were willing to be interviewed once they were reassured of the nature and the legitimacy of the study in contrast to the men. Initially I found their reluctance difficult to understand as I felt they were being offered the opportunity, perhaps for the first time, to talk about their experiences of being in an interracial relationship and to discuss the reactions of significant others and strangers towards them and their relationship. It was the high proportion of black men who refused to take part in the research that has prompted a more detailed analysis of the possible reasons why there was such uniformity in their behaviour.

### **Making Sense of Black Respondents' Reactions**

One of the most interesting outcomes of this project has been black men's reluctance about getting involved in the study. From the outset it was decided that 20 white women and 20 black men would constitute the research cohort. However as the research progressed it was clear that there were going to be difficulties in attracting a sufficient number of black men to take part in the study. Whilst it was possible to meet the required number of white female respondents in a fairly short space of time, it proved far more difficult locating the same number of black male respondents.

Although when initially approached some of the male respondents agreed to take part, when a formal meeting was arranged they cancelled at the last

minute or said they were unable to take part. The consistency in their behaviour prompted questions about the nature of their apprehension and the reasons for their reluctance to be involved in such a study. Although this study found that black men were unwilling to be involved because, as a rule, 'all' men, irrespective of their ethnicity, reputedly find it more difficult to discuss their relationships and their feelings. Because of men's general reticence about such matters it was not surprising perhaps that the black men that were approached showed little interest in taking part in the study. Particularly a study which focuses not just on relationships but specifically on their experiences of them. Whilst this may indeed be the case, what also emerged was that in being involved with a white partner, black men were sensitive to significant others' and strangers' perceptions and assumptions about them. They were aware of the popular explanations of the motivation of black men involved in interracial relationship. These predominately negative popular perceptions contributed significantly, in my view, towards the men avoiding situations in which they have to discuss their feelings or the motivation for their involvement with a white partner. There was a sense that they felt exposed and vulnerable to any negative reactions directed towards them. Since they have very little knowledge about me as a researcher I may have been perceived as a bearer of negative black separatists assumptions. This of course would have added to their fears, apprehensions and uncertainties and by not taking part they could avoid further emotional and psychological humiliation through having to 'explain' and 'justify themselves' to a 'stranger'.

### **The Pilot Study**

An early draft of the interview schedule was initially piloted with 60 social work students in the form of a survey questionnaire (see appendix iv). The composition of the group who took part in the survey was mixed, in terms of race (black and white, men and women), age and social class. Following feedback (small group discussions and written comments) from respondents (48% return rate) amendments were made to the questionnaire. For example in the questionnaire there were only 2 sections. The first section asked questions about the respondents' age, gender, ethnic background and

marital status. The second section consisted of 20 questions, which asked people about their choice of partners and their views about interracial relationships. The reactions of the respondents were that the questions were too distant, remote and restrictive for the nature of the subject under investigation.

They opined that whilst it was easy to complete the schedule they were left with a lot more to say and they were not convinced that the questions got to the 'heart' of their experience. These comments and my analysis of the replies of the respondents suggested that a research instrument needed to be devised that both allowed the subjects to expand on their experience, yet kept them focused. To achieve this, the questions were revamped and subdivided into 3 sections 1) early history; 2) relationship formation and 3) external relationships (See appendix iii), with each section concentrating on particular periods of the respondents' personal biography.

To test the amended schedule 10 interviews were conducted. What emerged after the testing of the amended schedule was that an additional four categories were required 1) early childhood history and experiences; 2) friendships; 3) forming intimate relationships and 4) recognition of racial and cultural difference 5) experience of being in an interracial relationship, 6) reaction of significant others and 7) impact of significant others had to be created to take account of the relationship between the couple and significant others (see appendix ii). It is worth noting that the difficulties in administering the research instrument did not surface until the commencement of the actual study. For example, I had to ensure that all the areas within the themes that have been identified were covered and respondents kept generally focused during the 'conversation'.

### **Revising the Research Instrument**

Following the pilot study it was clear that the interview schedule had to be changed so that areas that were identified during the pilot could be included. As a result further sections were added, for example respondents were asked to respond to popular explanations about their relationship, and the strategies they adopt to minimise the negative impact upon their

relationship. Following these amendments the schedule was re-ordered and sub-divided into 4 parts and each part concentrated on one particular aspect. The final interview schedule concentrated on exploring not just the nature of the relationship but also the motivation, management and strategies adopted by respondents. (see appendix i)

### **The Research Process**

Each interview session lasted approximately 1½ hours and it was conducted in private at the interviewee's home. In cases where both partners were to be interviewed, an arrangement was made so that the couples were interviewed separately. Although it was recognised that much could be gained from interviewing the couples together, a decision was made that because of the personal nature of the questions, concerning their motivation for entering the relationship and their anxieties about its future, it was important that respondents had an opportunity to speak frankly in confidence. Also very early on in the research it was evident that the presence of partners inhibited the quality of information being given. The presence of partners caused respondents to be guarded about some of their responses. There was a sense in which respondents felt their lifestyle and previous relationships, especially when it appeared that they had been in many relationships, came under close scrutiny from their partner. The potential for jealousy and misunderstanding between the partners was removed through the adoption of separate interviews. The need for the research to be focused on the experiences of the individuals within the relationship pointed to an approach that was able to facilitate and enable that process to take place.

I found the semi-structured interview process a flexible instrument and it allowed for a certain degree of diversion. Although I had a set interview schedule that I worked from, I moved within its structure and did not allow it to stifle the respondents' responses. I pursued a 'guided conversation', McNeil (1990), in that I allowed the subjects to speak freely about their earliest childhood memories of growing up and as the discussion progressed I introduced different themes whenever I deemed it necessary. In taking this

approach the interview, through guided conversation, helped to facilitate what I term as a loose, friendly, comfortable but transient 'interaction' between (myself) the interviewer and the interviewee and as Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggested:

'The conversation partner has the advantage of emphasising the link between interviewing and conversation, and the active role of the interviewee in shaping the discussion. Moreover, the term suggests a congenial and co-operative experience, as both interviewer and interviewee work together to achieve the shared goal of understanding' (Rubin and Rubin 1995:11).

Though the problem of using this instrument, in particular interviews, was highlighted by Mason (1996) when she opined that we should:

'.....be aware of epistemological shortcomings of interviewing in this respect too. For example, if you are interested in people's experiences, these can only be *recounted* in interviews. If you are interested in people's interpretations and understandings you must bear in mind that talking to people will not enable you to get inside their heads, and that you will only be able to gain access to those interpretations and understandings which are revealed in some way in an interview' (Mason 1996:40).

And as Katz (1996) observed, semi-structured interviews can facilitate the 'gaining of sensitive information and disclosures, while also focusing on specific areas of interest' (Katz 1996:64). However the approach can also be restrictive in that the questions pursued by the interviewer tend to frame the interviews so that the information gained may be determined too much by the interviewer's assumptions and not enough by the realities of those being interviewed (Katz 1996).

### **Ethical Consideration**

All research has an ethical dimension and in pursuing this thesis I am conducting the research in accordance with Brunel University's Research Ethics Committee guidelines. I have been guided by the 'Statement of Ethical Practice' (1998) and related notes of guidance of the British Sociological Association. The guidance notes act as a benchmark by which one is able to judge that the way the thesis was conducted was compatible with the standard expected of a social researcher. From the outset of the

research, I was aware of the expectations, regulations and codes of conduct to which social researchers are required to adhere. For example, respondents' informed consent is an important starting point. This allowed the respondents to decide whether they were interested in being part of the project and their level of involvement. In this study at the beginning of the interviews (taped) the respondents were given a brief verbal overview of the study and the questions to be asked. According to Denzin & Lincoln (1994): 'Conventional practice and ethical codes espouse the view that various safeguards should protect the privacy and identity of research subjects' (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:92).

In this study permission was requested for the interview to be taped and the respondents were assured that their individual personal details were confidential and would not be made widely available, without their approval. As further reassurance on the tapes, minimal details were written to preserve the anonymity of the respondent. For example, the terms F and M was used to denote the gender of the respondent, the date of the interview was recorded as was the area in which the interview took place, ie, Harlesden, Bradford, Balham, Orpington, Oxford, etc etc.

Bulmer (1982) reaffirmed the importance of preserving the anonymity of the subjects with the comment:

'Identities, locations of individuals and places are concealed in published results, data collected are held in anonymized form, and all data kept securely and confidential' (Bulmer 1982:225).

The awareness of the codes of conduct and the conventional practices informed the ethical stance taken in this study. To further buttress the stance taken the operationalisation of the research study was subject to continued scrutiny by the study supervisor. This close monitoring acted as safeguards against abuse. The expectation was that, through close supervision and a clearly written process, it would be possible to see that an ethical stance was being taken by the researcher and that every effort would be made to address any ethical issues that may arise. This researcher

*envisaged from the outset that the transparency of the methodology and the documentation of the data would provide buffers against the danger of exploiting the experiences of the respondents.*

A great deal of personal information was disclosed by the respondents in good faith, what was expected was a stance that respects the information given and remains faithful to the meaning the respondents ascribe to their experiences. This of course did not prevent analysis of the data gleaned in the interviews via thematic content analysis. It was evident throughout the process that there was a need to acknowledge the responsibility that one has, as a researcher, to ensure that appropriate use was made of research data and that the information obtained did not abuse the respondent's trust, nor was their confidentiality betrayed.

I was also aware of the aspects of the code that considered the issue of research integrity. There is overall, an expectation that reports and analysis from studies are presented responsibly, appropriately and the findings reported accurately and truthfully.

**The coding of the data** had to take account of the subjective nature of the reality and the experiences of the respondents. As a result the coding was to a large extent determined by the headings that were identified as the most appropriate research instrument. Thus the coding of the data followed a thematic approach, i.e. early childhood experiences, friendship, forming relationships, experience of being in the relationship, managing the relationship, the reactions of significant others and reactions towards the popular explanations advanced about the relationship. The themes that emerged followed the same pattern as the interview schedule in that it highlighted respondent's experiences of being in the relationship, their motivation for entering such relationships, their experiences of hostility and disapprobation from significant others and the strategies adopted to minimise the negativity towards them. These themes provided the framework for analysis and theoretical possibilities suggested in the study conclusion.

### **Data Analysis**

As well as the thematic approach providing the main tool for making sense of the data that was generated from the interview conversation, it also made it possible to analyse the data in a systematic way. Because the data unearthed ‘people’s experience and how they interpret their world’ and that there is an ‘essence to (their) shared experience’ (Patton 1990:70) the process of analysing the data involved a careful reading of what was said and a detailed exploration of experiences that were being conveyed. The ‘working of the data’ necessitated the linking of the explanations, research design and my analytical thinking. Having gone through the findings under each theme thoroughly, I was then in the position to highlight and report not just specific and general findings, but I was also able to provide an interpretation of the findings in the light of what had emerged from the data.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has been concerned with the methodological underpinning of the study and the method utilised to operationalise the research strategy. In addition it has provided a discussion on the guiding principles that informed the way the study was conducted and the complexities involved. Finally it has highlighted and explored the way in which the data was coded and analysed.

The next chapter, chapter five (the findings - part I) provides an overview of the experiences of respondents and records their responses.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Findings – part I**

#### **Respondents' Responses**

This chapter report on respondents' responses to the range of questions posed in the interview about their experiences, motivation, reactions and strategies for managing their experience of being in the relationship. It therefore focuses on:

- (a) their early experience of their partner's race and culture,
- (b) their explanation/motivation for getting involved in an interracial relationship,
- (c) their experience of being in the relationship,
- (d) the reactions of significant others,
- (e) the impact of the reactions of significant others upon respondent's relationship,
- (f) their strategies for dealing with the reactions of significant others and strangers.

Men and women's responses are presented separately in each section and while emphasis was on the straight reporting of the responses there are occasions, at the end of each section, when a brief analysis of the responses is offered. It is important to also note that although direct quotes from individual respondents are given under each section, A to F, these quotes should be read as examples that best illustrate the views, comments, expressions and experiences of not just one respondent but others as well. In some cases, views, comments and experiences, which were not necessarily shared by all respondents, are also given to highlight particular differences that exist amongst the respondents.

#### **(A) Early Experience of their Partner's Race and Culture**

This aim of this section of the interview was to highlight the early experiences that respondents had about their partner's racial and cultural

group during their early childhood. Governed more by sociological considerations than psychosocial developmental issues, the idea was to ascertain the preconceptions and the knowledge that had been acquired about the 'other' prior to their involvement in the relationship.

### *The men's experience*

There were some differences between respondents who were born in the UK and those from Africa and the Caribbean. For example all the respondents born in the United Kingdom grew up in predominately white neighbourhoods. Respondents who were born in areas with a relatively large black and other minority population still spoke of being exposed to a predominately white social and cultural environment. This exposure, they felt, was reinforced through their everyday interaction with the wider community including significant others and strangers. And this group of respondents recalled having awareness of racism from a relatively early age, as one respondent said:

*'I remember one incident. My father, he had a bike and I always wanted to ride it. I never dared to ask him. And I think he got hit by a bus and got knocked off his bicycle, and it didn't hurt him badly but that put him off and he just came in one day and gave it to me. So I looked at it and I thought, my god, what am I going to do with this, you know? And I got the confidence and I started to ride it. Anyway, a white guy stopped me, I must have been about 11 or 12 years old, or maybe 11 or 10, and he stopped me. I don't know why...it turned out to be a policeman but he was in plain clothes. So I didn't know. And I wasn't rude, I don't think I was rude or out of order with people, I was just a get on with anybody type of person, so.... I remember him saying to me for some reason, you're black and you're ugly. And, something in my mind kind of clicked. I think it was a mixture of feelings and I know there are people like that, and yeah I am black, you know, and this person is pointing it out to me.*

The majority of the respondents (over 80 per cent) felt that their negative experiences were counteracted by examples of positive personal experiences from some white people they came across. As one respondent commented:

*'I had a very good relationship with Bruce's parents (who are white), in particular his mother. She still writes to me and tells me how he is doing'.*

And another respondent said:

*'...we went on holiday to Burgess Hill, I think it was in Sussex, and stayed at a lady's house, grand house.... tennis court and played bowls and beautiful lady, really, really nice lady. She must have been in her 50's, mid 50's. Her husband was really outgoing and sociable and they were generous people, and we stayed with them, five of us'.*

Respondents were able to recall individual white people within their immediate environment who showed them kindness and were non-threatening in their attitudes and behaviour. For example, not only did all the respondents have white friends within their friendship circles but also a sizeable number (60 per cent) of the respondents described their 'best friends' as being white:

*'My best friend?..... probably... well, Alan was the guy who lived close to me so we'd play around on the street and he was white'.*

And:

*'Although currently I must say that they are predominantly white, but that's really (because as a) result of the(my) circle (of friends) and the social scene I'm involved in. I think'.*

Those respondents who were born outside the United Kingdom, in Africa and the Caribbean, recalled that although they were not in direct contact with white people during their formative years, the presence and dominance of white culture was abundant and very influential in their lives. For example, many spoke about the large number of European and American TV programmes (not subtitled) to which they had been exposed and that their early years were therefore influenced by the same programmes, toys and fads as enjoyed by children in the UK and in America. All respondents who originally lived in Africa or the Caribbean said that there was still evidence of colonialism and also at a social level, a high value was placed on Western media and Western products. They said that in the social milieu in which they grew up there was, as a matter of course, preference for non-indigenous products and that Britain and her people were highly regarded. Many said the prestige of white Europeans was buttressed by constant news about life in the UK and North America from siblings and family members living there. The status of white people was further boosted by the wealth they were assumed to possess; especially since people they knew who have

emigrated to the UK invariably sent money and other goods to friends and families. Similarly, in the cultural arena of music, films, literature, fashion and life-styles Western influences appeared pivotal and provided the yardstick against which 'local' cultural forms were judged.

Respondents from Africa (five respondents in total) spoke about how, like everybody around them, they also perceived white people to be superior in all areas of life. For example life in Britain was thought to be luxurious and everybody lived in wealth. The governance of society and the availability of a whole range of services, provisions and resources were deemed far more superior to that which they knew. For example:

*'I mean being a Black man in Africa, especially in that rural area you see the whites as superior''.*

And:

*'.....we just knew she's (white woman) different and ...she was different and our perception of white people being superior added to that...'*

Another said:

*'I did not really have any contacts with white people until I came to England. Where I came from people try to come to England to seek their fortunes and I did the same and it was when I arrived in London that I actually saw white people'.*

The African respondents who recalled seeing white people before they came to England said that when white people were seen visiting their home area people either ran away or chased after them to get a closer look and if possible to touch them. As one respondent recalled:

*'When they (White people) came to the village, especially the children crying and running away, some children and adults chased after them shouting oyinbo oyinbo (white person)'.*

And:

*'I can't remember when we first had a white person in the village but people run away because they had never seen a white person before'.*

Respondents from Africa who lived in rural areas said that they did not have television and so the only time they came across white people was when they went to the market or visited relatives in the big towns and cities.

Some said although they had not seen a white person they were aware of their existence. As one respondent commented:

*'At that time we did not have any television so a white person was not known. The only time you came across a white person is when you go to the town. When you see them in town you're sort of watching them, wondering and itching to have a touch to see how they are'.*

Another respondent said he recalled: *'as a six year old coming across a white person for the first time'*.

A respondent said:

*'when I was about six or seven in the Nigerian town where I grew up there was a Nigerian who returned with his white wife and that ...I would say that was my first contact seeing this white woman who is married to a Nigerian was my first experience...with a white person'.*

The same respondent also recalled his experience of white people during his adolescent years. He said:

*'I experienced white people as being superior after I started secondary school that was when I was 13 or 14....I had to leave home to go to secondary boarding school. When I got there our science teacher, was white, ...I remember him now, he was white from Britain. The town where I went to school was a provincial town where there were government-reserved areas; some of these areas were exclusively white ....my science teacher lived there. Where they lived they had a swimming pool where no blacks were allowed to use or even go there....my gang and I always wanted to go and swim in the pool'.*

Another respondent said that the first white person he came across was a missionary who came to their village. Because of his position, many in his village believed that the missionary was close to god.

Two respondents spoke about meeting white people for the first time, when local men who had travelled abroad brought home their white partners to get the blessing of their family.

There were divergences between respondents who spoke about having awareness, during their childhood, of differences between black and white people and those who felt they were too young to notice such differences.

Of the respondents who said they were aware of the difference one respondent commented that he knew there were differences because: *'you are made to feel different'*.

And of those who said they did not think about differences between black and white or considered the issue of race and culture when they were growing up, one respondent, whose comment was echoed by others said:

*'we did not even think about it, my mother brought us up to believe that people are people'*.

### ***The women's experience***

The experience of the female respondents differed significantly from the male respondents. For example, they all lived in areas in which their racial group constituted the majority population. Although many (14 respondents) of them were born in racially mixed areas, others were from small towns and villages that had very few, or no black people at all. From an early age, pre adolescent (between 3 and 10 years old) many remembered seeing television programmes about black people (some negative, some positive) and those who lived in mixed neighbourhoods had direct contact, through school and recreational activities, with black children.

As one respondent recalled:

*'another thing that sticks in my mind very clearly, and I was only young at the time, and I don't know why it should stick in my mind, but when my parents were selling the house that they had, so I was at the age of about 7, I remember a black couple coming and looking round it, and my older brother asking my mum, would you sell it to black people? And I don't know why it stuck in my mind because I didn't understand what the deal was at the time....but it did'*.

And another respondent commented:

*'Yeah, well they were, because of the way the school was, I mean there was a lot of black pupils at the school, and I mean that was one of the things that was good about it because it was meant to be, you know, one of the first schools that took mixed multicultural type thing, in those days, you know, but unfortunately the way the educational system was divided was that if you got on the 11+ then you were put into a higher class and unfortunately a lot of the black girls were in the lower classes.'*

*But, having said that, I took Physical Education (PE) as an option and a lot of the black girls were doing PE. So I did make a lot of friends in that sort of area'.*

Of the small number of respondents (6 respondents) who said that they were not from racially mixed areas, half said they came across other racial groups for the first time at college or at university.

One respondent said:

*'Predominately my friends were white and from the neighbourhood rather than from my school, although many were at the same school. After we moved to Chichester I saw no black people at all.*

One respondent said she came across a black person whilst she was at college. She recalled that her first close contact with a black person revolved around the sexual banter that was shared with one of the black male students, who was a peripheral member of her friendship circle. She said:

*'I was aware of the sexual innuendos about black guys.....The .....guy at college it was a sort of joke that was made around him and one that he would joke about as well'.*

Some respondents recalled that the first group of black people they saw were public sector workers, such as bus conductors, nurses, cleaners and railway workers.

Some respondents said they remembered meeting black people who were schoolteachers and school helpers. For example one respondent said:

*'The person I do remember very vividly, strangely, is the mother, who was the mother of the person who is now my closest friend, who comes from Guyana, and she....her mother actually taught me at my junior school. So I had close contact.....well that I remember, I mean I had a black teacher'.*

Some respondents said when they were growing up they were unaware of the racial and cultural differences between black and white people, or other cultures, and they had never considered the issue involved nor was it at the forefront of their mind. For example one respondent said:

*'I don't really have much thoughts about it. Nothing really stands out – I don't recall seeing any dark people when I was growing up. – But*

*as the years go by I began to see more coloured people out and about. ....I came across more dark people in the South'.*

Seven respondents who went to mixed comprehensive secondary schools said that although there were black girls and black boys at their secondary school they did not really mix much with them. According to these respondents, in their experience, there was very little inter-racial mixing amongst the children as boys and the girls tended to associate within their racial groups. Similarly a small number of respondents noted that the youth clubs they attended as youngsters were racially and culturally mixed, but again there were little racial mixing amongst the youngsters. One respondent said:

*'The school I went to maybe has a lot to do with the way I am because obviously it was so multi-cultural and you learnt all sorts of different cultures and you were mixing with all sorts of different people, but we did not develop much friendship across the racial divide.*

For some respondents their early experiences of people from other cultures came from what they had heard from other people, particularly other family members and their friends. In these cases they got to hear about other nationalities and cultures through stories that were told by people they knew who had travelled or worked abroad or those who had heard stories from others and had passed it on.

Some of the women respondents' experiences of racial and cultural differences were gleaned not necessarily as a result of direct contact with people from other racial and cultural backgrounds, but by observing them from a distance and, as above, hearing about them from other people. For example one respondent said:

*'When we moved to Bristol the only black person I met was a Jamaican guy called.....who lived nearby. He was married to a white woman and they had a daughter, in fact they had more than one child, but I remember .....who was a year older than me. Other than that I had quite a limited experience of black people'.*

A number of respondents (5 respondents) said their parents or other members of their families were racist in their attitudes towards black people.



They commented that although they were aware of black people they had very little contact with them. However they were surrounded with family members, including their parents, who had very negative views about black people. For example one respondent said:

*'I mean he (my father) was racist. He thought black people shouldn't be here. You know the typical dreadful things you hear about the jobs and everything like that. You know stick to your own. He did not like living where we lived he thought it was horrendous. If I came down to Carnival (Notting Hill) he'd die. He was you know very racist'.*

### **Analysis**

Although both black and white respondents were aware of the existence of the 'other' throughout their early years, direct contact between the two groups was limited to those from the cities and larger towns. All the black respondents acknowledged the dominance and influence of British culture on their lives. It was also evident that both sets of respondents have had what can be described as mixed experiences of each other's racial groups. For example, some female respondents spoke about growing up knowing very little about black people and having no direct contact with them, yet hearing very negative views and forming negative opinions about them. Correspondingly many male respondents said not only had they had negative attitudes directed towards them, they had also heard negative things said about white people. However, despite this exposure to negative attitudes about the 'other' both the female and male respondents were able to relate positive individual experiences as a counter-balance. In other words, it would appear that rather than generalising the negative experiences and allowing this to cloud their choice of partners, respondents have particularised their experiences and this appears to have been an important factor in enabling them to maintain relationships with people from different racial groups.

### **(B) Explanation for Becoming Involved in an Interracial Relationship**

The aim was to ask respondents to explain their reasons for getting involved in such a relationship and to ascertain the factors that influenced their choice of partner.

### *The men's experience*

The respondents gave a range of reasons for becoming involved with a partner from a different racial group. Two respondents from Africa said that as students attending university in Sunderland they met mainly white women. One respondent recalled how he and his black friends, who were all students, went to clubs hoping to meet women. But he commented that they only spoke to white women because, compared to the black women, they were more approachable and not as aggressive in their demeanour. He recalled:

*'Where I was a student (Sunderland) when we go out every weekend we go to the discos and chat up girls. It didn't matter whether they were black or white we just chatted them up. We try to find the ones that are agreeable to us and were interested I remember the white girls were dancing around us and I started to talk to one of them and it just developed after that. But the black girls weren't so easy'.*

However, many other respondents (8 respondents) spoke about how they found the black girls they met to be arrogant and aloof and this meant their choice of partners was to some extent limited. As one respondent commented:

*'I'll be honest now....I think because while we were there we found it easier, we found the white girls easier as companions. We knew that when we went to the nightclubs on the Saturday night we probably end up chatting to the white girls. They were freer to talk to...yes definitely they were freer to talk to. I did find the black girls I came across very arrogant and aloof...the white girls I came across were readily more friendly and probably their own curiosity wanted to know more about us'.*

However there were some respondents who said they paid little attention to the skin colour of their potential partners. One said:

*'I am involved in the relationship 'cause I am in love. I'm in love and I've found someone who I find compatible and the colour of her skin didn't come into my thinking at all. As far as I am concerned we are two individuals and we just have to get on with our lives without caring what other people think'.*

Another respondent said:

*'... I can't say it's got nothing to do with personality, but the colour of the skin is held as some kind of importance. So, I sometimes wonder if people put us in that category. I must*

*admit there's one thing that would irritate me more than most is that the idea that I chose Samantha because she was white or that she chose me because I was black. That would irritate me'.*

And another respondent commented:

*'I think I notice beyond the colour. Obviously I was aware that she was white, but I don't think it ever bothered me because there were black women I was interested in just as much for the same reasons, you know. When I was younger I did go for a sexy looking woman with the bodies and in the clubs. And you think...that's nice, she looks nice, I really fancy her physically, and that went the same for black and for white. But....I suppose on balance I would say I've had more relationships with white girls, but I have had quality relationships with black women also. So it's got nothing to do with colour'.*

Some respondents (6 respondents) said they just seemed to have drifted into an interracial relationship with a white partner rather than setting out to get involved in such a relationship. They commented that they had given very little forethought to the racial or cultural background of their partner, rather, their involvement in such a relationship was purely by chance and that in their 'particular' case it was a case of being in a particular place at a particular time, without any ties, and finding another person to whom they were attracted in a similar position. As one respondent commented:

*'I went out with someone who I didn't really feel (anything for but) who I thought was okay. She was prepared to accept my level of indifference so we went out for a bit and a mate of mine cajoled me [into the relationship]. And then the next person who I went out with was someone at work, again a white English girl, who expressed a lot of interest in me. I was not particularly that much interested in her. Unlike the next one whom I had to work hard to go out with. But after going out for a while I decided that it really wasn't worth it. After her there was another white English girl who I thought was quite nice, she was pretty, she was just a bit odd, a bit snooty at times and we just didn't get on so that ended. There was (another) white English girl who I went out with for three years and she was okay. And then a white English girl who was an absolute top person, she was a great personality except she wasn't that physically attractive. She was more like a mate than a girlfriend'.*

Five respondents said the racial difference between themselves and their intended partners was a factor in their decision to enter the relationship. They reported that they were physically and sexually attracted to their

partner specifically because of her colour. For example one respondent suggested his formation of:

*'relationships with white women instead of black women has been designed to be so. It is deliberate...well it is a combination of so many things...at that stage...when one came out of Nigeria you have an impression of how the women there behaved...coming over here you sort of try and avoid those sort of relationships'.*

He clarified his explanation further by saying;

*'in Nigeria my girlfriends were brilliant because they never really behaved like Nigerian women, they never made demands on me for example unlike the average Nigerian woman who would make demands and expects you to maintain her and actually keep her. I never really like those sort of relationships my girlfriends were self-sufficient'.*

He reasserted the point by saying:

*'I began to look for relationships that would not put pressure on me because I wouldn't be able sustain it as I was a student so I looked for relationships that would benefit me. From my experience of white women, they were more helpful and accommodating than black women. I did not think a black woman would really be so helpful and understanding so I avoided them'.*

Another respondent said: *'I developed relationships with white girls because they (white girls) were more easier to talk to than black girls. The sex only came into it later.*

And another respondent said:

*'My first girlfriend was a white girl, we met through the church after her I went out with only black girls, but I had a really bad experience with this black girl, I was about 19 you know and after that I thought never again. I find the attitudes and behaviours of black girls to be too harsh. They come across too aggressive like, you know what I am saying? white girls are easier to deal with they are more accommodating'.*

With slightly different emphasis from the above, a small number of respondents said they excluded people from their own racial group and other groups as possible partners. One respondent said:

*'I hate to categorise but I think I shall in this instance....let's talk about the cultural dimension. The West Indian girls I don't think would go out with an African I don't know but I think there is*

*something in their attitude I might be wrong. The black Nigerian girls who I could have gone out with, I do find their ...I think they want to know the size of your pocket and wallet (how rich you are) so I deliberately avoid going out with Nigerian girls.....so I just found my choice limited'.*

Another said: *'I had a really bad experience with a black girl...I thought never again. It's too hard, so I go out with just white girls'.*

Six respondents said when they were younger and part of the 'club scene' they went for women that they considered sexy irrespective of their colour, however they found that they got better responses from white girls than black girls. As one respondent commented:

*'...like I say to you, all my friends were different...you know. In my group there were black guys and white guys, but when we go to clubs and parties, the black girls are hard...you know, they just look you up and down and give you dirty looks and stuff. But the white girls were just different and more relaxed with us'.*

Many respondents said people in their social circle tended to be involved in interracial relationships.

Some respondents implied that they were attracted to their partner because 'she' stood out amongst others. They said there was something 'different' about the women that attracted them.

Eight respondents spoke about the type of partners they were attracted to and with whom they would form a relationship. One respondent commented:

*'I get [Probably] involved in a relationship with a person that is educated, that had gone to university and would have a career in mind...yes I think that might be the attraction'.*

Another respondent said:

*'In forming a relationship I do consider their looks and whether I find them attractive or not and also whether I find their attitudes and personality (compatible). It is not just a case of whether I find them physically attractive or stunning or anything like that but it is also how they behaved and handled themselves'.*

Ten respondents said that they did not have an ideal partner in mind as they were 'open minded' and they would consider all options irrespective of the colour or culture of the person. However these respondents also acknowledged that although they did not have an ideal partner in mind, nevertheless they had been attracted to women who have been similar in terms of their personality, lifestyle and attitudes and as a consequence all their relationships have tended to be interracial. As one respondent said:

*'I know it seems funny...but I have been out with only one black woman, it's not that I don't find them (black women) attractive but it's just that I seems to be with white women. That's just how it is'.*

None of the respondents said that they chose a white partner to enhance their social status. One respondent said he hoped his partner would enhance his feeling of being a man but he cannot see how the relationship could enhance his social status. Another respondent whose comment represented many of the other respondents' views said:

*'I've heard that people who get involved in interracial relationships are considered to be social climbers. I find that absolutely ludicrous to be honest with you because nobody knows at my place of work that I go out and I am married to a white person... so...my promotion or whatever it is at work does not depend on whether I am married to a white or black or anyone'.*

Another respondent whose comment is echoed by others said:

*'As far as I am concerned the economic argument is rubbish. We both work hard and share the mortgage so I could have got married to another black professional girl and it would still be the same. She is no richer or I wouldn't say she is any richer than me. Her parents are richer and I was aware of their social class and the economic difference between us but that did not make any difference to me'.*

### ***The women's experience***

The women also gave a range of reasons for getting involved in a relationship with a partner from a different racial group to their own. One respondent simply said: *'I wanted something that was very different'.*

All respondents recalled being advised, mainly by their families, against embarking upon a relationship with black men. As one respondent said:

*'...my family cautioned against it. I think that is something....because my family had the notion that being in an interracial relationship is going to mean difficulties'.*

Four respondents spoke about being attracted to black men because when they were growing up, late 1970s' early 1980's, that was the thing to do in 'those days'. As one respondent said:

*'When we first started going out there was a thing that we really only went for black guys because they were different and we thought they were so cool. But then later on it became pure accident as to whom we ended up with as a partner you know. Now I couldn't say that there is a certain type I go for'.*

A similar number of respondents said the relationship was entered into as a rebellious act against people around them. In these examples the respondents explained that as adolescents the advice from their parent/s against having a black partner galvanised them into accepting an invitation from the first black boy/man who asked them out, and in another it was a reaction against their father's negativity. As one respondent commented:

*'I don't know why I like black men. I've tried to ask myself that question. People have asked me why? Why have you gone out with black men? And I don't know. I can only think that I wasn't treated well by a white man....My dad, I'm not saying he was bad, but he was in a way towards me, he beat me, and maybe that put me off. Maybe I was looking for something different, affection from somebody different, because they were different...I was attracted to the difference'.*

Some respondents said that the negative attitudes of their peers towards black boys/men provided the catalyst for their decision to embark on the relationship, as they wanted to challenge their friends' beliefs and attitudes. As one respondent commented;

*'I mean, I just think at the outset it was a bit of a challenge I guess, but as I said you can't...you know... a challenge can't sustain for any length of time unless you've really got a death wish. At the end of the day you have got to be there because you want to be there'.*

Five respondents said within their circle of friends the idea of going out with a black man was seen as not only daring but also dangerous, because of the perceived 'hardness' of black men. Of this group a smaller number said that an aura of toughness surrounded black people, and black men in particular,

and this made the idea of such a relationship even more attractive at that time. As one respondent commented:

*'I had relationships with people that mother and father did not approve of. They were people not exactly dodgy but they were people who weren't exactly straight. I was attracted because again the difference and because slightly dangerous, slightly unacceptable'.*

And another said:

*'(what) I'd say the thing about them all (black partners) really is that they've got pretty much a hard surface. They sort of attracted me. I don't know how to explain it really but they're hard in the way that they're not going to let you get to them and their feelings'.*

Some respondents said that they found that they were attracted to charismatic men who were self-aware, confident and mature. A point illustrated by one respondent who said:

*'He was very self confident, very charismatic again a couple of years older and he was reasonably good looking too. But it wasn't really that it was his lust for life and self confidence and the rest that attracted me'.*

The same respondent made an interesting comment, which, to a certain extent, was echoed by many other respondents' experience of developing relationships when they were much younger. For example she said;

*'I don't know but I tend to think that when you're younger, you're not looking for a serious relationship and you are not looking for a soul mate, so you're not really bothered whether they've got a personality as such or whatever. I think, from my experience, it was....you know, you'd been out all together, having a good time, meeting somebody, and if they were OK you'd see them. If it sort of went with the mood of the time you know, I remember, not at the time, but later in life, looking back and thinking that half the people I used to see, they weren't really, sort of, lengthy relationships, and I used to think, god, why did I ever bother. But it didn't matter at the time, you know, we were just out for fun and it didn't matter, even if they were idiots. I don't think it was anything about them as individuals, other than the fact that they might be quite nice looking, or I think, usually, I would go for people who were pretty confident and very good fun I suppose - it wasn't so much hard work then'.*

Some respondents said rather than being influenced by the race and culture of their partner they were more attracted to people who showed them



interest, had them in focus and were good fun to be with. For example a respondent said:

*'I have heard that white women go out with black men for sexual curiosity, for me I was not interested in that...no, no it was him as a person...he's kind and considerate and he looks after us. I just love him and think a lot about him...I am just glad I am with him'.*

Another said;

*'.....I liked him...he had a lot of qualities I really like. We are interested in a lot of the same things and have a lot of the same values, in terms of the things we think are important, the things we believed in and I was physically attracted to him as well. But it was more of a complete thing I felt that I was at the same level (intellectually) as him in a lot of ways'.*

And another respondent commented:

*'Again, I would say, his personality. He had a very outgoing.....I mean he probably wasn't very much of a looker (but) he did have a brilliant personality'.*

Another respondent commented:

*'I'm very attracted by good humour and sharpness, somebody who can make me laugh is very.....and he black (partner) is one of the funniest people I've met, you know. He makes me laugh and he's very.....so it's the whole bit really - there's the sexual attraction and we're mates, which is very nice'.*

Like many other respondents (fourteen other respondents) she also commented:

*'No, I wouldn't say gaining some kind of status is the motivational fact really. I mean, I suppose...long after the event, I actually feel, well....I mean, I've always been very consciously anti-racist and so on, and so I think, well, you know, all my partners up 'till now have been white, so maybe..... But I didn't go for him because he was black, I mean he just happens to be black. In the same way, I suppose, the others happen to be white but, given that I was working and had a social environment that was predominantly white, I suppose that's not so surprising'.*

Another respondent said:

*'I wasn't necessarily looking for a long-term relationship and then I met him. He used to come round and we used to talk. But I was very ill and I had to leave university for three months, and I just managed to find him to tell him I'd been diagnosed as having hepatitis B. And then I disappeared but when I came back he was happy to pick up*

*with me again, so I thought, well somebody who does not get scared off by hepatitis B, well that kind of indicates a certain kind of person'.*

Interestingly in recounting their teenage years many respondents demonstrated that there was a certain degree of similarity in the way they developed interracial relationships. For example, one respondent commented that she got involved in the relationship as a result of a blind-date arrangement. And another respondent said:

*'Well I think the next guy a friend of a guy who was a friend of my sister sort of set me up with a friend of his, and he was a black guy and we went out for a few months I suppose and he was older than me, but I'm not sure how much older'.*

Some respondents said they were not particularly looking for a relationship with a black partner it just seemed to happen. As one respondent said:

*'I wasn't saying I wasn't going out with people, but I certainly wasn't looking for any relationship. Well ...then I met him. I don't know...he used to come round and I started asking some questions he was nicer (than all the other men I had been out with) and dependable who made me laugh a lot'.*

A very small number (three) of the respondents said they liked black skin and are sexually attracted by it. For these respondents the racial difference itself was a factor in their choice of partner. They reported that they were both physically and sexually attracted to their partner specifically because of the visible difference. For them the image of the highly sexualised black man was deemed as a factor in their decision to enter into the relationship.

As one respondent commented:

*'I find them (Black men) attractive...I don't know what made me go that way, you know.....maybe it is a Black fetish. I don't know how you would describe it'.*

Another respondent said:

*'I don't know, I really don't. I don't know why but there's....I find black men attractive, maybe because they're different to me.... you know, to white people.....a lot of people, you know. Yeah, I find them attractive, they look attractive, they look after themselves, they show respect for themselves, and they're like that'.*

Another respondent commented that:

*'Well, I think the thing was, in that time.....I don't know why, but there seemed to be.....suddenly, there seemed to be a lot of black people, you know, I suppose it certainly may be the places we went, but I suppose we did get into a bit of a thing that if they weren't black we wouldn't find them attractive, yeah. I don't know why.....No, I think possibly it's the colour.....' .*

A respondent whose response was echoed by many others said:

*'No...it's not for economic reasons or social reasons...I think I was more influenced by the woman I bought the flat with, who had many black boyfriends and she was the first sort of person I had met who'd had mixed relationships. There may be, though I haven't really thought about it before but there may be that there was sort of inquisitive really. ....and I think inquisitive on a sexual level as well because certainly there's always been that perception and sexual prowess and sexual reference'.*

And finally another said:

*'I mean I suppose I do like black skin, I think it is attractive, and I think, you know, that some of the most beautiful women are black women. So I suppose there was an element of how people looked was, yeah, was to do with the fact that they were black'.*

### **Analysis**

The respondents, men and women, gave a range of explanations for embarking on their relationship. A very small number of women suggested that their choice of partner was greatly influenced by the colour of their partner's skin, while a larger number said the colour of their partner had little bearing on their decision to enter into the relationship and that they were more influenced by personal attributes and their character. Similarly, the majority of black respondents challenged the explanation that social status and economic considerations played a major role in their decision to enter into the relationship (see chapter six). Many cited as evidence the fact that they either earned more or the same as their white partners. Some of the male respondents cited the negative attitudes, aggressive behaviours and the unapproachable demeanours of the black women they have met as their reason for their involvement with white partners. It was evident from the responses that the majority of respondents believed that their involvement in an interracial relationship was by accident rather than by calculated design

or a life plan. Their responses suggest that the circumstance under which both the black men and the white women met each other was based on accidental and chance meetings for which they claimed they had very little control. However to accept this interpretation of their experience would be to ignore the idea of structuration and the notion that accidental and chance meetings do not fully explain why the people concerned would consider developing their chance meeting into something more intimate. It would also ignore an analysis, which suggests that the choices respondents made or the eventualities of their actions are not random or devoid of social patterns and personal contingencies. Rather it could be argued that their social environments influence respondents greatly and it was not by accident that most found their partners from within their social circles, from their work place or as a result of being introduced by friends.

Finally what the findings also suggest is that irrespective of the warnings, negative views or negative experiences to which respondents may have been exposed, respondents were still attracted to and unperturbed about developing relationships with partners from different racial and/or cultural backgrounds.

### **(C). Respondents' Experience of Being in the Relationship**

The focus was on respondent's experiences of being in the relationship and the adjustments, if any that needed to be made as a result.

#### *The men's experience*

All the respondents spoke about the experience of being in the relationship and the dynamics of the racial difference between themselves and their partner. Over half of the respondents said there were enormous differences in their approach to a number of issues as a result of the racial difference between themselves and their partner. For some respondents these differences related as much to expectations of the relationship through to the practicalities of living together and the changes they've had to make as a result. As one respondent noted:

*'I would say yes being in the relationship has effected me. And whom you are with will affect you and also the environment in which you live will also affect you.....so in terms of my attitude towards certain things being in the relationship may have affected them but fundamentally I'm still typically a Nigerian'.*

What the respondents were suggesting was that, having become involved in an interracial relationship, they have had to make choices about which aspects of their culture they would retain and which aspects they would abandon. How the choices are arrived at and what informs one particular choice over another is not adequately explained, however they maintained that they made their choices for reasons of self-interest in terms of what they found comfortable and in line with their aspirations and expectations.

The self-interest consideration notwithstanding, there is recognition that their partner's wishes and expectations, her culture and the social environment have a major influence on the kind of decisions they make. For example, the African respondents all spoke about being acutely aware of not exposing their partners to the full African cultural traditions, with its duties, responsibilities, familial expectations and rituals. As one respondent said:

*'I think you do lose your cultural identity...yes I think so...for example....I used to enjoy playing African music but since I have been going out with her I don't play it so much any more in case she does not like it'.*

And another said:

*'I used to cook meals from my country but I don't anymore, partly because it too much hard work trying to get the ingredients secondly I don't think she likes it really. Also I get niggled sometimes when I am watching a programme about race or something like that and she seems uninterested. It's as if she cares nothing about me'.*

An issue raised by some of the respondents concerns their different approaches to domestic work. Particularly, they all mentioned their partner's technique to doing the daily 'washing-up' of dishes and other utensils. To illustrate, the respondents said they tended to rinse the dishes thoroughly ensuring no soap lather was left, whilst their partner did not rinse. Although they acknowledged that the example might be considered trivial it was cited as a source of irritation and arguments in the early stages of the relationship. For some of the respondents the different ways they approach domesticity provided a good example of how their differences with their partner were manifested. Some respondents said they had to readjust their views about the nature of black and white social relationships and the extent to which they could claim to be unaffected by being in the relationship. What was being suggested was that involvement in the relationship had meant a reassessment of their views about white people. In other words, although respondents recognise the impact of white racism, the relationship has forced them, to an extent, to individualise their experiences with white people rather than accepting the view that all areas concerning white people are negative and all areas in relation to black people are positive. This is not to suggest that respondent's involvement in the relationship necessarily means they have had to compromise their views about black and white people, but that they relate to both black and white people differently because their perspective is multiracial and interracial. This makes their position more complicated and in some cases problematic compared to those who are mono-racial in their outlook.

One respondent commented that being in the relationship had not caused him to readjust his views or caused any cultural difficulties between himself and his partner. He said as an Afro-Caribbean, his culture was in fact closer to his partner's than to many other black people for example.

However some respondents believed being in the relationship involved having to make a number of personal and social readjustments. For example one respondent said:

*'Because I am in a mixed relationship I have to think about my partner, her feelings and what she wants to do, her concerns and perhaps insecurity I have to take all that into consideration'.*

Another respondent said:

*'A black woman would actually say to the Husband, you should go out with your friends and you should visit so and so. You find that it's not the same with white women. It's not like that with a white woman, she wants to be with you on every occasion'.*

Some respondents spoke about the way in which being in the relationship forced them to focus on their own colour. As one respondent commented:

*'Well, I'm a black man, you know. And I thought to myself, hold on a minute.... because she said, oh, they'll be all right. She said they'd[people] be OK, and I thought to myself, no they won't....they won't be OK, because life isn't as easy as that, you know, life isn't as easy as that. You know, if I thought it would jeopardise your job, you know, while I [told] her, I wouldn't have got involved. So I'd have said, let's forget it because this is going to cause a lot of problems'.*

### ***The women's experience***

A number of the white respondents who had had relationships with white men/boys said that there was a difference between being in a relationship with black men and white men, but that that difference was not about sexual virility but about different ways of doing things based on different attitudes.

For example one respondent said:

*'...they (black men) are unreliable, there is a sense when you are with them you feel good, but you seem to be still rushing after them to some degree'.*

Another said:

*'It's one of those relationships you often hear women talk about having black partners turning up late at night and going out early in morning, he was doing a bit of dealing and whatever. I supported him a lot over the years. Actually I felt in quite a good hand because I had quite an unsettling time and my self-esteem was fairly low but he never misled me...or treated me badly'.*

One respondent spoke about the selfish attitudes of some of the black men with whom she has had relationships. From her experience of being in such relationships she said one of the differences between black men and white men is that:

*'White men are more caring, and more attentive and actually I'd suggest know the woman's body a bit better than black men. I think black men have all sorts of stigma associated with the female body. In terms of performance, I think black men see sex as a performance and where I think my experience with white men is that they see it as much more .....their level of intimacy is different... '.*

Another respondent said:

*'They don't show their feelings maybe, they're very hard, they want sex, you know, but they don't necessarily want what goes with it, the rest of the settling down and commitment, and that sort of thing. And then if they feel they're getting (too much hassle to commit and they are losing control of what)..... happening is, then they back off. They get involved but then they try to get out of it sort of thing'.*

However another respondent with a different experience said:

*'Well, I did get involved quite young with a black person and so most of my experiences have been with black people. I don't really have much experience sexually with white people. The white guy, Phil, he wasn't very adventurous in bed, he was just the basic what happens, you know. Yeah, but I suppose every black guy I've been with, they've been more sexual'.*

Five respondents spoke about expecting people to be disapproving of the relationship and having to maintain a sense of dignity irrespective of the negative comments and reactions from significant others and strangers. One respondent commented that it was difficult being in the relationship because her partner found himself in a relationship that had social consequences for which he was unprepared. She said:



*'...he was an accountant, he said he is working class and he got involved, on the fringes mind you, with the Nation of Islam movement ... he basically hid me from everybody he knew because I was white and he did not want to explain his relationship with me'.*

All respondents spoke about being aware of the stereotypical perceptions of significant others and strangers towards interracial relationships. Many respondents believe significant others and strangers could only relate to them through the negative perception. For example one respondent commented about how she had used the perceptions to her own advantage.

She said:

*'Yeah, but I mean you can play on that perception as well, can't you? I mean if I go to the market in Balham and I go to the store that sells West Indian foods, and there is a West Indian guy, then I would say to him, well you better give me a nice piece [of meat] you know because otherwise I'm going to get a kickin', you know. Because he sees me with my black partner so he knows what I'm saying. So you can tap into that as well'.*

Another respondent said she was afraid 'others' would perceive her relationship in the same way she had perceived some interracial relationships that fitted a particular stereotype. Some respondents spoke about feeling a sense of isolation and wondering how they were going to cope in the face of the rejection from their family and friends. They said because of the negativity from family and friends they tended to look to the relationship itself for their source of strength and validation. One respondent commented that even though her partner's chauvinistic and hurtful behaviour was causing her pain and anguish she still relied on him because she had no where else to go for support. She said:

*'He had some ex-girlfriend that used to phone him. He said it was when she wanted gear (cannabis) she'd phone him. And I'd get very paranoid that he was still seeing her and possibly he was, but he denied it. Things got a bit bad but we still sort of saw each other on and off. He'd end up not being here, he'd be nights away and then I'd get really paranoid and drive myself mad about it. I lost it, I think, when I was with him I didn't know what was going on and I didn't know what I was doing'.*

Another speaking of her experience said:

*'He started seeing somebody else, but I didn't know this at the time. But I assumed, I felt like he was seeing somebody else, though he denied it. We had a few fights he gave me a black eye one time which was bad, and I didn't take the kids to school for a week because I couldn't leave the house, and so I was very dependent on him to buy the shopping and things like that. It just got really bad into the relationship. We split up and then I still wanted to see him, I was still seeing him on and off, and things like that'.*

However she also said she learnt a great deal from him. In particular she said she learnt about black people's experience in Britain from being with him. She commented:

*'He put into me a lot about the way black people were treated in this country. He brought up the way that on TV black people are portrayed, and I started noticing a lot more the way black people are, you know, treated differently. He was very much on black, and you know, like he'd sort of talk about how difficult it was for him, he'd tried to get work, you know, a white collar job, and it never worked out. Because of the way he was treated, he was treated differently to what another white guy was treated, and so therefore he had a bit of a short temper and so he was trying to make money the way he knew how to make money rather than the way white people expected him to. He didn't want to be a cleaner or something, you know. He was very intelligent, he had it all upstairs, and I feel that he taught me a lot but he was also very bad to me, I think'.*

Eight of the respondents said that although there were clear cultural differences between themselves and their partners, the actual problems they faced had more to do with gender differences. In their view men, whether black or white had a great deal in common in terms of their attitudes and behaviour towards women. As one respondent said:

*'I met a lot of women who were involved in mixed relationships. They talk about the way the black men behaved which wasn't particularly nice and they weren't well behaved towards them but this is because they are men'.*

Another respondent said:

*'I mean, I think, yeah, I suppose I have had discussions with some of the people I've been out with about the fact that they are black and the differences that we had and.....these possible problems that we could encounter. But then.....you know, sort of, in particular, thinking that I had real problems with some men, the issue of race didn't come into it.*

*It was really, you know, more of the fact that they were men than the fact they were of a different race'.*

Fourteen of the respondents said they found it difficult to assess the extent to which cultural differences impinged on their relationship. But within this group five respondents acknowledged that on many occasions arguments or discussions with their partners had sometimes been conducted along racial or 'political' lines. As illustrated by one respondent who said:

*'There is a sort of power struggle that goes on and the power within the relationship and certainly if I think of my daughter's father who is constantly struggling to be on top if you like and to feel that he is in control so the sexual politics are an issue and by the same token he does not want me to help him with anything because of his own perceptions of the relationship between black men and white women. Because he is struggling against the notion that the reasons black men have relationships with white women is to help them, to help out and help them progress in whatever either socially or financially'.*

Another said:

*'I think there are some particular things...(about the interracial nature of the relationship) there are things about negotiating around each other. I think the way he...definitely...because before he got into the relationship with me he was very much not particularly liberal in terms of having a multi-cultural view of things he was quite staunchly into black identity and stuff and don't really think he'd end up with a white woman in any sort of long term basis. It is the sort of thing we spoke about before we got together and we still talk about it now a lot'.*

Some respondents said they were aware of the racial difference between themselves and their partner at the beginning of the relationship, but this awareness faded after a few months into the relationship and that the difficulties in the relationship are more about 'being a relationship per se. For example one respondent said:

*'The things which have been difficult about the relationship have been things to do with relationships between men and women and I don't think it's anything necessarily to do with the cultural difference or ways of approaching things because of where we have come from'.*

Another respondent made a similar point. She said:

*'Em...I mean, I think, yeah, I suppose I have had discussions with some of the people I've been out with about the fact that they are black and the*

*differences that we had and.....these possible problems that we could encounter. But then.....you know, sort of, in particular, thinking that I had really problems with some men, the issue of race didn't come into it. It was really, you know, more of the fact that they were men than the fact they were of a different race'.*

And another said:

*'You can't separate the cultural difference between us from the relationship. I mean, like the only thing we really argue about is that if we are having a discussion about politics or social issues, I would tend to be more left-wing ..... West Indian men can be quite conservative, with a small c, you know'.*

However one respondent highlighted class and level of education as an area of difference between herself and her partner. She commented:

*'I mean the difference; I suppose between him and all the others is actually one of standard of education. I mean he doesn't have a degree...em....and I suppose all the rest of them were either, you know, on their way to, or working professionally and had a degree, I think, all of them. He didn't achieve very well at secondary school. But he's a very clever man, I think. But he's not as well educated as some of the other people I've been out with. I mean he can be quite difficult and he's very tetchy at the end of the day, I mean he doesn't like, you know, because we're at his flat and he says, are you causing trouble? which means I've left a piece of wrapping paper somewhere or something. So we....and there's a serious edge to it. But, no, I mean we get on...we get on, you know, we're like mates as well, and that really...(is what is important)'.*

A number of respondents said that the racial and cultural difference between themselves and their partner did cause them to think about their social environment, their movements and where they go together. For example one respondent said:

*'think so, yeah. I mean I wouldn't like to think it would stop us going anywhere, but I'm certainly conscious of that in a way I've never been before. We went to Paris last year and we just.....last weekend we were in Amsterdam. Now, obviously, both of those places are very multicultural, very sort of very cosmopolitan. It's a bit different from....I mean we were talking about going to Ireland. Now that's going to be a very different experience. It wouldn't stop us going, but you are conscious of it'.*

## **Analysis**

There were differences between male and female respondents' responses in this section of the interview. The majority of the male respondents admitted that being in the relationship has meant having to make compromises between their partner's cultural norms and their own. It was clear from their responses that they were acutely aware of the personal changes and adjustments they had to make as a result of being involved in such a relationship. For example they have had to confront the issues of race, their sense of identity, the nature of their relationship and connection to their cultural background. Similarly the perceptions and assumptions of significant others and strangers appeared to be an area of concern even though most suggested they were unaffected by the views of 'others'.

In some cases women respondents spoke of the personal adjustment they had to make as a result of being in the relationship. But, unlike the male respondents they experienced less probing from others about their race or cultural affiliations. Their connections to their cultural group were not called into question nor was their identity and racial and cultural identification held up to the same scrutiny, although some commented about wanting to 'show' significant others and strangers that their relationship did not conform to the stereotype. Most were aware of the stereotype of interracial relationships, with all their negative connotations. However, most respondents claimed that they were unconcerned by the views held towards them and their partner by significant others and strangers. The majority of the women respondents believed that it was the combination of gender difference and sexual politics that affected the relationship most profoundly rather racial and cultural differences.

### **(D) The Reactions of Significant Others and Strangers.**

The aim of the interview questions in this section was to explore how people involved in the relationship experienced the reactions of significant others and strangers towards their relationship.

### *The men's experience*

What was striking about all the male respondents' responses was their attempt to 'manage' how they informed 'others' about their involvement with a partner who was from a different racial and cultural background. There was a sense from their responses that they were under constant pressure to justify their involvement in what many significant others and stranger portrayed as a 'shameful' relationship. For example, all respondents spoke about having to think about whom to tell, when to tell and how to tell 'others' about the fact that they were in an interracial relationship.

Over half (60 per cent) of the respondents talked about how they found that black women were more likely to challenge them about their choice of partner. Some said black women, including members of their family, verbally abused them and they were accused of being selfish and abandoning their race. One respondent said:

*'I have a black woman friend who is pretty angry with me for having white relationships...she's still friendly with me...she said I am one of those brothers who has been lost to the whites'.*

Five respondents said a number of people advised them that they should not be taking relationships with white women as seriously as relationships with black women. Of this group two respondents said friends advised them that having sexual relationships with white women was acceptable but they should not marry them or consider having them as long-term partners.

One respondent said:

*'Most of my friends have reservations about my relationships with white women. Their reason for objection is purely cultural because they believe that I would not be able to do the things other African men do such as the ability to go out to clubs and other places without one's partners or having to explain oneself'.*

Another respondent said:

*'my mother wanted me to get involved with women from my village or from my town because she's always of the opinion that wherever you*

*go in the world if you marry someone from your own town she was likely to come back with you to your own town'.*

One respondent said:

*'my mum told me definitely not to marry a white person because she believed they would never come to Nigeria to live...I remember she warned me about that before I came to England' .*

And another respondent recalled:

*'And they didn't think that I should be taking relationships with white women as seriously as I did, or as they felt I did. You know, because I've always treated women, black or white, with respect, I think. And I don't suppose they thought that would even go down too well with them, I guess. This is some of them'.*

Of the respondents who are or were married to white partners many of them said that when they informed families and friends that they were getting married the usual reaction was that that they should not do it because of the racial and cultural difference, and that it was unlikely that the relationship would survive or work for the benefit of both partners.

Three respondents said both their family and their partner's family were very supportive of the relationship and that they had no difficulties or problems with the idea of them having a relationship with a partner from a different racial and cultural background.

One respondent said the reactions of his partner's parents and friends were more positive than he had anticipated. He said:

*'In my first relationship with a white person I wouldn't say there were adverse reactions from her parents, in fact her father welcomed me with open arms and I even lived in the house while I was attending college they gave me a room....but I was surprised when she went back to work and she told them she was going out with a black male student, people felt happy for her and when we did get married all friends came. It was good'.*

In contrast to the positive reactions highlighted above some respondents said that they had reached a stage where they no longer cared what significant others and strangers said or thought about their relationship

because they had the same negative reactions each time they informed people. For example, one respondent spoke at length about the response of his partner's parents when they discovered the relationship. He recalled:

*'It was awful, they invited me to the house and her mother said what are you doing with my daughter? And then her brother comes on and says to me do you know two years ago you wouldn't be sitting in that chair? They were basically threatening me. She said; 'go back to Brixton and leave my daughter alone'. I wasn't even from Brixton. After we've been going for about three years and we told them we were getting married...her mum said you may marry her but don't have any kids because they wouldn't have a culture and they would be funny'.*

Many respondents spoke about how their family and close friends advised them against the relationship, not because they did not approve of such relationships, but because they were concerned about the likely negative reactions of significant others and strangers toward the relationship.

Two respondents said they could not work out whether the negative reactions of their partner's family were due to their dislike of their daughter forming a relationship with a black partner or because of other reasons. For example one respondent said:

*'The mother wouldn't accept me and neither did her dad...the reaction was different, I don't know, ....this is really hard for me to say it, ...whether it is because of my colour but I was a married (separated) man with 3 children so it was like a no-go area'.*

The other respondent said:

*'Yeah, that was a different kettle of fish. Samantha's parents had a bad reaction.... partly based on my colour but, having got to know them quite well and got to understand them quite well, I don't believe it was just colour. I think anybody, almost anybody, would have had a problem with them. You know, I think and I firmly believe that there were other reasons that he couldn't quite accept me'.*

Another respondent said he disliked going out with his partner to certain places because of the reactions of significant others and strangers. He spoke about the experience of feeling uncomfortable and agitated because he felt stared at and scrutinised by 'others'. He said:



*'I hated people staring at me and making comments, although sometimes you don't hear the comments but I know they are looking and saying something and.....,you know you feel very uncomfortable...I hate (going out) shopping when she's with me'.*

Some respondents said they often got the sense from people outside the relationship that the *raison d'être* of the relationship was sexual and that the couple must do nothing else but copulate all the time. As one respondent whose comment was also echoed by other respondents said:

*'people think they know what's going on...well, you know, black men have big dicks and white women easy lay, you know. You're not going to beat.....forever. We know what it's all about, you know, you're just shagging each other senseless and that's it, and there's nothing more to the relationship, you know. No, I'm sure a lot of people feel that way. I'm sure they feel there can't be a meaningful relationship there. It's not...it's nothing more than, you know, trivia involved, which I find offensive'.*

All the respondents said they get what they described as the 'look' of disdain and disapproval from black women. They all said they were aware of the meaning behind the look. In their view the look was black women's way of saying they disapprove of the relationship.

The majority of the respondents also spoke about going out to places with their partner and looking to see the reactions of others. In some instances when they were out with their partner, particularly in predominately white areas or areas with very little black presence, they looked to see whether there were any other black people present. They said their dilemma is that although they look for other black people they are caught in a double bind because of the possible negative reaction from the black person because they are with a white partner. One respondent whose views represent the others said:

*'when I go to Cornwall and places with Sharon I am always looking around for another black person...you get me. It makes me feel comfortable and uncomfortable to see them'.*

And another respondent commented that while he looks for other black men in places, he dreads seeing black women. He said;

*'But I am aware of it wherever I go, you know. If I go into a pub, I would say to her, you know there's no brothers in there, hope there are no sisters in there' .*

One respondent said:

*'I suppose it's a bit upsetting (people's reactions) and I can feel it, and we (black people) feel something white people can't feel and don't understand. And I do think it's genuine. Maybe sometimes I build it up a bit when it's not there and maybe sometimes I don't pay attention to it when it is there, so maybe I'm out of focus sometimes, but I believe it's (the negativity) there'.*

Another said:

*'When we go out to places where it's mostly white people I always tell her that I feel uncomfortable but she did not take me seriously, but when I took her to Queens, a black area in New York, she was shocked because she began to do what I do when I looked for other black people, because she was now in the minority she started to look for other white people, do you understand?'*

### ***The women's experience***

A respondent said her mother told her an 'old wife's tale' about floating tea and black men and was warned against getting involved with a black man.

As she said:

*'if you had a cup of tea and it had a tea leaf floating in it, it meant that you were going to marry a black man. She often joked about things but if she'd known what was going to happen, she wouldn't have made the joke.....'.*

One respondent recalled as a young child asking her mother what would happen if she was to marry a Black man. She said she was told the family would disown her. She said:

*'What would you say if I married a black guy? And mum said we'd disown you. And my friend Jane was really upset at the thought she would do anything like that'.*

Another said:

*'my parents were never too happy about me having a black boyfriend'.*

And another respondent said:

*'I did not think oh no I won't go out with a black man. I knew my father wouldn't like it ok. He just thought it was wrong and it was the wrong thing to be doing.....I knew he wasn't happy and he did not really speak to him....he would come in and say hi to my mum but he and my dad would just ignore each other'.*

Some respondents said when their parents discovered they were involved in a relationship with black men their reaction was to try and keep the relationship a secret from all other members of the family including their friends and work colleagues. One respondent commented that both her partner and herself had to hide the relationship from respective families.

She said:

*'...he used to take me out to places that I never even dreamt of before. It was like growing up over night and it was, it was fine while it lasted. I couldn't contact him because his family, of course, didn't know about me. It wasn't a problem because he, you know, he would ring me and contact me when he was supposed to but I never met any of his family. They wouldn't allow it'.*

Some respondents said their family took it badly and they felt it was wrong for black and white people to get into a relationship together as this is considered 'unnatural'. Four respondents said their parents/family reaction was racist. One respondent said:

*'I mean my family's kind of prejudices....em...my parents I mean, not my brother..... my father said I don't know why you are hanging out with that, and the word he used was `coon'.*

Another respondent said:

*'I was told by my step-granddad that I'd let my dad down, that I'd let the family down, you know, like my nan and my step-granddad and some other relations. They don't include me in anything now; I'm very much the outcast of the family. I accept it, I don't care, you know. I don't really want to see them. If they've got that sort of attitude, if they're going to feel ashamed of me, then I feel ashamed for them for feeling like that'.*

Ten respondents said that when they took their partner home, a parent, usually their father would ignore their partner. As one respondent said:

*'(When) my dad met him that Easter holiday but only very briefly, he said he got dirty looks from my dad. My mum didn't really say anything'.*

Eighteen of the respondents said they tended to get different reactions depending on whether the onlookers were black men, black women, white men or white women. All of these respondents spoke about walking down the street with their partners and being given the 'eye' or the 'look' (of disdain and disapproval) by black women. They said the reactions of black men were in the main non-threatening while white men and other white women looked at them disapprovingly.

All the respondents discussed above agreed that although the responses of white men, black men, black women and white women towards their relationship were different, they all said people tended to express disapproval in different ways. A respondent whose comment is echoed by the others said:

*'You notice reactions. People definitely look at you and they look at when you are in a mixed couple. It varies from those who look out of curiosity, they wonder and you get negative vibes out of other people...I think it (the reactions) varies. I am aware of and I know other women who are involved in mixed race relationship or have got mixed race children sometimes they experienced negative vibes or looks from black women'.*

Another said:

*'You would get funny looks sometimes or you would get comments and these are from all sorts of people, white people and black people. A person assumes he beats me up and it is black women and the white men are usually the ones that make the comments'.*

Some respondents said they were warned by friends and family members to be careful about forming relationships with black men because of cultural differences and the different expectations with regard to relationships. Some were also warned that their black partner was likely to mistreat them. Some respondents said when they informed close friends; they were warned to end the relationship in order to safeguard their reputation. Another respondent commented: *'They (people outside) see you and they think they know you and how our relationship is organised and what we do'.*

Fourteen respondents said they 'feel' people look down on them for being involved in the relationship. One respondent commented:

*'Yeah, I think I notice it more, and even when I'm just with friends, I think that maybe...I don't know whether I've got more sensitive to it or whether it's got worse. But I think that people do look at you more. I think...and if you meet people that you don't know, they would tend to speak to me rather than if I'm with a black person, you know. Even guys would tend to speak to me, you know, men generally. And it's like I feel now that it's almost like there's a period where if you're with somebody and there's a period of proving themselves'.*

Some respondents said they believe that members of their family and friends often saw their relationship with a black partner as transient and not a meaningful relationship. They believe people outside the relationship do not expect the relationship to last or to have the same commitments as monoracial relationships. One respondent recalled her family's reaction when they discovered she was involved in a relationship with a black man. She said: *'I think my family's reaction were...they were quite surprised and not surprised because I had quite a lot of difficulties in my other (previous) relationships'.*

Some respondents spoke about the negative treatment, both verbal and physical, they had received from significant others and strangers, both black and white. For example one respondent recalled:

*'Well, I suppose, you were aware sometimes, especially in that time, of people looking at you sometimes, you know, if you're walking down the street holding hands, or....em...but the only time I experienced any outright sort of racism was when I was with my partner and people spat at me and threw things, threw stones at me when I was walking down the street with him'.*

Some respondents said they found it difficult to be specific and give examples of the negative reactions of significant others and strangers, but the feeling of negativity they experienced from them was real. However one respondent said:

*'What was the reaction? He was convinced that everybody would be hostile and he was right, he was convinced that people wouldn't like it because of the fact that he was black and I was white. And it's true, people have a view you know, everybody's got a bloody opinion, haven't*

*they, you know. Like, it's wrong, it's right, they shouldn't do that, yes they should, you know'.*

Another respondent was certain she lost her job because of her involvement with a black partner. As she commented:

*'Because my children are mixed race they think....I'm not hiding the fact that I've been with a black man if you like, and they can't handle it, they don't like it. I did have a job in one pub and nobody knew anything about me. They didn't know me at all and they just see me as this blonde girl behind the bar, all chatting me up, and I wasn't interested, I was there for the money. But then the minute they find out I have black children and that I was in a black relationship, I lost my job, wasn't wanted there any more, you know. I feel it was because of that'.*

One respondent commented that she 'felt' implicated in the relationship because she was concerned about other people's reaction. She said:

*'In terms of other people's reaction I was concerned that people might be racist towards both of us. Obviously because I'd become implicated in that.... you know, having children and thinking about what the children might go through'.*

## **Analysis**

All the respondents had experienced, primarily, negative reactions from significant others and strangers. As a result of the negative reactions there was often an attempt by respondents to manage how information about their involvement in an interracial relationship was conveyed to 'others'.

Respondents did not readily make their relationship known to 'others, including in many cases families and friends. The majority of respondents said black women's reactions towards the relationship was by far the most consistently aggressive and hostile. They noted that white men were often hostile to the relationship, but not as hostile as black women.

## **(E) The Impact of the Reactions of Significant Others upon the Relationship**

### ***The men's experience***

Many respondents said that they tended to hide the relationship from significant others and strangers because they could not predict the likely reactions. As one respondent commented:

*'Well, I think she would admit that I was right in that it would have been silly to let everyone know at the start of the relationship. As things got on, obviously it was evident that it needed to be managed because things were happening...you know..... I suppose I admitted it to myself I did need a bit of support, you know, because you think to yourself, hold on a minute, if everyone's against you how is it going to work? You know, it's going to be bloody difficult. Do we want this and do I want to go through this? Jeopardise our careers....it was the start of my career and, you know, she's established herself very well there. She's got a lot of credibility and a lot of respect, and I thought it would be damaged, it would be tarnished, you know, I really did. So I thought, who needs to know?'*

Many of the respondents said they developed a sharpened sense of awareness about people around them. They had grown to trust their instincts by taking account of both verbal comments and the 'vibes' they felt in the situation. As one respondent commented:

*'I think it exists. I'd be a fool to say it doesn't exist. I think 'isms', ignorance, racism exists wherever you go, you know. And I suppose I've got more of a problem than her really. You know, she doesn't have a problem. I honestly believe she doesn't have a problem. She's tough, you know, and I guess I'm more sensitive really. I'm thinking about it, but it doesn't really bother me because I know I'm big enough and ugly enough to look after myself, but still, you know, I'm thinking Why, why do we keep having to go through this, you know. It's getting boring. And there's somebody....people who are so blinkered that you can't see what's going on in the real world'.*

Five respondents said they reacted very badly to the negative comments and attitudes of their partner's parents/friends/family. They commented that their response towards the negative attitudes did not help because, as a result of their reaction, it became more difficult for them to get close to their partner's parents. One respondent said: *'Because of my mum's warning to me not to marry a white person my wife and my mother have not met each other yet'.*

Another said:

*'People stare, they go past and then look back and you...know...looking back now that might have been one of the factors that led to the break down of my relationship because I used to hate going shopping with her because we go into shops.....I hated people staring at me and making comments, although you don't hear the comments I know they are looking at you and saying something and you know you feel very uncomfortable...'*

Some respondents said, because they were never sure what the external reaction was going to be, they had to be able to make the necessary adjustments and tailor their reactions and behaviour depending on the situation. For example one respondent recalled his experience with his partner in Central London. He said:

*'There was one reaction we had once...we were in Central London, when three young black girls, as they walked past us started singing the theme tune from the film 'Jungle Fever'. I just' laughed' because I knew what they were getting at'.*

Some respondents said they scrutinised other interracial couples to see whether they were stereotypical and they made strenuous efforts in their relationship not to fall into the trap of confirming the stereotypes. The consequence of this affected the way they saw themselves and the way they behaved with their partner. As one respondent commented:

*'Because I am a black man her parents and others have this vision that I would have other women on the side and I would treat her badly. I don't deliberately go out to prove them wrong...I am just myself and they can't work it out...we've been together for 15 years'.*

Many respondents reported that as a result of the reactions towards their relationship, their friendship circle changed considerably. They had more close friends who were themselves in interracial relationships.

Some respondents spoke about hiding their partner from their family with the subsequent result of a strained family relationship and their relationship with their partner was also affected.

### ***The women's experience***

As with their partner, some respondents said the negative reactions they experienced strengthened their emotional ties with their partner because he was all they had for support.

Some respondents felt the negative reactions towards the relationship caused difficulties and anxieties and was a constant source of irritation because they



found themselves discussing the very nature and motivation of their relationship. A respondent whose comments are echoed by many others said:

*'... ..oh yes absolutely we talk a lot about mixed race relationships and the stereotypes of and the kind of and the misconception people have of mixed race relationship and how black men are studs and how this sometimes attracts white women to black men, and how black men get involved with white women as a status thing those sort of things we discuss and we discussed them a lot from the beginning (of the relationship)'*.

Some respondents said whilst they were aware of significant others and strangers' negative and hostile attitudes towards their relationship, they tried not to allow it to get in the way of their relationship, but it required a great deal of effort. As one respondent said:

*'It's like my dad. At the beginning he didn't want to know Tony, wasn't interested in me and him having a relationship, until I was pregnant. And it wasn't until I was eight months pregnant that he decided that he'd best make the most of what's going on. He was just about to have a granddaughter, and she's going to be mixed race. He can either deny it or make the most of It'*.

Some respondents said they recognised the 'image' that was often portrayed about couples in interracial relationships and their attempt not to fall into that category often affected their relationship. She commented;

*'I think there's a type of white women that goes about with a type of black man, but if they're not falling into my idea of what that type is, you know the type... Well, I suppose a bit rough really, unfortunately, and straight black hair, gold, common dress, or smart but common, if that makes any sense. I often wonder whether that is how I am seen. I never dress like that...'*

Some respondents said because of the reactions from significant others and strangers they felt under pressure to make the relationship work as they did not want to fall into the stereotypical trap. For example one respondent said:

*'I don't know whether other people say this, but I sometimes think, God, the worse thing would be if we split up, it would be, you know because he was black. I know if it goes wrong it is because we did not get on not because of his colour, but that does not stop me thinking about it'*.

Many respondents said that when they were in conversation with people they didn't know very well people tended to assume that they were in a mono-racial relationship. And they often appeared shocked and uncomfortable on the discovery that they were involved in an interracial relationship.

It was evident from the responses of many of the respondents that the sexual stereotyping by significant others and strangers is often mentioned by the partners and in some cases had an impact on the relationship. To illustrate the point one respondent said:

*'...there is a belief that there is sexual curiosity and black men and penis size. Yeah, I mean, I've thought about it. I don't think it is....it's not that...that wouldn't have been a factor, you know, it wasn't a factor for me. I mean, it doesn't....Frank is Frank, whether he's black or white. I mean, I'm not saying that he's not partly how he is because he's a black man, but no, there wasn't any curiosity about is somebody different somehow physically because they're black, no I mean we joke about that. You know, he says you'd better tell people I've got the biggest and, you know, I say, oh absolutely, you know. I mean we joke about the cultural stereotypes'.*

Another respondent said: *'we make jokes about the penis things'.*

Some respondents spoke about the difficulties of developing intimate relationships with white males once they discovered they had had a relationship with a black man. They said that white males tend to be apprehensive about getting involved with them. As one respondent commented about her experience with a white partner:

*'He had a go at me about having a black fetish. What is it I like about black people? How comes I only have black friends? Why do you only let black people in your house? Why haven't you got any white friends who come and see you? I said maybe that's because the white people don't like the idea. They don't understand what I feel. We've had a few arguments about it. He feels pretty insecure I think. He's worried that I might meet a black man and go off with him rather than be with him. And I feel, when I go out with him, when we walk past black people he looks at me to see if I look at them. And that makes me feel very uncomfortable. One day, not long ago, he was waiting at the station to get a train and I was talking to him, and behind him there was a Rastafarian. And I just happened to look at the guy and he walked away from me, Nick did, and he accused me of fancying this black guy. And he was saying, what is it you've got a problem with black people? I said I haven't got a problem with black people, I think you've got a problem.*

She continued:

*He's got a problem with black people because I think he feels he should be better than them. And for me to have gone out with a black person and have two children by him, makes him realise that he isn't necessarily better than a black person, you know. I don't know. It's em.....it's a difficult one, you know, but yeah, some white guys don't like it, they don't like the idea that I've been out with a black person'.*

### **Analysis**

Some respondents, women and men, believed the negative reactions of significant others and strangers had served to undermine their relationship while for others the negative reaction had in fact served to strengthen the relationship and helped to deepen their emotional ties much stronger.

Because of the ostracism and disapprobation from significant others and strangers, these respondents felt they had nowhere else to look for emotional and psychological support but from one another.

In presenting this analysis in this form there is a need for caution because, by definition, the study did not interview those for whom the pressure of being in the relationship had been too great and who had therefore separated from their partner

### **(F) Strategies for Dealing with the Reactions of Significant Others and Strangers**

This section prompted and probed respondents to discuss the ways in which they coped with the reactions of significant others and strangers. It focused on the actions they took, if any, and the strategies they had developed that enabled them to circumvent the impact of the negative reactions they had encountered.

#### ***The men's experience***

One respondent said:

*'I developed probably a very thick skin very early on (in the relationship) because I presumed that everyone hated black people so when I am out (with my partner) I tend to ignore people'.*

Another respondent said. *'I never look round, I close my ears, I don't look at the periphery, so I don't see any reactions'*.

Fourteen respondents said that there were many places they tried to avoid when they were with their partner. They said if at all possible they didn't go to places where they 'know' they are likely to be made to feel uncomfortable. It may be places where there were black people or white people, it did not matter as the negative reactions tended to induce the same uncomfortable feelings.

As a consequence of feeling uncomfortable many respondents said they often avoided going to places where they thought they were likely to face hostility. While some respondents said they never went to pubs, others said they think about the pubs they visited because those were the kinds of places where they were more likely to get negative reactions from strangers.

As one respondent commented:

*'Maybe to a degree I do vet the places I go to because, like I say, if I go out for pleasure or something like that or leisure I go to a pub and I choose the pubs that I want to go to, who I want to go with and I don't feel comfortable with you, I'd probably, make a decision like not to go, whereas when I was younger I'd go, but in the back of my mind I'm still very wary that I don't know where I'm going, I'm trusting somebody else, and I don't really like that because at the end of the day you don't have to deal with the things I have to deal with, so I have to look out for myself cause..... You can be in a situation where it could be hostile.....because I'm a black person living with white people, it's all right for them to walk into a pub and not have to think about somebody's out to do you harm for no reason, you know. Because when I go into places I stand and look to see whether there is another black face, normally get a (nod) because you're (both) in a minority.... basically it means it is an all right place'*.

Another respondent, like many others, echoed the responses of the above. He commented:

*'... Secondly I never go to pubs, because these are places you are more likely to get reactions from people'*.

Other respondents made similar points. One respondent said:

*'We definitely avoid certain places. I know I do. She has been asking me to go to a country village pub with her, but I wouldn't because I know I'm going to be the only black man there so I wouldn't' .....I avoid places that we perceive as racist like the East-End of London or that area in London where Stephen Lawrence got killed, Eltham. I usually decide where to avoid because she's been wanting to go to the country pub and I have said no, she knows my reason but she thinks it might be ok....I don't'.*

One respondent said he was careful about where he went in certain circumstances so as to avoid what he termed 'unnecessary aggravation'. He said:

*'With me and I do not so much avoid, although avoid does come into it. For example if I were to go to Bristol and we wanted to go for a drink...I wouldn't take her to places where I think there would be a problem. I don't see the point of trying to expose her or myself to aggravation basically because of other people's bigotry if I can possibly avoid it. There is no point in going into a place if we are not going to be accepted'.*

Some of the respondents said their experience of being a minority had enabled them to deal with the negative reactions from significant others and strangers. (Although the additional reactions of black women made the situation more complex for them). Some said they adopted similar strategies, so for example, they may decide to confront the negative reactions from significant others and strangers and other times they may choose to ignore it. How they decide which strategy to adopt and under what circumstance a particular strategy would be utilised was never fully articulated. But in some cases they would confront people who were being objectionable in their comments and at other times they just ignored it.

Some respondents said they discovered that if they are very cautious then they are not too anxious about where they went with their partner.

Some respondents said they tried to avoid references to their partner when they were with 'others'. As one respondent whose view was shared by many other respondents commented: *'the question of my partner never comes into it because it's not something I bring up'.*

Some respondents said they close their ears and they don't look at the periphery (avoid taking notice of people around them) when they are out with their partner. As one respondent said; *'I used to notice people's reaction but now I don't bother to look at people anymore'*.

And another said:

*'Well, a lot of the times we're not often walking, like you're in the car or you're going from A to B basically and you get out. I wouldn't say that I'm looking, you know, maybe I'm walking like that but I'm concentrating, yet I see you in my peripheral but when people look at us and I think there are times when I don't look, depending on where I am I won't look around because I don't want to invite hostile reactions'*.

Some respondents said they were aware of the stereotypical ideas people had about the relationship and rather than be depressed about it they made jokes about it and played up to the stereotypes as a reaction and to regain the initiative.

Many of the respondents said as a result of their involvement in the relationship they restricted the places they went with their partners, both in terms of where they lived and the places they visited to socialise.

It also emerged that many respondents were very sensitive about the views others held about them, particularly other black people and how 'others' viewed their relationship. Many spoke about how they deliberately avoided situations, private and public, where their relationship or interracial relationships per se were discussed. As one respondent commented:

*'I never talk about my relationship at work...it has never been an issue nobody at work asks me if your partner is white...unless I have to I don't talk about it. I see no benefit in mentioning it. There is graduation ceremony coming up where the other students are taking their spouses, I am still debating whether to ask her to come...it is unlikely I would ask her...if she came it would make those people at work see you in a different light. I want them to see me the way they see me I don't want them to mix my social life'*.

Five respondents reported that, because of their partner, they had lost contact with significant others and as a result they had to concentrate on just the relationship.

Some respondents said they tried not to show any affection to their partner in public so as not to draw attention to themselves. For example one respondent whose comment is echoed by others said:

*'Because of their reactions (significant others and strangers) when we go out I don't hold her hands..... it's too awkward'.*

Another respondent said he was so anxious not to let other people know about his relationship that at first when he and his partner are in the company of other people he would:

*'..not talk to her because I used to think if I avoid talking to her and sort of ignore her and show nothing towards her...you get me...people will think we can't be together.. You get me'.*

Some respondents said there were times when they turned back from situations, especially when it was a new environment to avoid hostility and uncomfortable feelings that the reaction engendered.

### ***The women's experience***

Many of the respondents (approx 95 per cent) said they were aware of the problems that the relationship caused for significant others and strangers and therefore they avoid certain places. One respondent said when a colleague at work asked how she could go out with a dark man she said: *'I just ignored her.....I just thought it's her opinion she can have it'.*

Like the male respondents many of the female respondents said they tended to restrict where they visited with their partners and it also affected the areas where they were able to live and socialise.

As one respondent commented:

*'I wanted to move away a little while ago but I was worried about where I would go as to where I would fit in, you know, (because I have mixed race children). I was thinking about going up North, I wasn't sure if it would be a very good move'.*

Another respondent said:

*'There are places I feel less comfortable going. I know there are places my partner would certainly feel less comfortable going. I do veto where we go because of the reactions. I know at the beginning of the relationship it used to worry me more than it does now, but I still think about it'.*

And another respondent commented:

*'It is sometimes in the back of my mind to do that. I think I worry about where we go and what sort of a reaction we will get. I worry about that more than he does. When Paul moved up here from Birmingham, which was just over a year ago.....I've never sort of gone to pubs, it's not the type of thing I do, just go into a pub for a drink, but I started thinking about if I did want to go to a pub, which pub would I go to. I'd be a bit wary about going to certain places.. '.*

The majority of respondents spoke about the reactions of significant others and strangers towards the relationship, but in particular they all mentioned black women as the main group who appear to show the most vehement and aggressive attitudes towards interracial relationships. One respondent whose view is typical of other respondents said:

*'Yes....it's something you wish you weren't conscious of people looking at you. Conscious that people might be looking at you and...it's not a case that everybody is looking at me...but there are occasions when you're conscious that people are looking particularly when you are around black women. But generally in those situations I choose or try not to make eye contact. Somebody may be observing me but I choose to look away and not engage with that'.*

Another said: *'People look a bit more when they see us together'.*

Another respondent spoke about the experience of having to ostracise herself from others who she felt were negatively judging her because she had been involved in an interracial relationship. There was a sense from this respondent, and others, that by distancing themselves from significant others and strangers who disapproved of their relationship they could maintain their sense of pride. As one respondent said:

*'There are some white women who are OK about it, but then there some who have been brought up that white people maybe are better. And then they don't become your friend as such, you know, they will talk to you in the street or maybe on the way to school, you know, you get these groups of mums who always stand around chatting, but I don't. I don't stand around chatting with none of these mums. I don't know why it is, I*



*don't know if it's because they don't see me as one of them or they see that because I've been out with a black person and got black children that I'm not one of them, you know. I've got a couple of friends, mums at the school, who aren't like that at all, who I know because my children get on with their children and so therefore we've become friends. Em....but there are some white women who I feel look down at me possibly because of my relationship'.*

Another respondent said:

*'I did more or less what I wanted to I don't think I really bothered...it did not really bother me as to what other people would think and I know that some people I know did not like it and they don't like that sort of thing... ....I just think tough I don't care what other people think its got nothing to do with them so I just ignore them'.*

Another said:

*'I don't know. It's hard now to say because I've sort of got used to how people react to me. So I can't really say that I notice anything in particular (anymore)'.*

One respondent highlighted how, although she worked with a colleague for a number of months, she was unaware of the fact that she was in an interracial relationship. As she commented:

*'You discover people who are in relationships who, obviously, you just don't think. I mean the librarian who was working at work is pregnant now and having a baby, and she's married to a black guy. It's like hell, god, you've worked here for six months... ....but why should I know, two white women'.*

Fourteen respondents said, by accident rather than by design, but as a result of the reactions towards their relationship, they find that many of their friends are either involved in interracial relationships or have been in one. Even the black women they know are involved in non-monoracial relationships. For example one respondent said:

*'Yeah.....I 'd say quite a lot of women friends are in mixed race relationships or have had mixed relationships, it's actually incredible the number who are ...and women who are the same age as me with similar experience. The black women I know... ..some of whom have had mixed relationships'.*

Another respondent said:

*'I think my friends are quite diverse, but I have certainly.... since I have been involved with my partner (in an interracial relationship) I*

*have met more women with mixed race children. Definitely I think. All my friends have got mixed race children. I don't think it is a coincidence people seek out people in similar situations to some extent...definitely '.*

One respondent said: *'Of the ten of my closest friends nine are white and half of the ten are involved in an interracial relationship'.*

Another said:

*'I think I'm lucky that where I live there are a lot of mixed race relationships, you know, not just black white, but other races as well. I don't know, I just have to carry on doing what I am doing, bring up my children (who are mixed race)'.*

And the same respondents also said: *'The white people I know tend to be more involved with different race people'.*

Another respondent commented that she tended to associate with:

*'people that I felt safest with and who I maintained relationships with, because there's a couple of other guys that I still see, were black, and I felt safe with them. I never, you know, felt that they were going to take advantage'.*

### **Analysis**

What was evident was that many respondents made deliberate choices about where they went to socialise and with whom they developed friendships. They were acutely aware of the negative reactions that their relationship evoked, and as a result they avoided situations and environments in which they had to explain either the nature of their relationship or the reason for their involvement in such relationships. Further evidence suggests that rather than talk openly about their relationship to 'others', respondents, particularly the males, made strenuous efforts to conceal their involvement in such a relationship. It was also evident that in some instances male respondents seemed embarrassed by their involvement in a relationship with a white partner, while female respondents appeared to be less apprehensive and able to talk about their relationship freely and share their experience of being in the relationship with 'others'.

The strategies developed by respondents to deal with the negative reactions of significant others and strangers took the following forms: a) DISTANCING themselves from 'others', b) DENIAL of their involvement in the relationship, c) The SELECTIVE REVELATION of the relationship to chosen 'others', d) The INTENSIFICATION OF MUTUAL SUPPORT, e) The STRATEGIC AVOIDANCE of situations in which the couples find themselves to be under scrutiny, f) MINIMISATION OF SOCIAL CONTACTS with negative significant 'others' and, g) RECONFIGURING THE SOCIAL MILIEU with close relationships with other couples/individuals in similar situations. These strategies will be explored in greater detail in chapter eight, but it is worth noting that a strategy or combinations of strategies are used depending on the circumstances.

The next chapter, chapter six (part II) shall consider whether and to what extent the popular explanations discussed in chapter three have withstood exposure to the evidence gathered in furtherance of this thesis. The process will involve the discussion of each of the explanations in turn in order to develop an interpretative analysis of the findings that emerged.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Findings - part II**

#### **Respondents' responses to the Popular Explanations**

This chapter considers whether and to what extent the popular explanations developed in chapter four have withstood exposure to the evidence gathered in furtherance of this thesis. The process involves the interrogation of each of the explanations in turn in order to develop an interpretative analysis of the findings.

The explanations were;

- 1. Racial denial**
- 2. The quest for cultural inclusion and social mobility**
- 3. The quest for economic mobility**
- 4. Sexual and colour curiosity**
- 5. Revenge for racial and social oppression**
- 6. Geographical propinquity and shortage of same race partners**
- 7. Shared interests**

#### **1. Racial Denial and Self-Hatred**

This explanation maintains that the black respondents would minimise the significance of their racial difference with their partner and, in addition, would minimise the significance of race to their sense of identity and self-esteem.

#### **Findings**

There was little evidence from the findings to suggest that the black respondents either minimised the significance of their racial difference with their partners or minimised the significance of race to their sense of self and self-esteem. What emerged instead was that the racial differences between the respondents and their partners had, in some cases, a direct effect not only on the relationship itself, but also in the way the respondents and their partners related to significant others and strangers. For example, from analysing the responses of the majority of the male respondents it was

evident that because of the 'visibility' of their relationship they felt exposed to the gaze of significant others and strangers. The effect of the exposure was made worse by the disapproving manner and the negative attitudes expressed towards them. As a result the men became sensitive to the disapprobation of 'others' and the negative reactions their relationships evoked.

Many of the male respondents asserted that while it was undeniable that there were racial differences between themselves and their partner, they suggested that the difference became inconsequential in their daily interaction with their partner because they had grown to see not only the race of their partner, but the personal qualities that attracted them in the first instance. Many of the female respondents also echoed the same point when they commented that they were not preoccupied by the race of their partners but rather by their personal attributes and their personality. In looking beyond their racial differences many of the male respondents asserted that this was not an attempt to deny the racial difference or their own racial origin, but that from their daily contact with their partner they cease to see their partner's race or their own race as an issue in the relationship. At the same time there was a sense that far from being able to deny their race, in reality they are constantly confronted with their race, their sense of identity and where they belong, both culturally and politically as a result of being in the relationship. The explanation for the persistence of the racial and cultural question was largely due to the way significant others and strangers reacted towards the respondents and their partners.

As one male respondent commented:

*'Most of my friends have reservations about my relationships with white women. Their reason for objection is purely cultural because they believe that I would not be able to do the things other African men do'.*

Another said:

*'Even just walking down the street, you see people look at you...secondly you feel very, very alien because you stand out'.*

And another said:

*'People look and I think there are times when I don't look, depending where I am I won't look around because I don't want to invite what's the word?.... hostile (hostility)'*

Many of the male respondents said they had observed that there were often assumptions made by 'others' about their involvement in the relationship and about their sense of blackness. They said it was often assumed, though wrongly in their view, that they had 'sold out', that they had become a coconut (a term of abuse meaning black on the outside and white on the inside) and therefore could no longer relate to or identify as a black person. They said their sense of racial and culture connection to other black people tended to be a focal point for discussion by significant others and strangers. As one respondent commented:

*'I have a black woman friend who is pretty angry with me for having white relationships...she's still friendly with me...she said I am one of those brothers who has been lost to the whites'*

In addition, aside from the negative reactions of significant others and strangers, respondents suggested that the impact of the 'look' from black women, in particular, should not be underestimated because it meant their racial and cultural identity was under additional scrutiny. As a result they had had no choice but to confront not just their blackness but also the whiteness of their partner. For example one respondent said:

*'Well, I'm a black man and I know to take my station.... so that others will feel comfortable'*

Of course there are different ways in which the respondents' comments can be interpreted. They can either be viewed as a confirmation of the idea of a capitulation with a negative expectation and an acceptance of that which it portends. However, they could also be viewed as a reiteration of a reality that is unquestionable and with that an understanding and an awareness of the stereotypes about black men and the need to challenge the preconceptions not by confrontation, but by adopting a different approach than that expected. Nevertheless the point raised was that the black

respondents were conscious of the effect of their relationship on 'others' and the impact that their colour had on the situation.

Many of the male respondents said that rather than deny their racial identity; they in fact tended to accentuate their racial and cultural background. They suggested that the relationship acted as an impetus for them to maintain as many different aspects of their culture as they wanted. Within the relationship they were conscious to maintain their links and connections with their racial identity through the clothes they wore, the music they listened to and the food they ate. All the African respondents said that whilst they enjoyed their partners' culture and food, they regularly cooked African dishes and had introduced their partners to the culinary delights of African meals. Similarly the Caribbean respondents said they too had kept their cultural links and that they had taught their partners how to cook Caribbean dishes. All respondents said they had kept their links through their involvement in cultural festivals, either as active participants or as observers. Some said they went 'home' (The Caribbean and Africa) regularly to see families and friends. However, five respondents acknowledged that the relationship had changed them and the ways in which they related to their cultural background. For example one male respondent commented that:

*I think you do lose your cultural identity...yes I think so...for example....I used to enjoy playing African music but since I have been going out with her I don't play it so much any more in case she does not like it'.*

And another said:

*'I used to cook meals from my country but I don't anymore, partly because it too much hard work trying to get the ingredients. Secondly I don't think she likes it really. Also I get niggled sometimes when I am watching a programme about race or something like that and she seems uninterested. It's as if she cares nothing about me'.*

Another example that demonstrated the extent of the black respondents' understanding and awareness of racial and cultural issues was evident in the way their white partners had to get to grips with the complexity of being in a relationship that stirred up so much anger and negativity from 'others'.

For example, the white partners had to confront the realisation that an intimate relationship with black partners involved coming to terms with the ways in which colour affected their relationship with significant others and strangers. In many instances it was the black partners' recounting of their experiences of personal and institutional racism that enabled the white partners to become aware of discrimination and inequalities that existed. The realisations of their partner's negative experiences and the discriminatory treatment they received were confirmed by the comments of many of the female respondents. For example one female respondent said:

*'He put me into a lot of situations about the way black people were treated in this country...he sort of brought up the way that on TV the way black people are portrayed; I started noticing a lot more the way black people are, you know treated differently...'*

From a different perspective a similar view was expressed by a male respondent who spoke about his partner's increased awareness of the negative experience of black people. He said:

*'I think it raises discussions, you know, allows for discussions to be brought up because...until Sue started going out with me, she didn't really realise how subtle things were, you know, that I could actually point out.....she didn't notice this was going on. Now, Sue, because she's actually with a black person; she's actually sort of living the life of (black) people.....'*

From the study it was evident that before developing a relationship with black partners many of the women respondents had had very little knowledge or understanding of the level of discrimination and racism that black people experienced in Britain. They were unaware of the manifestations of racism and discriminatory practices or its impact on those who experienced it. However it also emerged that in a small number of cases, it was the white partners who introduced a political edge to their partner's understanding of discrimination and racism. In these instances it was the white partner who helped the black men to explore, in detail, the significance of slavery, the colonial legacy, the nature of the post-colonial relationship and the manifestations of institutional racism. Even though this group of respondents had experienced discrimination and racism it was not until they got involved with their white partners that they were able to articulate and



contextualise their experiences within a broader framework. So paradoxically the black partner's lack of awareness of racial and cultural issues were not due, in these cases, to their involvement in an interracial relationship, but because they were 'apolitical' and were disinterested in racial, cultural and identity issues and black politics. In some other cases the black partner's lack of understanding was based on their inability to conceptualise or analyse their experiences in any meaningful way.

These examples were not the norm because in most instances it was the black respondents who were instrumental in bringing their partner's attention, particularly during arguments, to the manifestations and impact of racism and discrimination on black people. For the white partners the experience of listening to their partners' experiences of racism and discrimination, both direct and indirect, had had an effect on how they saw not just their partner, but also black people in general.

Overall, the findings suggested that, contrary to the explanation, black respondents had developed, from necessity, a sharpened sense of awareness about themselves and their blackness. Because of the 'visibility' of their relationship, respondents and their partners had to confront the disapproving 'gaze' (and 'the look') of significant others and strangers. These negative reactions were constant and visible and they were manifested whenever respondents were out in the public domain with their partners. In many cases as a result of their previous encounters, with significant others and strangers, respondents often anticipated negative attitudes and reactions towards their relationship. They expected that on meeting with significant others and strangers that the reactions was likely to be negative and in some cases hostile. This anticipation of negativity has caused many of the respondents, both black and white, to develop a heightened sensitivity to the issues of race, culture and identity.

What was also revealed was that there were respondents, males and females, who, although were involved in interracial relationships, in fact had no interest in black politics or the politics of race and culture. Equally there

were respondents, men and women, who were involved in interracial relationships but were also steeped in the politics of race, culture and identity.

What also emerged from this study was that far from the male respondents being able to identify with their oppressors, they have had to conceal their relationships from members of both the oppressed group (black people) and the oppressor group (white people). This attempted concealment of the relationship from both significant others and strangers greatly undermined the idea of the black partners wanting to identify with whites and deny their blackness. The main thrust of the Fanonian assertion concerns denial of self and the identification with the 'other', however the visibility of the blackness made it virtually impossible to 'pass'. As a result any racial denial would have to be manifested subconsciously and attitudinally through non-engagement with or lack of recognition of black issues. However, evidence from the study did not support this lineal interpretation of the respondents' actions, instead because respondents were aware of the profound negativity towards their relationship, there was a retreat into what can be described as a 'safe space' or zone of influence, or a place where they were able to exercise some degree of control (see chapter seven). In essence, it could be argued, that it was this retreat into a safe space that had prompted significant others and strangers to interpret respondent's actions as a demonstration of their desire to identify with the oppressors.

In conclusion, the explanation of denial, which claimed that the black respondents will minimise the significance of their racial difference with their partner and in addition would minimise the significance of race to their sense of self and self-esteem, was not supported by the empirical evidence.

## 2. The Quest for Cultural Inclusion and Social Mobility

This explanation suggests that the black respondents' would view becoming involved in an interracial relationship as a means by which they would be more readily be accepted in mainstream society and therefore improve their social position.

### Findings

The evidence from the study suggests that rather than seeking social mobility and cultural inclusion by getting involved in an interracial relationship many respondents, particularly the men, avoided letting it be known that they were involved in such a relationship. As a result of their involvement in the relationship, respondents said they had had to think about the places they went for recreation and relaxation, and give serious consideration to whom to tell about their relationship with a white partner.. One respondent who said: *'I don't go to pubs, because you are more than likely to get reactions from people'*, exemplified many of the other respondent's views.

Many male respondents, like the one quoted above, spoke about avoiding places that would expose them and their partners to hostile reactions from significant others and strangers. They were careful about going to places where they were uncertain of the likely reactions or where they believed their relationship would not be easily accepted. As one respondent said:

*'Yes in some ways I am thinking consciously about avoiding places that would expose my partner and me to negativity. The reason behind that is that I don't want to expose either of us to unnecessary aggravation. That is not to say we have not had aggravation but that's something different, we've been to some places where things have gone silly'.*

And another respondent said: *'Well I am careful about where I go in certain circumstances. ...I would hope that the person wouldn't take us anywhere where they know there would be a problem'.*

For many of the male respondents, because of their awareness of the negative reactions towards their relationship, they were conscious about not making themselves and their partner targets for vilification and abuse.

And as one respondent suggested:

*'I don't see the point in trying to expose either myself or Sam to aggravation and other people's bigotry if we could possibly avoid going to a club or a pub you know darn well I/we wouldn't be accepted...That's what I mean by avoiding places'.*

Although one respondent commented that: *'A few whites that I have moved about with seem to like me because maybe they see my attitude and me. I may be different from what they think of black people'.*

But the comment was further qualified by experiences of not being accepted once outside their immediate circle of friends and acquaintances.

Many of the male respondents also refuted the explanation that the relationship provides a means by which they could gain social mobility. One respondent commented that:

*'I've heard that people who get involved in social relationships are considered to be social climbers. I find that absolutely ludicrous to be honest with you because nobody knows at my place of work that I go out and I am married to a white person... so...my promotion or whatever it is at work does not depend on whether I am married to a white or black or anyone'.*

Another respondent said: *'my social status and standing comes not from my relationships but from my job and position, so that argument is rubbish'.*

This study generated no evidence to support the claim that the black respondents got involved in an interracial relationship as a means of gaining social mobility and social inclusion into the mainstream. Instead, the evidence suggested that in many instances, respondents attempted to hide their relationship from significant others and strangers. Male respondents in particular avoided making references to their partners outside and engaging in discussion that were likely to expose their involvement in such a relationship.

In addition they often pre-empted significant others' and strangers' reactions and actively avoided public places where they were likely to face what the black partner perceived to be hostile reactions. Finally it was also evident that respondents were circumspect about the kinds of people with whom they formed friendships. For example, so as not to be judged negatively

respondents think very carefully about whom to tell about their relationship and weigh up the implications of such a disclosure. In essence it would seem counterproductive to hide the relationship from significant others and strangers if, what was sought in the first instance, was the quest for cultural inclusion and social mobility.

### **3. The Quest for Economic Mobility**

This explanation suggested that the black respondents embarked upon interracial relationships to enhance their economic prospects and opportunities.

#### **Findings**

Evidence from the study indicated that the majority of respondents did not benefit economically by the mere fact of having a partner from a different racial background. Instead what emerged was a complex set of findings. For example, in a small number of cases equal numbers of respondents, male and female, had partners who were of a higher socio-economic grouping. In the cases where it was the white partners who were from the higher socio-economic background the effect on the male partners was much more pronounced. For example, in these cases the male partners improved their social and economic prospects by rekindling or developing interests that would enable them to improve their life chances. In many instances the male respondents returned to education to improve their academic qualifications or pursued professional qualifications and careers that, up to meeting their white partner, they had not considered possible or within their capability. Their heightened expectations and their newly found aspirations were directly attributable to their relationship with their white partners. What was highlighted from the data was that this group of male respondents developed a much wider perspective and engaged with wider circles of friends because they had, out of necessity, developed much closer associations with those who accepted them and their relationship. In their case their reference group became, what could be described as, one of high achieving, educated, liberals. Either as a result of the relationship itself or following encouragement from their partners, the men developed wider options,

considering for example, areas of work they did not previously realise were available or an option to them. (I would suggest that this could be considered as a non-exploitative and indirect educational and social mobility rather than that assumed by the popular assertions). In the cases where it was the black partner's socio-economic position that was higher, the female partner's aspirations and expectations did not appear to have been influenced or affected to the same degree.

In this study the vast majority of people had partners who were from the same or very similar socio-economic backgrounds and in occupations that were comparable to their respective aspirations. (Although somewhat dated, yet still relevant, the measure used to determine respondents' social background was the registrar general's grading of occupations. Although I am aware of the advertising industry's classification and the new socio-economic classification system adopted by the statistics office, I nevertheless decided to adopt the registrar general's grading). So for example, it was noticeable that respondents, who were graduates, also had partners who were graduates; respondents in professional occupations also tended to have partners in similar areas of work, with similar educational backgrounds and professional qualifications. In other words respondents who were non-graduates in manual and clerical work and respondents in non-manual work had partners who were from the same or similar occupational group.

What the finding suggests is that people are involved in relationships with partners who are similar, educationally and professionally. As one female respondent, whose response was characteristic of many male and female respondents said:

*'No, I suppose most of the black people I met were working class and I suppose I felt I had something in common with them. And especially the older black men that I sort of maintain friends with, I suppose they had... their sort of experience was possibly similar to my dad's in terms of working, you know, being in very low paying manual work, which, you know, we'd sort of grown up with'.*

And another said:

*'As far as I am concerned that (the idea of getting involved in the relationships for economic reasons) is rubbish. We both work very hard and we share the mortgage and everything'.*

In many instances respondents challenged the assumption that they got involved in the relationship as part of a quest for economic mobility. While they acknowledged that their backgrounds were different from their partner's, this was viewed as unimportant since it was the relationship itself that was of importance not the social or economic background of their partner. As one respondent said:

*'I could have got married to another black professional girl and it would still be the same. She is no richer or I wouldn't say she is any richer than me. Her parents are richer and I was aware of their social class and the economic difference between us but that did not make any difference to me'.*

In this case there is an acknowledgement that the respondent was from a different socio-economic background from his partner, but despite the difference in their social background each partner was expected to contribute their share towards the household expenditure.

However, the findings point to a relatively small number of black men in interracial relationships who have benefited, both economically and professionally, from being in the relationship. In these cases, despite the concealment of their relationships, the respondent's lives had been transformed, beyond their expectations, as a result of being in the relationship. For example as already highlighted, in some cases respondents have developed what can only be described as middle-class values and aspirations, in that they look towards improving their academic qualifications with the view to joining the professional ranks. However the changes in their outlook and the increase in their aspirations have been triggered by a realisation that they had, with their partner's support, the capacity and ability to change their situation and condition. Many of these male respondents openly admitted that it was unlikely they would have enjoyed the same level of 'success' had it not been for the way their white partners enabled them to develop a better understanding of the 'system' and widen their horizon. The

great unknown in this instance is whether these same groups of male respondents would have achieved the same level of 'success' if they were in a relationship with black women who also engendered the same aspirations.

In conclusion, the explanation that respondents entered interracial relationships to enhance their economic prospects and opportunities was not supported except in a small number of cases. In these cases the male respondents benefited because they were involved with partners who believed that they had great potential and trusted them and encouraged them to pursue avenues that they had not previously considered or thought possible.

#### **4. Sexual and Colour Curiosity**

This explanation suggested that the respondents would emphasise the primacy of colour and sex as the key ingredients in their attraction to their partner.

#### **Findings**

It was evident from their responses that all the respondents were aware of the sexualisation of interracial relationships and the fetishistic symbolism with which the relationship was sometimes imbued. This awareness, notwithstanding, many respondents spoke about being physically and sexually attracted to their partners on first meeting, and that they admired their partner's physique, and how they 'carried' themselves. Although respondents, both females and males, were aware of the negative connotations surrounding the 'myths' about sex and race, some respondents admitted finding the myth a sexual 'turn on' which enhanced and intensified their sexual experiences with their partners. In other words in a number of cases it would appear that respondents had also fetishised their sexual relationships with their partners.

A number of respondents said the non verbal and verbal reactions from significant others and strangers were interpreted as being akin to them saying: *'We know what's it's all about, you know, you're just shagging each other senseless and that is it and there is nothing more to the relationship'*.



Many of the women respondents said they were aware of the penis size debate and the perceived sexual virility of black males. Some women respondents said they had used the sexual myths as a conversation piece with potential male partners. A number of the respondents also said they sometimes mimic the stereotypical assumptions about the sexual nature of their relationship with their partners. For example, some of the female respondents *said* they joked with their partners about their sexual prowess and the size of their genitalia. Their partners often responded in the same friendly manner *about: 'the women's inability to keep-up with the men's sexual appetite and stamina and the females being sexually conservative'*.

All the women respondents said that they were sexually attracted to the males with whom they subsequently developed a relationship. Three women respondents said that having developed a number of relationships with black men they were convinced the men were more interested in forming a sexual relationship than a meaningful relationship. One respondent acknowledged that she was curious about black men as she had heard a lot of stories about them and when she had the opportunity to get involved in a relationship she took it. As she commented:

*No...it's not for economic reasons or social reasons...I think I was more influenced by the woman I bought the flat with who had many black boyfriends and she was the first sort of person I had met who'd had mixed relationships. There may be, though I haven't really thought about it before but there may be that there was sort of inquisitiveness really...and I think inquisitiveness on a sexual level as well because certainly there's always been that perception of sexual prowess and sexual references to black men'*

Other respondents mentioned that in their experience many of the black men with whom they had been involved appeared to have been less committed to a relationship, especially after sexual activity had already taken place, and they were more likely to have other sexual partners outside the relationship.

Many male respondents reported that they too were aware of the 'sexual myths' (penis size, the insatiability of white women, etc etc.) and the stereotypical views concerning colour and sex held about interracial

relationships by significant others and strangers. Indeed in a small number of cases the male respondents said they had used the 'sexual myth', initially at least, as 'a chat up line' to break the 'ice' with actual or potential white female partners.

The findings suggested that while sexual attraction played an important role in the early part of the couple's relationship, it was in combination with other factors. That the partner was merely black or white was not enough to develop and sustain the relationship, it was evident that other attributes, such as personality, tastes, attitude and mutual interests were also taken into consideration, particularly by the females. It was evident that sexual attraction was an important consideration in the initial development of the relationship. However, respondents believed that significant others and strangers only equated sex and colour and were unable to see beyond the stereotypical assumptions and the image of the 'sexual act' between black men and white women which is deemed unacceptable.

In relation to colour the evidence from the study was that, for the majority of people in the relationships, the colour of their partner was perceived as insignificant. The colour of their partner was not seen as a good enough reason for desiring them physically or sexually.

As one respondent asserted:

*'for me colour has never been an issue. The only issue I had when I decided to stay with her, which was a calculated decision on my part, was whether or not I thought it was fair to expose her to other people's attitudes about our relationship'.*

Another said:

*'I am involved in the relationship 'cause I am in love. I'm in love and I've found someone who I find compatible and the colour of her skin didn't come into my thinking at all. As far as I am concerned we are two individuals and we just have to get on with our lives without caring what other people think '.*

Many of the men found it difficult to accept that colour may have played a role in their decision to embark on the relationship. However, as many of the responses revealed, the colour of the partner was not coincidental, but in fact an important consideration in their decision to embark on such a relationship. And in many cases respondents actively sought white partners. As one respondent commented: *'I had a really bad experience with a black girl...I thought never again. It's too hard, so I go out with just white girls'*. The generalisation of specific experiences is of course not unusual, however the issue in this case is the way the respondent had used his negative experience with a particular black woman to influence his attitude towards all subsequent black women. From a slightly different experience another said:

*'I find the attitudes and behaviours of black girls to be too harsh. They come across as too aggressive like, you know what I am saying? White girls are easier to deal with they are more accommodating'*.

These responses of the male respondents are of course justifications and a rationale for entering into interracial relationships rather than an acknowledgement of the fact that the colour, as well as perhaps other attributes, may have been an important element in their decision to embark on a relationship with a white partner.

However there were differences in the responses of men and women towards the question of colour. For example three women respondents admitted that they found their partner's colour attractive and, that if they were honest they would have to admit that it was the colour that triggered the initial interest. As one respondent commented: *'I mean I suppose I do like black skin, I think it is attractive'*.

Another said:

*'Well, I think the thing was, in that time.....I don't know why, but there seemed to be.....suddenly, there seemed to be a lot of black people, you know, I suppose it was certainly maybe the places we went, but I suppose we did get into a bit of a thing that if they weren't black we wouldn't find them attractive, yeah. I don't know why.....No, I think possibly it's the colour....'*

And another said:

*'Well, I did get involved quite young with a black person and so most of my experiences have been with black people. I don't really have much experience sexually with white people'.*

In essence, while respondents were sexually and physically attracted to their partners, other attributes were also identified as being important. The attributes that were mentioned were varied and wide-ranging. In particular they highlighted the importance of the personality of the individual, their ability to keep them interested and engaged, mutual interests and in some cases the ability to hold interesting and intelligent conversation. Some women respondents said they were attracted to partners who were capable of showing emotional fragility and some degree of vulnerability. These women respondents viewed their partner's feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability as both attractive and an endearing quality, because, as one respondent said: *'I know they will need me' and I will have something to offer'.*

Some respondents mentioned the feeling of connectedness, while others said they were drawn into a relationship in which there was a certain degree of conformity and conventionality. In other cases, respondents wanted partners not for their colour, but because they were rebellious and unconventional in their attitude and behaviour. A small number of respondents wanted partners who were perceived to be different, not just from them but also from other people they knew. For four respondents, partners who had charisma and charm were considered far more attractive than a partner who happened to be racially different. While for others, whom they formed relationships with had more to do with the individual personality and their attitude. As one respondent commented: *'it depends on whether I like him or not. If I like him I don't care what colour he is, I like him, innit?'*

For another respondent:

*'I have an ideal partner in my mind but I have never been in a position to exclude anybody who offers themselves to me. I do consider their looks and whether I find them attractive or not and also whether I find them attractive in[their] attitude, personality. It is not just a case of*

*whether they are physically attractive and stunning or anything like that but it is also how they handle themselves’.*

It was evident that respondents considered any one or a combination of the positive attributes possessed by a potential partner as having been more important than the size of the man’s sexual organ or the woman’s ability to perform various sexual tricks or their colour. Although the colour difference was acknowledged, overall it was not afforded the same level of importance as other attributes. In other words these respondents found other attributes about their partner drew their attention more than the colour of the skin.

What emerged was that it was difficult to separate sex and colour since a range of factors amongst which were colour and mutual sexual attraction determined respondents’ choice of partners. Attempting to disentangle what was most significant has proved not only difficult but also almost impossible. What was clear was that respondents were aware of the ‘sexual and racial myths’ that surrounded interracial relationships. In some cases the myths were used as ‘introductory talk’ to gain the interest and attention of potential partners and in others cases respondents used it as part of their ‘playful banter’ and ‘sexual innuendo speak’ with their partners. Many respondents acknowledged that whilst they may have been attracted to their partner because of their colour and/or sexual curiosity, these could not have been their only motives, as in their view, a relationship has to have additional factors to sustain it once the initial ‘curiosity’ and attraction has waned.

There was clear evidence that the colour of the partners was an important element in respondents’ decisions to enter into the relationship. Although not all the respondents acknowledged this point, it would seem inconceivable that respondents would enter into such a relationship without taking account of the obvious, colour, and difference between themselves and their intended partners. For many this was an additional thrill, which added to the mysteriousness of the relationship and provided an incentive for the partners to explore the relationship further. There was some support for the explanation that colour and sexual curiosity played a role in respondents’

decisions to enter an interracial relationship, but where the findings depart from the main thrust of the explanation, it was the view that colour and sexual curiosity were the only or main motivation for entering the relationship since evidence from this study suggests that once the initial attraction was outplayed, other factors came into effect.

## **5. Revenge for Racial and Social Oppression**

This explanation suggested that respondents would use the relationship as a vehicle to avenge racial and social oppression.

### **Findings**

Evidence from the study did not support the explanation that respondents got involved in such relationships as a means of avenging racial and social oppression. Although a majority of the male respondents admitted having sexual relationships with a number of white females, none of them suggested this was part of a systematic campaign to avenge the racial and social discrimination black people have experienced. Some said that whilst in their youth they had a number of 'one night stands' with white girls and never considered forming a meaningful relationship with them, they did not regard their actions as a political statement. Rather, their actions were guided more by a desire for sexual conquest and satisfaction than a political gesture. In this regard there was no evidence amongst the cohort of male respondents to support the explanation.

Evidence suggests that whilst some of the male respondents were aware of the politicisation of interracial relationships they did not experience their relationship as being part of a wider battle between black and white people. From analysing the data there was little corroborating evidence to support the explanation that the respondents used the relationship as a means of avenging racial and social discrimination and oppression.

## **6. Geographical Proximity and Shortage of Same Race Partners**

This explanation suggests that the relationship started as a result of respondents sharing the same social space and the shortage of potential partners from the same racial and cultural backgrounds.

### **Findings**

The evidence suggests that some respondents met their partners either through introduction by friends or other family members or by chance. Some respondents met their partners at nightclubs where they and their partners were regular visitors. Other respondents met their partners as a result of living within close proximity of each other and passing friendly glances over a period of time until a formal approach was made. In other instances respondents met their partners whilst they were students at university, college and other educational and professional institutions. Some respondents met their partners in the work place. One respondent said:

*'I went out with someone who I didn't really feel (anything for but) who I thought was okay. She was prepared to accept my level of indifference so we went out for a bit and a mate of mine cajoled me (into the relationship). And then the next person who I went out with was someone at work, again a white English girl, who expressed a lot of interest in me.'*

Another said: *'my first girlfriend was a white girl, we met through the church'*.

And another respondent, whose comment was acknowledged by others, said:

*'I suppose.... maybe the places we went (made it more likely that we would meet black males)'*.

Respondents reported that in coming into contact with 'others' from different racial backgrounds and forming social relationships with them and or knowing people who had direct contact with them, they had not considered the possibility of forming an amatory relationship with someone from a different racial background as unnatural. In other words many respondents met their partners mainly in the course of routine activities and not going out of their way to meet a different race partner. However, as already

acknowledged above, a few respondents did set out specifically to form relationships with different race partners.

The second aspect of the explanation, shortage of same race partner, was quickly discounted since all the female respondents lived in areas in which *there were sufficient white indigenous males* from which to choose a partner. It emerged that all female respondents had had relationships with males from their own racial and cultural groups. This finding suggested that there was no evidence to support the explanation that a shortage of same race partners was one of the reasons for their decision to form relationships with black partners.

Similarly for the male respondents the evidence from the study did not support the explanation. The majority of the 20 male respondents lived in areas that had a sizeable black population (London, Reading, Birmingham and Bradford) others were from areas with a relatively smaller black population (Oxford and Orpington) and their ages ranged from 23yrs to 55yrs. Of the respondents from London, Reading, Birmingham and Bradford the majority were 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation migrants who had had their schooling in inner city areas that were multiracial and multicultural. In other words unlike their parents, mainly fathers, who emigrated to Britain in the 1940's and 1950's there was no evidence of shortages of potential partners from within their racial and cultural population. Even in areas where there was a very small black population the male respondents still had access to black women, yet they chose to form relationships with white females. The evidence suggests that choice of partners in these instances was not solely based on the shortage of potential partners within the same race population, but rather that respondents chose their partners for personal reasons. As one respondent commented:

*'I hate to categorise but I think I shall in this instance...let's talk about the cultural dimension. The West Indian girls I don't think would go out with an African I don't know but I think there is something in their attitude I might be wrong. The black Nigerian girls who I could have gone out with, I do find their ...I think they want to know the size of your pocket and wallet (how rich you are) so I deliberately avoid going out with Nigerian girls.....so I just found my choice limited'.*



And another respondent commented:

*'I think I notice beyond the colour. Obviously I was aware that she was white, but I don't think it ever bothered me because there were black women I was interested in just as much for the same reasons, you know. When I was younger I did go for a sexy looking woman with the bodies and in the clubs. And you think...that's nice, she looks nice, I really fancy her physically, and that went the same for black and for white. But...I suppose on balance I would say I've had more relationships with white girls, but I have had quality relationships with black women also. (So it's got nothing to do with colour)'*

Finally another explained:

*'Where I was a student (West of England) when we go out every weekend we go to the disco's and chat up girls. It didn't matter whether they were black or white we just chatted them up. We [try to] find the ones that are agreeable to (us) [and are interested] I remember the white girls were dancing around us and I started to talk to one of them and it just developed after that. (But the black girls weren't so easy)'*

These comments suggest that shortage of women from the same racial background, as a reason for interracial relationships was unsustainable since respondents had access to, and were in frequent contact with, women from the same racial population. What also emerged and worth further study, was the perceived problem of exploitative relationships between Nigerian men and women and the view that Africans and Afro-Caribbeans are mistrustful of each other.

As a result of the mistrust and antagonism, some of the male respondents believed there was a lack or limited choices available to them. From the responses, respondents were making choices about whom to form relationships with and their decisions did not appear to have been based on lack of women from their racial or cultural groups, as asserted by the explanation, but rather for other reasons. Of course with regard to the women respondents their situation was somewhat different in that as members of the indigenous population that form the racial and cultural majority group there was no question of there being shortages of potential same race partners.

## 7. Shared Interests

This explanation suggests that the relationship started as a result of an association based upon a shared cultural, sporting, religious, or academic interest.

### Findings

As with geographical propinquity discussed earlier, the majority of respondents commented that they looked for partners that shared their interests and concerns. Many respondents reported that whilst they did not necessarily have ideal partners in mind when deciding with whom to form a relationship, they did look for compatible and shared interests. As one respondent commented: *'I do consider their looks and whether I find them attractive or not and also whether I find them attractive in[their] attitude, personality'*.

Another respondent said:

*'I get (Probably) involved in a relationship with a person that is educated, that had gone to university and would have a career in mind...yes I think that might be the attraction'*.

One respondent said:

*'I have heard that white women go out with black men for sexual curiosity, for me I was not interested in that...no, no it was him as a person...he's kind and considerate and he looks after us. I just love him and think a lot about him...I am just glad I am with him'*.

Another said:

*'.....I liked him...he had a lot of qualities I really like. We are interested in a lot of the same things and have a lot of the same values, in terms of the things we think are important, the things we believed in and I was physically attracted to him as well. But it was more of a complete thing I felt that I was at the same level (intellectually) as him in a lot of ways'*.

And another respondent commented:

*'Again, I would say, his personality. He had a very outgoing....I mean he probably wasn't very much of a looker [but] he did have a brilliant personality'*.

The evidence from the data supported the explanation that shared interests were an important consideration in respondent's decisions to embark on a relationship with their partners.

### **Conclusion**

Evidence suggests that whilst in some cases the findings of the study did not completely refute the popular explanations, they did cast it in a significantly different light. For example, with regard to the explanation concerning relationship as a means to economic mobility, it emerged a broadening of horizons and raised expectations galvanised the lower class partner into self-improvement. In essence, rather than colour being the deciding factor in the black respondents' change of social and economic circumstances, in fact it was the social class of their female partners that was of importance, as it proved to be a major catalyst in the men's changed fortunes.

Similarly although sex and colour curiosity were identified as two aspects that influenced respondents to enter into the relationship, it was also acknowledged that curiosity by itself was not enough to sustain the relationship.

Overall the findings, in essence, gave a great deal of support to the explanations that geographical and social propinquity and shared interest played an important role in the decision to enter into the relationship.

## **Chapter Seven**

*The heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing of.* (Pascal 1670)

### **Analysis part I –**

#### **Interpretation of findings**

A major finding that emerged from this study was that the views expressed by significant others and strangers about interracial relationship were not really about the individuals involved in such relationships, but they are an expression about the wider social relationship between black and white people and the racial and cultural tension that existed between the two groups. In other words from analysing the findings, the concerns expressed by significant others and strangers about the relationship were about social, economic and sexual boundaries and that which are considered acceptable and permissible between black and white people. It was also about the ways in which the historical legacy of slavery continues to have an impact and inform the ways in which black and white people relate to each other socially, economically and politically.

From analysing the findings it was possible to suggest that despite the negative reactions, a small number of black respondents actually benefited from being in the relationship. In these instances the black men's outlook changed and their social and professional aspirations increased to a level they had not expected or anticipated. For example one respondent spoke about working as a youth worker and that it did not occur to him that there were other possibilities for him in life until his partner encouraged him and suggested to him that he should consider a professional career. Another spoke about working in a factory until his partner suggested he return to study with the view to going to a university to do a teacher training course. However, the interesting point that emerged from these examples was that the white partner's social class position was far more important than the difference's in colour. In these cases the driving force was the higher aspirations of the white partners born out of their social class position rather than, necessarily, racism being an obstacle to advancement of the black

partners. Many of the male respondents said that it was unlikely that they would have enjoyed the same level of 'success' had it not been for their partners. They said they were helped by the way their white partners enabled them to develop a better understanding of the educational system and how they could benefit from it. It was their partner who 'schooled' them about the practical measures they needed to take in order to improve their academic and professional qualifications or encouraged them to embark on vocational training. However as I mentioned earlier, it is difficult to be certain that the same group of male respondents would not have benefited had their partners been black women who offered them the same opportunities or inspired similar drive and self-belief.

Some of the black male respondents said they were aware of assertions by significant others that they only became involved in the relationship so as to improve their social and economic condition. They also said the reason for the assertion was obvious in that in witnessing their relative 'success' it has been inferred by significant others that, by implication, all those who enter such relationships must enter them with a view to benefiting themselves socially and economically. Ironically the implication of the assertion by the male respondents, about the views of significant others, is the idea of racial and gender (reverse) exploitation.

In essence this assertion was informed by the view that the relationship was based on a kind of unspoken social exchange between the partners. The idea was that, at some level, by asserting their individual self-interest people concerned would come to an arrangement that would be acceptable and profitable to both. As Wallace and Wolf (1991) made clear:

'Exchange theory proposes that individuals make decisions to maximise their gains and minimise their losses in all social interaction, including relationships involving friendship and love' (Wallace and Wolf 1991:181)

This explanation is in some respects simplistic because it ignores the question of altruism on the one hand and the possibility, within the Pascalian assertion, that irrationality may play a big part in human relationships. It

also fails to contemplate the idea that routinely people do things in relationships, which are patently not in their best interests in any rational calculation. Although Wallace and Wolf's (1991) analysis is somewhat instrumentalist, I would argue it is nevertheless interesting and pertinent in this case. It is of course a reworking of the utilitarian notion of individuals' drive towards the avoidance of pain and the pursuance of their own pleasure.

However for the social exchange theory to have any meaning, there is a need for reciprocity and a certain degree of understanding about the position that any such arrangement is held in the wider social context, particularly by those involved in such relationships and significant others and strangers. In other words the principle of the theory:

'Implies that a hierarchy of status among ethnic groups will be matched by a compensatory system of intermarriage (relationships) based on how much needs to be offered in order to marry someone from a higher status'. (Xuanning Fu and Heaton 1997:55)

Under this social exchange rule it was not clear how in many cases either of the partners had benefited from such arrangement. For example, with regard to the explanations, it is pertinent to ask why would the white partner, who de facto would often be assumed to be of a higher status, benefit economically, personally and socially from forming a relationship with black partners. The explanations, on social and economic mobility, fail to explain what a black partner, as already acknowledged who is subject to discrimination and is a member of a social group that experiences inequalities in all areas of their lives, has to offer the white partner who, because of their colour, is deemed to be in the privileged position. It would appear that rather than benefiting from such relationships the white partner would have to contend with alienation and estrangement from significant others and strangers.

The evidence presented suggests that, far from being able to gain from the experience both partners had, on the surface at least, more to lose as they face hostility and are subjected to pressures to explain their motivation for entering into such a relationship and their racial loyalty is questioned. The

rational choice theory was also unsustainable for another reason in that although the theory does not juxtapose rational choice and exploitation, nevertheless it was difficult not to link the two since the black partners appeared, on the face of it, to be the rational manipulators in the situation. By presenting it in such a form the females emerge as hapless puppets that were either ignorant of the men's intentions or were unconcerned by the way they were being used. However, the evidence from this study does not support these explanations since it was difficult to ascertain which of the partner was making the choices and which was being exploited.

### **Seeking External Approval**

It was striking that despite the anger, mistrust and hostility shown towards the relationships, in many instances respondents still attempted to present the relationship to significant others and strangers as 'normal' and not unlike mono-racial relationships. In essence respondents were acknowledging that being in the relationship had heightened their awareness of the ways in which significant others and strangers viewed the relationship. The evidence from this study was that people in interracial relationships liked to see their relationship as normal, a view echoed in an earlier study by Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell (1995), in which they asserted:

'Many of the people who were interviewed characterised theirs as a normal couple relationship. Most volunteered that the race of their partner made no difference to them. Most also said that they saw themselves as like other couples in dealing with the ordinary challenges and opportunities of a couple relationship, in working toward conventional goals, and in struggling with the everyday issues of making a living and maintaining a household'. (Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell 1995:24)

Many of the respondents reasoned that like mono-racial relationships their relationships were also set within the same social environment and followed the same pattern and with the same aspirations and the same levels of commitment as other relationships. For many of the respondents forming and being part of a relationship, interracial or monoracial, and making the necessary commitment were considered to be both complex and difficult and the outcomes unpredictable. In their view, the difference between being in

interracial relationships and mono-racial relationships was to do with the choice of partners rather than either the nature or the substance of the relationship itself. Respondents believed that because of their partner's racial and cultural background their relationships were imbued with uncaring, selfish and pathological qualities by significant others and strangers.

For many respondents, both men and women, the attitudes and negative behaviours displayed towards them by significant others and strangers were based on what they believed to be a misconception of the nature of interracial relationships, the motivation for entering such relationships and lack of understanding of the experiences of the people who were actually involved in the relationship. And this misconception, in their view, is further fuelled by the belief that interracial relationships are not only different but also unnatural and socially deviant and therefore should not be encouraged. (Shahrazad Ali 1990 and Henriques 1975).

### **Not a Mirror Image**

In analysing the data it was possible to suggest that many of the women respondents attempted, initially at least, to project, what they perceive as an open and honest picture of their relationships to significant others and strangers. I would suggest that the underlying thinking that guided and informed this approach was twofold. Firstly, it was a conscious attempt to encourage significant others and strangers to view *their* relationship not as stereotypical, but as a relationship with the same qualities that would be found in any other relationship. Secondly, they believed that their openness would lead to the relationship, and their partner, being accepted and treated with the same respect that was afforded to couples in monoracial relationships. They appeared to believe that if they could convey that the relationship was neither extraordinary nor 'abnormal' and that its form and structure, as well as its trials, tribulations and the way it operated were the same as other relationships, then the relationship would be seen, and therefore accepted, as 'normal' and given the necessary endorsement and validating signals. However evidence suggests that far from accepting the



female respondents' approach, in most cases, significant others and strangers were more likely to reject their overtures for acceptance. Although, in many instances, respondents were aware of the negative reactions the relationship was likely to provoke, they still attempted to achieve acceptance, at least initially, from significant others.

However, despite their knowledge, from their experiences of the likely outcome, in many cases respondents were still shocked by the negative reactions of others towards them. Interestingly the women's experience of the rebuttal was the same, irrespective of whether the rejection emanated from significant others or strangers. The different ways the female and male respondents deal with the rejection is detailed elsewhere (see chapter eight), however, the sharpness with which the women experienced the rejection may be softened, depending on the depth of the impact of the disapprobation and by the level of support they were able to receive from elsewhere, particularly from their partners. The important point to highlight is that, either individually or as a couple, respondents still sought, initially at least, validating signals and reinforcing gestures as well as support and acknowledgement from significant others and strangers.

### **Not looking Out, but Looking In**

This attempt of trying to convey to significant others and strangers that interracial relationships had much in common with other kinds of relationships and that they are 'normal', exemplified Duck's idea (1993), that irrespective of social and cultural differences, there are similarities in the way people want their relationships (and themselves) to be viewed by others. In this study there was evidence that respondents, particularly the women, wanted to keep their relationship connected to the mainstream by looking outwards for validation and approval. (Duck 1993, Berger and Luckmann 1985).

The attempts by many of the female respondents to look outwards can be viewed as a way of countering the multiplicity of devaluing experiences they felt for being in an interracial relationship. This attempt to normalise the

relationship might be termed a social role valorisation strategy (Wolfensberger, 1983), which recognises 'the power of perceived social roles in the devaluation of individuals or groups'.

In trying to demonstrate their normality there was a clear strategy by the respondents to counter the negative perceptions of others, which devalued them. Thus they looked at ways to increase the likelihood that their social image would be perceived more positively by significant others in particular and by strangers more generally.

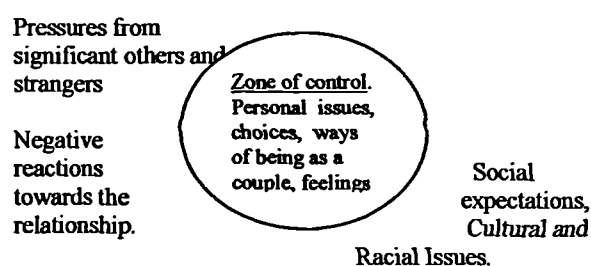
The evidence, in this study, suggests that people involved in such relationships are, of necessity, locked into a relationship in which they rely on each other for mutual support. Although it is acknowledged that mutual support amongst partners is part of the expectations of all relationships, (Duck 1993), nevertheless the notion takes on a different dimension in this instance because the mutual support also serves to both validate and reinforce the relationship as a result of the intensity of the strains put upon it by the negative reactions they experience. Thus respondents look internally for support because such support was generally unavailable from the sources they would have normally expected.

### **Agency and Choice**

The evidence from this study suggests that people involved in interracial relationships have a different experience of being in the relationship compared to the way such relationships are perceived and represented by significant others and strangers. In particular, 'others' spoke about interracial relationships without reference to the internal aspects of the relationship, or without consideration given to the possibility that people were capable of developing a relationship that transcends stereotypical, materialistic and utilitarian motives. However for the people in the dyad a great deal more consideration was given to the internal-dynamics of the relationship together with other considerations.

For the respondents it is the internal aspect of their relationship that was of importance because it was an area, which they believed, was devoid of direct external influences; areas which are beyond the frame of influence or control of significant others and strangers, (see figure 1 below).

This 'zone of control' comprised personal issues (individual's biography), ways of being as a couple, individual feelings and the dynamics contained in a dyad. Outside the zone of control are external influences which include additional pressures, social expectations, negative reactions, pressures from significant others and cultural and racial issues.



(Figure 1)

For people involved in the relationship the notion that they are influenced not only by their immediate surroundings, but also by the external world, would be considered an obvious point. However despite the strong 'ripple effect' of the wider influences, many would maintain that within their everyday life, they are still able to make decisions, have control and make their choices with little consideration given to significant others and strangers' reactions.

It is their ability to make these choices that enables them to claim that they exercise control and have a greater level of influence in their daily lives.

And as Berger and Luckmann (1985) pointed out:

'.... This means I experience everyday life in terms of differing degrees of closeness and remoteness, both spatially and temporally. Closest to me is the zone of everyday life that is directly accessible to my bodily manipulation'.

(Berger and Luckmann 1985:36)

The essence of this zone, which respondents believed is within their control, is that 'it contains the world within their reach, the world in which they act so as to modify its reality' (Berger and Luckmann, 1985: 36). Berger and Luckmann's idea makes explicit the different strands and levels of interactions in which individuals are engaged and the level of 'power' that can be exercised within that reality. Both Berger and Luckmann's 'Social construction of reality and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology of human development are of interest in this regard, and although their ideas are different, they start from a similar premise that the interplay between the inner and outer is continuous and that no aspect of it is static, and that whilst there are choices to be made, people are able to make decisions about life in a way that facilitates the continuity of their lives.

Whilst Bronfenbrenner's ecology highlights the interplay between the internal and external and the way they influence and 'shape' an individual's identity, and as a reflective being, Berger and Luckmann (1985), identified that as well as interacting with the external, individuals are also exerting their own influences rather than only being influenced. This concept, I would argue, is of relevance to the experiences and conditions of people in interracial relationships. But our point of departure is the extent to which people in interracial relationships are able to exercise any control or influence on significant others and strangers. People in interracial relationships I believe, are locked into a relationship in which their micro world and the wider, external macro world are linked much more closely because the external (macro) world attempts to exercise a greater degree of power and influence upon the relationship. The power and control is manifested through its negative reactions and through the behaviours that are exhibited towards the people found to be involved in such relationships. The purpose of the control, it could be argued, is to act to deter people from entering such relationships.

## **Revelation and Concealment**

As part of their attempt to exercise control, those involved in interracial relationships often attempt to conceal their relationship from others. For example, some respondents talked about not holding hands with their partners in public, not introducing their partners to their family, friends or work colleagues. In sharp contrast to people in mono-racial relationships, for whom the revelation of their relationship can have a very positive effect, people in interracial relationships appeared certain that the revelation of their relationship would not be positively received. The revelation concealment dilemma has a different significance for people in interracial relationships compared to people in mono racial relationships. As Baxter noted:

‘On the one hand, a relational pair needs isolation from others for dyadically focused interaction (McCall 1970) On the other hand, the couple needs identity as a social unit, which comes through joint presentation of coupleness in interactions with family and friends’. (Baxter 1993:143)

Baxter’s premise is that there are potential benefits from making the existence and character of the relationship known to others, particularly significant others. Because legitimacy for the relationship comes from outside the dyad and accordingly significant others cannot support and legitimise a relationship unless they have knowledge of it.

Lewis (1972) also recognised this point because couples needed the privacy away from others in order to form, what is essentially their dyadic culture, but at the same time they also need the recognition and acknowledgement of others because it is through this process that the wider legitimacy of the relationship is conferred. The attempt to control and manage information about the existence of the relationship was fraught with difficulties because people outside the relationship were often interested to know and do not acquiesce with the effort to conceal. Those who have taken a dialectical perspective in looking at the internal workings of relationships acknowledged the internal contradiction that is at the heart of the dyadic relationship. For example, within relationships people look for privacy but seek public acknowledgement, people want the interdependency of being in a

relationship, but they also want independence, (Askham 1976, Rawlins 1983). Similarly the need for autonomy is counteracted by wanting to be connected, the surety of certainty against the fluidity of uncertainty. As both Petronio (1991) and Baxter (1993) observed in their different ways, couples are locked into an internal world of contradictions and these are manifested in the ways they relate to the outside world. And according to Baxter:

‘The internal contradiction of openness-closedness, that is, the need for parties to sustain both candour and discretion in their relationship... is in the internal fabric of the relationship between the two parties’. (Baxter 1993:142)

What this suggests is that relationships are characterised by contradictions and these contradictions are fundamental to the functioning of the relationship. It is through the process of working with the dynamics that are thrown up by the contradictions that the relationship begins to generate and formulate its own internal mechanisms and develop its own uniqueness. And as Baxter (1993) suggests:

‘The external manifestation of this dialectic, the revelation-concealment contradiction, captures the extent to which parties reveal or fail to reveal information about the nature and status of their relationship to outsiders’. (Baxter 1993:145)

Unlike couples in interracial relationships mono racial couples are in a position whereby they control the extent to which they interact with the outside world and there is often no attempt (by significant others and strangers) to search for an underlying reason for the relationship or a probing of the internal nature of the relationship.

### **A Very Public Relationship**

Many respondents, males and females, believed mono-racial couples are able to share as many aspects of themselves with the outside world as they feel they want to share, and they believed they are not called upon to account for their relationship or explain their motives for getting involved in the relationship. What was being advanced was the idea that monoracial couples have a clearer line of demarcation between themselves and the world outside in that they are able to determine the level and nature of the interaction

between their personal, private world and the external, public world. As Baxter observed in his study:

‘.....the findings tentatively point to a general pattern of segmented separation in the management of the revelation-concealment dialectic. That is, parties (couples) demarcate some target recipients and some types of relationship information as appropriate for revelation while other targets and relationship topics are regarded as inappropriate for revelation’ (Baxter 1993:153)

This point was illustrated by many of the respondents who spoke about hiding their relationships from ‘others’ and giving serious consideration to whom to tell about their relationship. As one respondent commented:

‘She’s got a lot of credibility and a lot of respect, and I thought it would be damaged, it would be tarnished, you know, I really did. So I thought, who needs to know...(about the relationship)? And she thought it needs to be managed (whom and when to tell others)’.

These tactics are devices for enabling people in the relationship to maintain (zone of) control of their relationship and to be circumspect about the amount of information they give out to others. In essence, I would suggest that these are important aspects of being part of a relationship, and depending on how these areas are negotiated, it could mean the difference between a relationship that is relatively secure and adaptable and one that is not able to find an equilibrium amid the intensity of the contradictions. In this respect it could be argued that what distinguishes mono-racial couples from interracial couples is their ability to operate within the contradictions and create a safe boundary around themselves and their relationship.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed and discussed the extent to which interracial relationships conform to the views held about them by significant others and strangers. The chapter has provided an analysis of the contradictions and dilemmas that people involved in such relationships have to endure and their reaction towards such negative attitudes. It has also discussed the additional pressures that people face and how freely they make their choices as with whom to form a relationship and the motives that influence their choices.

The analysis of the findings has pointed out the importance of exploring the strategies (the focus of chapter eight) that have been devised to enable people involved in the relationships to cope with their experiences.



## Chapter Eight

### Analysis part II - Managing the Relationship

#### Introduction

This chapter highlights and discusses the strategies that have been developed by respondents in order to lessen the impact of the negative attitudes and the hostile reactions towards their relationships. The observation from this study, which also advances our understanding of interracial relationships, is that people in such relationship have developed strategies that help them deal with the experiences of being in the relationship. The strategies that emerged were;

- Distancing
- Denial of the Relationship
- Selective Revelation
- Intensification of Mutual Support
- Strategic Avoidance
- Minimisation of Social Contact
- Reconfiguring the Social Milieu

These strategies are heuristic in that people are learning and adapting their responses in the light of the reactions they encounter from significant others and strangers. These strategies enable the people involved in the relationship to develop a set of protective shields that guard them against the vilification and negative onslaught they experience from significant others and strangers. To elaborate:

#### **A. *Distancing***

Distancing involves keeping people at bay until those involved in the relationship are certain that the person or people they are with are not hostile towards the idea of an interracial relationship or disapproving of such relationships. Those involved in the relationship look for some kind of gesture, verbal or non-verbal, to reassure them that they, their partner and

their relationship will not be judged negatively. For example many respondents, men and women, although mostly men said they tried not to talk about their involvement in an interracial relationship until they were confident and certain about people's attitudes toward such relationships would not be negative. It was evident that until such trust could be established respondents kept themselves at a distance from significant others and strangers. In not talking to other people about their involvement in such a relationship, there is an attempt to draw a clear line between their public life and their private worlds. This means that information about the relationship is managed much more tightly than would otherwise be expected. There is a belief that the less information that is given out the less a need there is to justify the relationship and thus the less vulnerable the person to disapprobation of others.

#### ***B. Denial of the Relationship***

In some instances respondents, particularly the men, said they have on occasions denied that they were involved in an interracial relationship when asked by friends and families. Four male respondents said they remembered occasions when they had acknowledged their involvement in such a relationship to friends but they then went on to tell their friends that the relationship was not really a relationship because, 'it did not mean that much to them as they had no affection or feelings for the white woman with whom they were involved'. One respondent remembered speaking at a small gathering against interracial relationships per se, although he himself was actually involved in such a relationship at the time. He explained, in hindsight, that he felt he had to make such negative statements as a way of gaining credibility in a social environment that condemned such relationships.

The other form of denial is more complex because it is a complete lack of recognition or acknowledgement that there are any issues to consider as a result of being in interracial relationships. Couples/individuals spoke about not noticing any hostility or negativity towards them, their partner or their relationship. They were convinced that people were uninterested in the racial

configuration of their relationship and that both their respective significant others, and strangers, have been very supportive and have shown positive reactions towards them and their relationship.

### ***C. Selective Revelation***

Selective revelation differed from denial of the relationship in a number of ways. For example it emerged from analysing this particular strategy that there are two forms of selective revelation that are employed by many of the respondents. One form is not to inform people or let it be known that they are involved in such a relationship. This often involved being secretive and ensuring that neither significant others nor strangers were aware of their involvement in such a relationship. This strategy is of course particularly difficult for those with children, especially the women who usually have the caring responsibilities. The other is more calculating and involves a certain degree of duplicity by both partners. This is a strategy adopted by some males whereby whilst they did not deny their involvement in such a relationship, they just did not let it be known that they involved in such a relationship. In one case a female respondents said although she was aware that her partner was a member of the Nation of Islam they not only had a child together but they also managed to keep their relationship a secret from everybody around them apart from a very select groups of friends.

### ***D. Intensification of Mutual Support***

As a result of the negative reactions from strangers and the lack of support from significant others many people involved in the relationship are often 'forced' by their circumstance to rely on each other for mutual support. There is an assumption, partly based on previous encounters, that 'others' would be disapproving and negative about the relationship, so rather than look for support outside the relationship they look within and towards each other to a larger extent than may ordinarily be the case. It is only when people have been able to develop close friendships with others outside the relationship, particularly people in a similar type of relationship, that they then make attempts to look outwards and share their experiences.

### ***E. Strategic Avoidance***

Many respondents spoke of not exposing their partners to unnecessary and avoidable dangers, hence decisions are made not to go to certain places. Over ninety per cent of the male respondents said they avoided going into social environments with their partner that they believed may cause both of them difficulties. They also tried to avoid familial gatherings where their relationship would come under, what they considered to be, an unwelcome and intrusive mono-racial gaze. In some cases the avoidance is total and may involve the termination of long developed close relationships. In some cases where friends and important people in the lives of the individual have shown such opposition and disapproval, the individual has felt forced to choose between those who oppose their relationship or their partner. In another example, uncomfortable feelings induced by the negative views that are expressed act to silence the people in the relationship, especially the white women, who no longer confided in people around them about their relationship.

### ***F. Minimisation of Social Contact***

The minimisation of social contact was another strategy used to cushion the couple from the pressures from significant others and strangers. To minimise and curtail the level of anxiety caused by the negative reactions towards their relationship, many couples reduce their level of interaction with people outside the relationship. The impact of this limited interaction is that there is a diminished circle of people with whom they feel able to connect. There are also self-imposed restrictions about the areas they feel they are able to visit and the kinds of places they feel comfortable enough to socialise also decreases.

### ***G. Reconfiguring the Social Milieu***

For many respondents there was a sense that the negative reactions they experienced from people outside the relationship was the price they had to pay for daring to form a relationship with a partner from a different racial background. To counteract this, efforts were made to ensure that the friendships they developed, their social environment and the places where

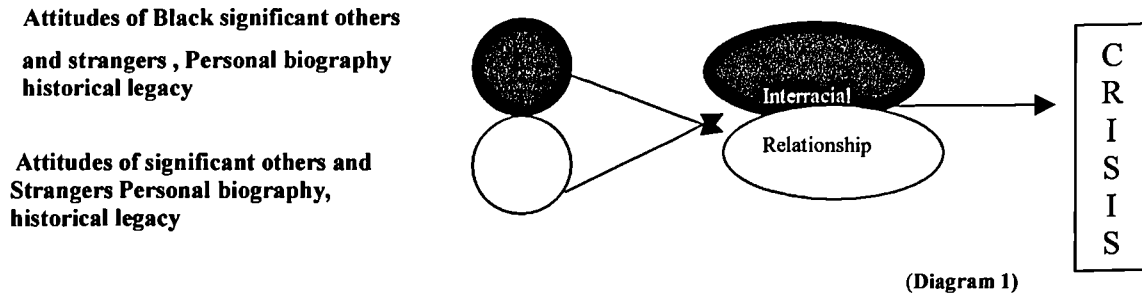
they socialised were such that their sense of identity would not be called into question nor would they and their partners be asked to justify or explain their motivation for entering the relationship. Thus they often sought validation and acceptance for their relationship from peers who were themselves in either interracial relationships or other types of unconventional relationships. In other words, there was a reconfiguration of their social milieu, in that they gravitated towards a new reference group that was sympathetic to them and supportive of their relationship.

### **Facing the Personal Crisis**

The strategies highlighted above suggest that people involved in interracial relationships develop a sharpened awareness of themselves as a result of the negative reactions that their relationship provokes in others. The consequence of this awareness was that people adapted their lives and developed ways that enabled them to relate to significant others and strangers and maintain *civil inattention* with others. Maintaining a stable interracial relationship is painful because often, upon entering such a relationship, individuals experience personal crisis about themselves and their relationship with significant others. The relationship forces them to look, not only at themselves, but also at their relationships with significant others.

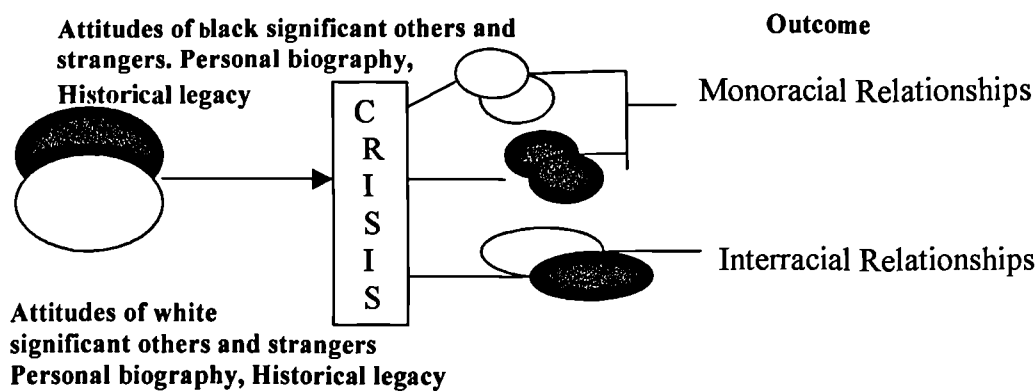
In entering any relationship an individual not only take their personal biography with them they also take additional areas. Contained within the additional areas are, for example, attitudes and expectations of significant others and strangers about what relationships signify and the nature of relationships *per se*. However for those entering interracial relationships they not only take their individual biography into the relationship and the attitudes of significant others and strangers, they also take the historical legacy of the wider relationship between white and black people (as discussed in chapters one).

More specifically, the development of an interracial relationship may trigger a feeling of personal crisis as a result of the negative reactions and attitudes of significant others and strangers toward the relationship (See diagram 1).



The crisis challenges each one of the people involved in the relationship, but particularly the black partners, to look at themselves critically and consider their sense of identity, their feeling towards not just their own blackness but blackness in general and whiteness in particular. It requires them to consider their attitudes towards the historical legacy that informs the wider black and white relationship and how they are going to reconcile the social and the political antagonism between black and white people and their personal feelings. The relationship challenges the people involved to consider the connection between their sense of identity, their racial and culture origin and their loyalties to their families and friends.

The crisis triggers not just questions about self it also challenges individuals to decide whether to continue their interracial relationship and risk ostracism and vilification from significant others and strangers or forgo the relationship all together. How they react towards these pressures may well determine the nature of their involvement in their present relationship and it would also affect their future relationships with a partner from a different racial background (See diagram 2). If they are able to manage the personal crisis that the relationship triggers then they may to go on and develop (and maintain) their involvement in the relationship.



(Diagram 2)

Those who are unable to withstand the rejection and vilification or are torn (psychologically and emotionally) by the incompatible demands placed on them by the relationship often choose to terminate their involvement and seek to form intimate relationships with a partner from a similar racial/ethnic background. As Beck and Beck (1995) observed:

‘In...interviews bicultural couples described typical phases of their relationships. In the period of initial infatuation and effusive optimism prevails, a feeling of blissful openness, and ....a certain pride in one’s nonconformism. After going through internal and external strains there is often a phase of retreat and renewed identification with one’s own background’. (Beck and Beck 1995:85)

In line with Beck and Beck’s observation this study also found that those who choose to remain in the relationship often have to work through the personal crisis and the questioning that is provoked as a result of their involvement in the relationship. To help them deal with the reactions, individuals may absorb all the negativities and reframe the verbal abuse and disapproval shown towards them positively. In other words they just do not ignore the negative attitudes directed towards them, but they in fact reframe it and develop, as already mentioned, strategies that enables them to cope with being in the relationship.

### **Caught on the Margin**

I would suggest, interestingly, that the adaptations and strategies devised by people in interracial relationships are akin to those described by adults of mixed parentage (of interracial relationships) as they attempt to make sense

of their dual heritage. Zack (1995); Park (1964, 1937); Stonequist (1937); Simpson and Yinger (1985). It was evident from analysing the findings that, as a result of the high level of pressures and the personal crisis, not infrequently experienced by individuals on the margins of two cultural (marginality theory) and racial groups, there is a sense that those involved in interracial relationships are at the centre of an un-resolvable racial conflict that pre-date their relationship. There is an attempt to make sense of 'how to be' when caught between two different and competing worlds, an area explored by marginality theory. Although 'marginality theory' is 'largely a theory about internal conflicts and its psychological effects....', (Katz 1996:24), its relevance in this instance is that the internal conflicts that are provoked are not just repressed and ignored but in fact are reframed and reabsorbed and a strategy is developed.

Notwithstanding Owusu-Bempah and Howitt's (2000) criticisms of the theory, I would suggest that the experience that many individuals in interracial relationships have to go through is not dissimilar to that described by marginality theory. Individuals in interracial relationships also feel themselves at the 'margin' because of their experience of rejection from people whom they (may) have held in high regard. For many the anger and frustration they feel towards their families and friends was not compensated for by having positive relationships with people outside their immediate family circle. Instead their sense of isolation and rejection were further reinforced by the negative reactions they experienced from strangers. Similar to the experiences of people described in marginality theory, there is evidence of fractured family and friendship connections as well as, in many cases, lack of trust in their social relationships with significant others and strangers.

Respondents spoke about how each of their encounters with significant others and strangers brought its own complexities. For example, in each different social space they occupied with significant others and strangers, they often found themselves with people who brought unresolved racial and cultural tensions to the encounter and the relationship therefore often evoked



these tensions. In this study evidence suggests that with each encounter with significant others and strangers similar kinds of issues and problems have to be confronted in, what appears to be, an ever-ending spiral.

### **It Is Not All Bad**

Although what is highlighted above helps to illustrate some of the difficult issues that interracial couples face and the dynamics that are generated by the relationship, it is worth noting that it is not all negative because evidence shows that in many instances, after an initial negative response, some couples did experience positive reactions from some families and friends. There was evidence that some people changed their attitudes towards the couple and they became more supportive and less hostile. Where it was believed, by the respondents' parents for example, that the relationship was long term, and the partners' intentions eventually came to be considered 'honourable', some who were previously opposed became more accommodating and less negative about the relationship. This finding corresponds with those of earlier studies by Benson (1981); Alibhai-Brown & Montague (1992); Tizard & Phoenix (1993); Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell (1995).

### **The Discourse**

It could be argued that the expectations of those outside the relationship are shaped by a typification, which consists of a set of values, norms and beliefs about the ways in which black and white people should conduct relationships with one another. This Schutzian idea of how people make sense of their social world through the reinforcement, legitimisation and reproduction of that same world in their everyday interaction with others is interesting and pertinent to my analysis. Thus significant others are locked in the dominant discourse of the historical encounters between black and white people. In some ways the way significant others related to interracial relationships is analogous to a continuous re-enactment of the dialogues that have been repeated by previous generations. These discourses and encounters have a content, structure and context that predate and transcend the people in the relationship. The effect of this, at least with regard to interracial

relationships, is that whilst it is possible to continue the previous, predetermined discourse, it would only be maintaining a racially divided social world. As Warren and Johnson observed:

‘The message is that mixed (interracial) marriages (relationships) are wrong. It is seldom that they are portrayed as desirable or even acceptable’ (Warren and Johnson 1994:8).

To maintain the undesirability of the relationship there is an attempt to maintain the racial boundaries and for this reason: ‘the most popular analyses of interpersonal dimensions of mixed (interracial) marriages (relationships) actually demean the marriage (relationship) by imputing purely mercenary motives to the partners’ (Warren and Johnson 1994:8).

The difficulty, from my analysis, is that interracial relationships fall between the cracks of the earlier racist discourse between black and white people and an emerging new social and relationship construct. Its mere presence, intentionally or unintentionally, challenges the expectations that the previous encounter would continue to be the only way that black and white people could and should relate to each other. It metaphorically asks whether the views that are expressed about the relationship by significant others and strangers can dictate with whom one should form a relationship. The presence of interracial relationships distorts what is considered by significant others and strangers to be the ‘appropriate’ relationship between black and white people.

The finding from this study is that while many of the people in the relationship are, to a large extent, preoccupied with the mechanics of daily living and maintenance of their relationships with their partners, they are also acutely aware of the negative attitudes held about the relationship and are, therefore, sensitive to the reactions and antagonism the relationship evokes in ‘others’. While they may not be thinking about the negative reactions towards them on a daily basis, evidence from this study suggests that respondents, in most instances, have, intentionally and unintentionally, both internalised the negative responses and integrated their protective strategies within their everyday interactions with significant others and strangers. This,

I would suggest, has become such an integral part of their existence that they are able to absorb the negative attitudes and reactions of significant others and strangers without it causing them to continually reassess their relationship with their partner or suffer racial or cultural identity crisis.

### **Not fitting in**

Analysing the reactions of significant others and strangers towards people involved in interracial relationships revealed that at an individual level it is possible to note that like their white partners, the black partners are, effectively, de-classed because they do not fit neatly into their previously ascribed social class positions. In essence the relationship disrupts people's perception of both race and class relations between black and white people. This analysis differs somewhat from that advanced by Montague, 1997 and Moran 2001, that it is only the white partners in interracial relationships who are often relegated to the lower social status of the black partner. My assertion is that, because of their relationship, there is a sense that the white partner has prised their black partner away from their social class position and hence, from their racial and cultural origin. Similarly the racial and cultural configuration of the relationship has no parallel and therefore there are no role models with which people in the relationship can easily identify. The previous encounter between black males and white females was characterised by brutality, subjugation, oppression, inequalities and discrimination based on the superiority of one race over the other. So as a group they have no reinforcing connection to the wider society and they have had to rely on mutual reinforcement for support and validation. Although the point being suggested is that the people involved in the relationship are having, in part at least, to 're-invent' themselves and their relationship, this is not to deny that at the individual level they do not maintain their racial and class identities. But it is their relationship with, and their connections to, significant others and strangers that their identification as individuals/couples becomes problematic.

### **'Dissin' and Shaming**

In the face of such hostility many respondents felt estranged from their racial and cultural group and their feeling of disconnection was made more intense by a sense of public exposure that is akin to shame.

The visible nature of such a relationship ensures that the uncomfortable feelings it generates are reaffirmed and reinforced by the negative reactions that are displayed by both black and white significant others and strangers.

As one respondent said:

*'There was one reaction we had once... we were in Central London, when three young black girls, as they walked past us started singing the theme tune from the film 'Jungle Fever'. I just 'laughed' because I knew what they were getting at'.*

And as another said:

*'People stare, they go past and then look back and you...know...looking back now that might have been one of the factors that led to the breakdown of my relationship because I used to hate going shopping with her because we go into shops.....I hated people staring at me and making comments, although you don't hear the comments I know they are looking at you and saying something and you know you feel very uncomfortable...'*

Such exposure means those involved feel more vulnerable to criticisms, public humiliation and the hostility of significant others and strangers. As Giddens observed:

*'In daily social life, we normally give a good deal of attention to protecting or 'saving' each other's 'face'. (Giddens 1989:93)*

Self-esteem and sense of pride come from the daily social interactions that take place between people and even in instances where there is a great deal of negativity, there is still a wider connection that people are able to make with 'others'. Similarly as with Goffman's (1971) notion of *civil inattention* there is cordiality and a code of expectations that help to provide the individual with a link to either their racial group or a wider connection. Under normal circumstances *civil inattention* means that although people notice each other this is done in a way that enables 'face saving'. In other words, the gaze and scrutiny is done at a distance leaving adequate social

space for the individual to occupy. However, in this study it would appear that people involved in interracial relationships are subjected to the gaze of significant others and strangers in a manner that is unashamedly direct and uncompromising, with little social space available for them to slip into and occupy. Because the relationship is perceived as wrong, those outside the dyad believe they are justified in their condemnation of the relationship and more importantly in letting it be known to the people concerned their disapproval of the relationship. One of the effects of the condemnation is a withdrawal, in most cases; of people involved in interracial relationships from their social milieu of origin. In essence they seek out environments that are not on the margins of society but outside the spaces occupied by mono-racial essentialists. The weight of the objections and the gaze of significant others and strangers is strong enough to reduce some people in the relationship to a position of defensiveness and a sense of disconnection to their families and friends and in some cases total isolation from people outside the dyad.

Unlike mono-racial relationships, people in interracial relationships are not able to experience or live their relationship in obscurity. There is a sense that because the relationship is so 'visible' it attracts comments from 'others'. In essence, strangers who publicly and privately have *no direct knowledge or* connection to the couple involved in the relationship 'feel' entitled to have a view and believe they can freely express those views about their opposition to such a relationship. It seems to matter less whether their views are abusive, emotionally and psychologically damaging to the people involved. Nor it seems does it matter whether their views and reactions lack rationality, coherence and that it is devoid of any understanding about the true nature of the relationship on which they are commenting.

It is evident that as a result of the disconnection and a sense of isolation that was felt by some people in the relationship, they have had to fashion themselves anew. For many this refashioning was seen as crucial not just for their personal well-being, but also for the survival and continuation of their relationship with their partner. This was necessary and important because

they have had to invent a yardstick by which to judge their relationship, as all current existing criteria are skewed against their kind of relationship.

### **Black and White Unite**

The nature of the groupings which are opposed to the relationship, black and white, has meant that the strategies that have been developed by people in the relationship to confront those who are opposed is less strident and more defensive. In identifying race, culture, identity and sex as the main point of 'attack' against the relationship, those who are opposed, have found that these areas were effective in silencing any discussion about people's experiences of being a partner in an interracial relationship. Taken individually these are difficult and complex areas to grapple with, combined they become almost impossible to disentangle. For example a black partner in a mono-racial relationship who is accused of wanting to be white, who is only interested in a sexual relationship with their partner because of their colour and involved in the relationship as a means of social mobility could defend themselves vigorously against these charges. But a black partner in an interracial relationship accused of the same would find it not only more difficult, but almost impossible to defend themselves with the same amount of vigour. It would appear the relationship renders those involved defenceless against accusations of opportunism and racial and cultural bankruptcy. Those who are opposed to the relationship are able to occupy the moral high ground, claiming racial and cultural authenticity, and therefore superiority, against the people involved in the relationship.

At one level interracial relationships appear to evoke what can only be described as a submerged, yet familiar and widespread discourse of the crudest pre-scientific racism. At another level the social status of people in interracial relationships, irrespective of their racial and actual class position, is ranked below all other groups, black and white, by dint of the racial and cultural difference between the couples. This reinforces the observation made earlier that people involved in such relationships do not fit neatly into a pre-existing, socially constructed, binary world view. This, I would suggest, is a phenomenon requiring further study.

### **Shaping their World**

People in interracial relationships are often accused of being calculating and that their decision to embark on the relationship is driven by individual self-interest. In embarking on such a relationship they are deemed to have transgressed implicit norms and expectations and in doing so are active agents in the process. At the heart of this assertion is the acceptance that, in as much as people are shaped and acted upon by the social and cultural world, they are far from being passive actors in the process because they too are actively involved in shaping that cultural world.

For people in the relationship in going against that which is expected, they are by implication challenging the social world, as it is perceived by 'others' as the way it ought to be, and as a result they have had to create a new social space characterised by a new normative structure, new mechanism for the attribution of status and a new, what Eagleton (1991) calls, 'post traditional identities'. It is evident from the data in this study that as the relationship does not fit neatly into existing social space, there is an emerging and expanding space, into which it might be located. Pratt (1994); Zack (1995); Gilroy (2000), where the emphasis upon racial integrity is giving way to talk of hybridity and multiple-identity.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the impact of the attitudes of significant others and strangers on interracial relationships. It has discussed the ways in which respondents manage their relationships. It has proposed that to enable respondents to maintain their involvement in such relationships they have had to develop a number of strategies. It has provided a schema of the adaptation that has been developed and analysed the wider implications.

## Chapter Nine

### Conclusion

The previous chapter discussed the ways in which respondents managed their relationships and the strategies adopted to minimise the impact of the negative reactions of significant others and strangers towards the relationship. This chapter is a summation of the study as well as a brief discussion and an analysis of the implication of the findings.

This study has investigated how black men and white women in interracial relationships manage their relationship and the ways in which they deal with the reactions and attitudes of significant others and strangers towards their relationship. In addition it considered the ways in which the reactions from significant others and strangers impacted on the couples' conduct of their relationship and in the light of these reactions it highlighted the adaptations developed by them.

Before setting out an overview of the findings, it is worth acknowledging that any analysis or discussion of the findings of a study must accept its inevitable shortcomings. For example it would be difficult for this study to claim unassailable generalisability of its findings without qualification. Nor can it be categorically claimed that the respondents in this study are representative of the entire interracial relationship population in Britain.

However, the **key findings are that:**

- People involved in interracial relationships are caught up in a relationship which is almost invariably subject to intense scrutiny by significant others and strangers and this distinguishes interracial relationships from other relationships.
- People involved in interracial relationships experienced a great deal of negative reaction from 'others'. In some cases the opposition from



significant others and strangers manifested itself as verbal abuse and ostracism whilst in a few instances people are actually physically attacked.

- These negative reactions to the relationship precipitate personal crises for many respondents because it causes them to review their views about what it meant to be involved in a relationship that was both visible and did not adhere to social conventions, there was considerable commonality in the strategies devised to enable individuals and couples to manage and cope with the disapprobation of 'others'.
- In most instances people eventually abandoned the quest for validation from significant others and strangers and they become heavily reliant upon one another for mutual support.
- There was then a tendency for couples to develop relationships with people in a similar kind of, or other unconventional types of relationship. In essence their involvement in the relationship led them to develop a new 'reference group' which then becomes their role set. This new reference group acted to both reassure and validate the couple's relationship and provide the pool from which the couples were able to develop friendship and over time reconstitute a social milieu of approving and supporting significant others.
- It was also evident that interracial couples tended to have more white people than black people as friends. This may be because white people were more tolerant of interracial relationships than black people. Equally it may be that they sought out white friends because the black partner's sense of racial identity was not placed under the same kind of scrutiny or pressure nor their cultural affiliations questioned as they may have been by black people.
- Once black and white people had been in an interracial relationship they tended to repeat the same pattern in subsequent relationships. The reason for this pattern of repeated involvement in interracial relationships lay, to a large

extent, in the feelings of estrangement they have experienced and the consequence of such estrangement from their respective communities. Once they had developed a relationship outside their racial group, they feel they are 'cast out' by their respective communities. This feeling of estrangement from their 'community leads many to sought self-validation by looking both within their relationship and outwards to a new, supportive, reference group (role set).

- Mutual sexual attraction forms a powerful and important pull for both partners. Though how this differed from mono-racial relationships was not clear. Some respondents acknowledged that the contrasting colour difference between themselves and their partner was a 'sexual turn on' and a small group of respondents said they have often used the differences as part of their sexual banter and playful innuendo with their partners.

Although many respondents deny that the colour of their partner had an influence in their decision to form a relationship with him/her, over 30 of the 40 respondents had had consecutive relationships with a partner of the same colour as their previous partner. Respondents were reluctant to accept that their partner's colour was one of the attributes, which attracted them in the first instance. It might be the case that to admit that they were interested and attracted by their partner's colour and for its connotations as other attributes would have appeared tantamount to accepting the racist stereotyping that the relationship was motivated by racial consideration above all else. The implication of such an admission would have laid them open to the charge that the relationship was rooted in perverse sexual fantasy.

- Many of the female respondents said as a result of having previously been in interracial relationships, trying to form intimate relationships with white partners was fraught with unforeseen difficulties. Many said in their experience white men were reluctant to get involved with them once they discovered that they had 'been with a black man'. In particular they said that the men had difficulties coping with the knowledge that they have had a sexual and loving relationship with a black man. The problem, it would

appear, was especially acute for those who have had children from the relationship. As a result of the reactions of white men the women who had children found that their choice of partners tended to be restricted to black men.

- People involved in interracial relationships have developed a sharpened sense of awareness because of the level of interest others show towards them. So, for example, they notice that black women were most likely to express the most vehement opposition towards the relationship and appeared unafraid of making their disapproval of the relationship obvious. As to why this should be so may be that black women feel rejected and dishonoured by potential black partners who appear to prefer to form relationships with a white partner. Put simply, such a sexual rebuff may make both black women and white men feel that they are regarded as 'not good enough'. However, these ideas are just speculative and this is an area that clearly requires further study. This finding corresponds with the findings of similar studies conducted in the United States, for example Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell (1995) and Roots (1992).

- The negative views and attitudes express towards interracial relationships, have a profound effect on the people involved in the relationship and in the way they relate to significant others and strangers. Both the men and women respondents were aware of the racial and cultural issues involved in interracial relationships as well as the arguments often presented against such relationships by significant others and strangers. And although people try to '*get on with their lives*' the attitudes and behaviours of significant others and strangers still impinges, to a lesser or greater degree, on the lives of the people involved. In many instances respondents were able to repeat the popular explanations that have been offered about interracial relationships and a small number of respondents were able to discuss the social, political and philosophical underpinnings of such explanations. Yet despite their knowledge, understanding and articulation of the criticism they felt their personal experiences did not relate to, or connect with, many of the

views and explanations that have been offered by 'others' about interracial relationships.

- In order to cope with, and get on with their lives, many people involved in interracial relationships tended to be circumspect about where they went with their partner for relaxation and recreation. They avoided places where they were likely to face hostile reactions and did not mix with people whom they regarded as being disapproving of their relationship. When out in public they ignored the 'periphery' and concentrated and focused on their destination. In other words they avoided eye contact with others and tried as best as possible not to notice any comments that were directed at them, although, as some respondents reported, this was sometimes difficult. They were aware of the mono-racial gaze but chose not to engage with it, hence their focus on their destination.

- In order to avoid negative verbal reactions from others many of the men did not make it known to some friends, acquaintances and work colleagues that they had a white partner.

- White women were less embarrassed or apprehensive about letting it be known that they had black partners.

- Some black male respondents also spoke about the difficulties they experienced when trying to develop a relationship with black women. In their view the black women, particularly young black women they encountered, were difficult to approach. They tended to present as aggressive, uninterested, and uncooperative and openly displayed negative attitudes. According to these respondents white women were more approachable, they seemed at ease with themselves and were receptive to their signals and attentions. For many of these respondents because they felt that many black women were unapproachable, they thought it made it difficult to develop intimate relationships and as a result they had to look to white women.

### **More Than Just A Relationship**

It has emerged from this study that interracial couples become a focus of and a metaphor for, concerns about a much deeper set of relations that include black and white, men and women, race, culture, identity and sex, nationality and nationhood. Of course, there are elements of personal and cultural transference in all relationships, however in the case of interracial relationships 'others' feel able to discuss the relationship and the people involved as if they embodied a challenge to a cohesive and predictable, binary, racialised world. As a result, the relationship becomes a vehicle for the racist discourse of the past, present and a portent of a multi-racial hybrid future. The future that such relationships promise is one that many people find difficult to countenance or accept because it requires them to deconstruct and reorder their views about the world around them.

It appears that significant others and strangers often see interracial relationships as a challenge to mono-racial orthodoxy. Significant others and strangers, (black and white), appear to experience intimate interracial relationships as a relationship that transgresses key social norms, social and cultural ideals and historically sanctioned social divisions. These norms delineate a particular view about the kind of society that Britain ought to be rather than the kind of society the relationship suggests it is becoming. There is, amongst those who object to interracial relationships, apprehension about a multi-racial, multi-cultural world in which historically given racial and cultural boundaries have been eroded. For some, such erosion is a portent of a world that would descend into chaos, with the fostering of anarchic and amoral beings whose actions contribute to continuing degeneration and decline of society.

It is, perhaps, ironic that those who are most vehemently opposed to the relationship should seek to retain a sense of continuity, certainty, coherence and racial and cultural integrity by harking back to a pre-modern era in which neither group fared particularly well. As Said (1993) has observed:

'These 'returns' accompany rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behaviour that are opposed to the permissiveness

associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity' (Said 1993: xiv).

In this perspective the relationship is viewed as part of the modernist development of multiculturalism and the hybridisation of society. This permissiveness gives the individual the freedom to choose their partners and their racial and cultural identity, as well as with whom they want to be involved. In fact this is a misreading because while multiculturalism accepts and encourages individual freedom it is still, it could be argued, within the confines of a kind of pluralism that promotes and glorifies racially and culturally protective enclosure zones, with its implied essentialist discourses (Said 1993).

A similar point was raised by Taylor (1999) who observed:

'Modern liberals who extol multiculturalism constantly celebrate the distinctive cultures of Asians, Chicanos and Afro-Caribbeans. But only those born as Asians, Chicanos and Afro-Caribbeans can lay claim to such identities. We are suddenly back to biology'.  
(Taylor 1999:6)

Taylor's point is interesting because he suggests that far from multiculturalism embracing hybridity, it appeals to a genetic naturalism disguised as respect for the integrity of cultures and a desire not to disrupt the fine cultural ecology that gives contemporary existence its rich and diverse character.

### **A Binary World View**

At a fundamental level, the opposition to interracial relationships is based on the belief that the relationship disrupts racial rankings and muddles the 'clear blue water' between racial groups. The driving force for this argument is the belief that we live in a binary world that is characterised by certain demarcations and differential rankings of races and cultures. This demarcation is not just to be considered as an arbitrary line, drawn up randomly. Rather it represents essential biological differences between the two racial groups.

In this particular case, there are two races, black and white and they relate to each other in a way that is informed and shaped by their racial and cultural differences. Whilst there is no longer scientific support for differential rankings there is still a suggestion that one race is superior to the other, and there is an implicit assumption that one (white) is superior to the other (black). For many people the normative structure of the time is that black and white can co-exist within the same social environment in a relationship that is based upon a social and economic arrangement. However because of their history, and racial and cultural differences, intimate relationships are best kept *within* races and not across races (exogamy). As Martin Luther King Jnr is quoted as saying: 'I want to be the white man's brother not his brother-in-law' (Green 1982:425).

In Britain, unlike the USA, (at least up to the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century) there has been no statutory legislation to buttress the social convention that black and white people form relationships within rather than outside their racial groups. The policing of this configuration has, to a large extent, been left to significant others and strangers who encounter interracial couples to regulate and maintain. This ability of the wider social body to control and regulate behaviours through normative pressures and social, economic and cultural divisions is a phenomenon that both Foucault (1976, 1988) and Bourdieu (1994) recognise in their respective works. In the case of Foucault the mechanism, which enables domination, is the power to define social relations. For Bourdieu, it is *habitus*; where we observe the field of social practices and how it is, to a large extent, policed. Unlike Foucault Bourdieu suggests power is exercised through people's position in the social space and their stake in the system, Lechte (1994). The idea that people should seek partners within their racial and cultural groups is of course consistent with Bourdieu's ideas about expectations that are contained in the social field. Lechte (1994).

However in this regard people in interracial relationships are aware that there is 'a sense of one's place', and that being in an interracial relationship is contradictory to societal expectation since they are going against the

continuing production of expected practices, by not forming an intimate relationship with their own kind.

### **It's a Question of Identity**

One of the difficulties for people in interracial relationships has been that those who are opposed to the relationship have dominated the debate about the relationship and because of the nature of the questions they posed. And up until recently (Gilroy 2000; Hall and Du Gay 1996; Zack 1995) there have been few counter arguments to challenge the dominant views that have been expressed about such relationships. At the heart of these questions are concerns about identity, cultural and racial affiliation and suggestion of possible pathology. It is evident from the present study that the silence from those involved in the relationship has been partly due to the form of questioning interracial relationships have had to endure and the shame some feel about other people's perception of them. I would also suggest that the silence was induced because the question challenges the couple's feeling about their relationship and their motivations for entering such a relationship. The questioning asks them individually to consider their sense of racial and cultural connection and their loyalty to their respective groups. These questions force the black partner to think not only how he is to be 'black in relation to the white man' (Fanon 1952: 110), but how he is to be 'black' in relation to the black man. To challenge a person's identity and their sense of belonging is, in essence, to question their very existence. A point well illustrated by Baldwin who observed; 'You can't tell a black man by the colour of his skin' (Baldwin in Green 1992: 424). In other words a black partner in an interracial relationship is automatically rendered not 'black enough' within the unspecified, but vicariously understood, criteria used to determine an individual's racial and cultural authenticity. So in this case not only do the black partners involved in interracial relationships have to cope with the distancing and stereotypical ascription of 'otherness' as determined by white people, but they are also deemed inauthentic by other black people.



### **Broader Implications**

The couple's involvement in the relationship, as mentioned previously, is experienced by significant others and strangers as a direct challenge to a predictable world where social, and thus intimate, relationships are racially and culturally determined. Interracial relationships are perceived as eroding the racial and cultural heritage of both the black and white communities. The fear is that such relationships, if it continues and is allowed to flourish, would ultimately lead to the total demise of the couple's respective communities. As a result, the relationship is viewed by many, within each of the respective communities, as facilitating the disconnection of the past from the present and more importantly eroding the continuity of the past from the future.

The broad implication is that people in interracial relationships have had to search for different points of reference. They are locked in a world of paradox where on the one hand they look for authenticity in their selfhood (cultural and racial) and congruence in their lives and their relationship, and on the other hand, their relationship signals a shift away from the certainties of a social environment that espouses racial and cultural essentialist and ethnocentric certainties and ideas. By implication, such relationships reject a racially and culturally divided world where individuals have to stay within their racial and cultural group. This relationship is characterised by complexity and hybridity in a world in which most significant others and strangers object to their relationship. As a result they must re-examine how they are related to and should relate to others and how to sustain a sense of cultural and racial 'authenticity' when their intimate surroundings are infused with different influences.

Ferber (1995) suggested that hybridity challenges limited, racialised discourses because 'it dissipates the political persistence of purity, if not the project of racial formation *tout court*' (Ferber 1995 in Zack 1995:254). Although the discussion relates to people of mixed parentage, the observation has some resonance for people involved in interracial relationships because they too extend the 'natural boundaries'; undermining

the sexual taboos about interracial sex; the fusing of different cultural values and belief systems and the forging of a course that is both racially and culturally complex and fluid.

### **Re-Drawing the Boundary**

Intimate interracial relationships pose a challenge to essentialist ontology because they call for a reassessment of the binary worldview, which implicitly privileges an illusionary racial and cultural integrity and its implied racial cultural hierarchy. It, by implication, challenges the racial and cultural closure or determinism, which such a position represents. It renders discussions about racial and cultural integrity problematic, because it demonstrates, that through the act of forming the relationship and having children, culture and identity are fluid and an emergent property of changing social relations. In addition the presence of the relationship suggests a degree of permanency and it is the certainty and the notion of racial acceptance that the relationship evokes, and the idea of racial equality that it hints at, that many significant others and strangers appear to find most difficult to accept.

The way the relationship is 'lived' challenges the dominant meta narratives of black and white people and how they should relate to each other. The relationship, by implication, also challenges the essentialism implicit in the modernist worldview *that, necessarily, all black and white relationships are characterised by an inherent racial power imbalance between the partners and hence it is bound to be an exploitative relationship. Its presence perhaps suggests that black and white relationships are not simply a matter of 'subjugation and imposition' with power exercised by the white women over the black men (Pratt 1994).*

This study demonstrates that many of the people involved in intimate interracial relationships are involved in innovation, adaptation, collaboration, challenge and resistance. Clearly by being in the relationship, there is an explicit, conscious or unconscious, rejection of a binary social world. Instead there is an implicit embrace of multiracialism/racialism and

an acceptance of the 'difference' that exists within the relationship. They try, as best as they can, to negotiate and work with the racial and cultural differences that exist between them.

As already demonstrated in the findings (chapter five) and in the discussion of the popular explanations (chapter six), cultural differences are manifested in the way the couples manage their relationship. Although it is worth noting that, in many instances, there are uncertainties as to whether the differences lay in the racial and cultural differences or in gender difference. So 'routine' arguments and disagreements sometimes take on a more complex dynamic, perhaps because of their racial and cultural differences. This point was clearly demonstrated in this study by respondents who spoke about having to understand their partners' culture and the different ways they do things, from preparing meals to the way they relate to each other's families and the ways they deal with confrontation. In reality, the experiences of the people in the relationship are far more complex, defused, fluid and fragmented and any informed analysis of interracial relationships has to take account of the complexities and dynamism of the relationship.

### **Living with Complexity**

The work of Gilroy (1995); Hall (1996); Hooks (1993); Said (1993); Tizard & Phoenix (1993) and Pratt (1994) suggests that a less deterministic explanation is required in order to connect individuals' experiences, their social reality and structural and social cultural considerations. In essence there is a need for an analysis that considers the notion of 'acculturation', 'zone of contact' and the concept of 'articulation' as a way of making sense of being in a social environment that is characterised by a plurality of races and voices. In this instance the term acculturation is used to acknowledge the view that in an open, multi-racial and multicultural society it is likely that 'cultures' would confront and to some extent negotiate and 'borrow' ideas from each other.

Similarly Pratt (1994), in exploring the notion of the 'contact zone' highlighted the experience of the colonised (black) and coloniser (white) and

how their physical contact inevitably sparks dynamism that is not just about the imposition of the powerful over the powerless. Here the attempt is to 'evoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geography and historical disjuncture, whose trajectories now intersect' (Pratt 1994:6).

This new discourse allows for a different way of looking at people in interracial relationships. It suggests that whilst there is a critical awareness of the normative structures of the times, this in itself is not enough to restrict the choices people make and their wish to realise their desires. As Coleman (1993) observed, in a free society people are not bound by the old rules because they have wider choices and are not restricted by the same kind of social conventions and restrictions that characterised the earlier period. Individuals involved in interracial relationships have had to improvise and in a sense build their own realities because, though they are part of the society, they have had to create and recreate a different milieu. And, in line with Pratt (1994), as a result of their experience they have had to develop different reference groups and create a space for themselves within a hostile social environment. Rather than 'describe themselves in ways that engage with the negative representations others have made of them', they appear to be forging new identities for themselves and relating to significant others and strangers in a way that does minimal damage to their individuality and their relationship with their partner.

### **Developing a Different History**

In analysing both the materials available on interracial relationships and the responses of the respondents who participated in this study it is evident that contemporary discourse on interracial relationships has a similar structure to that in evidence between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Even though the current social context is very different, as is the nature of the wider social relationship between black and white people, still the historical legacy of racialism, separatism and naturalism permeates all aspects of discussions involving black and white people. The discussions, assertions and views expressed follow a pattern in which the people in the relationship are rendered invisible or as having been stereotyped and simplified and that

which is individual and idiosyncratic about them is suppressed. The couple's relationship becomes a metaphor in an ongoing discourse about the wider relationship between black and white people and the uncertainties about the level and nature of integration that should exist between the two groups. For example there are fears about the changing social landscape and the uncertainties that surrounds it. There is apprehension in some quarters about a multiracial society with its myriad of colours and cultures. There is a belief that because of multiculturalism and the mixing of the races there is deterioration in the social order, that both black and white people would lose their cultural heritage and racial identity. The fear is that society would be meshed into a non-descript mongrel culture. There are also fears on both sides, black and white, that they are encircled by an alien culture that would eventually 'swamp' their way of life beyond recognition. In addition, for some people, there is repugnance at the very idea of a sexual relationship between black and white people. Such intimacy is seen as unnatural and hence 'weird'. It is possible to conjecture that for some white significant others and strangers there is also the belief that since black people were once objectified and subjected to brutal treatment, they fear retribution since, it is assumed, being in an interracial relationship would demystify the power of white people and leave them open to direct attack, or attack by proxy through the relationship.

It would appear as if significant others and strangers use people involved in interracial relationships to vent their anger and frustration at both an unjust society and a world experiencing profound change through fragmentation and social and personal uncertainties. Whilst there is little evidence to suggest that the negative views held about the relationship are likely to change, it is also the case that interracial relationships are set to continue and indeed increase (Alibhai-Brown 2001). What has emerged strongly in this study is that despite the negative reactions of significant others and strangers towards interracial relationships, for those involved in them their overriding concern centres on the nature and dynamics contained within the dyad. The findings suggest that the attitudes of significant others and strangers towards

the relationship does have a direct and visible impact on the relationship and in the way the people involved in the relationship live their lives.

So for example, those involved in the relationship, particularly the black partner, engage with significant others and strangers in a way that minimises personal discomfort and their doubts about their racial and cultural identity. Also, as a result of the negative reactions toward them, they look within the relationship for affirmation and valorisation of not just the relationship but also themselves. They form social networks and social relationships with the kind of people that would enable them to create their own world of new vocabulary of meaning. What has also emerged from this study is that, in being involved in an interracial relationship, an individual's sense of racial and cultural identity is meshed with the negative reactions and ostracising behaviour of significant others and strangers. In other words, rather than just absorbing and internalising the negativities, with all the possible destructive implications, they redefine and reframe them in a more positive way.

The result is that both the black partner and white partner develop a stronger sense of self, which continues to revalidate itself through their continuous involvement in similar kinds of relationships. This recurrent involvement in interracial relationships ensures that their sense of identity is not called into question or challenged, thus ensuring a degree of self-confidence about themselves, their partners and their relationship.

In conclusion this study investigated the ways in which people in interracial relationships experienced and managed their relationships and the perceptions and reactions and attitudes of others toward the relationship. The original contribution of this study to the growing body of materials in this area is that the study not only detailed the experiences of individuals involved in the relationship, the difficulties and problems they encountered and the ways they manage the relationship, it also identified the strategies individuals adopt to cope with the negative reactions and attitudes of others. In addition it advances knowledge about the ways in which people involved in intimate interracial relationships attempt to create a private space for

themselves whilst at the same time developing connections with those who accept them and their relationship.

Although it has already been stated (chapter two) that there is a growing body of material in this area, there is a need for further research in a number of areas, some of which have already been highlighted. However more specifically there is a need to explore:

1. Studies which would include black women and white men and whether their experiences are different from those of black men and white women.
2. The impact of interracial relationships on the black community. For example there are unexplored explanations from some commentators that interracial relationships have been instrumental in causing fragmentation and disintegration within the black community. How true is this claim?
3. Studies that look at the experiences of people involved in interracial relationships in other European countries, such as Holland and France.
4. The differences between the way Africans and African Caribbean people react to members of their family's involvement in interracial relationships.
5. Why are black women so vehemently opposed to black male – white female intimate relationships?

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## **Appendix i**

### **Research Instrument Schedule - Final Draft**

#### **Part 1 - Introduction (explanation of the research, process of the interview)**

##### **1. Early childhood history and experiences**

The interview schedule design had to enable the respondents to talk about their earlier history and consider the influences that have shaped their adult lives. Although the emphasis was not an in-depth psychoanalytical analysis of the respondent's childhood, it was to explore expectations, experiences of growing up and their social environment. Specifically respondents were asked:

Can you remember your early childhood?

Can you remember your earliest friends?

Describe the range of friends you had up to when you were 11 years old

Describe the friends you had from the age of 12 years old

When you were a child did you have any black/white friends?

Was there anyone you knew, when you were young, who was involved in an interracial relationship?

When you were can you remember your parents/carer ever saying anything about interracial relationships?

##### **2. Friendships**

Under this heading, the attempt was to enquire into respondents' friendship patterns. The probes encouraged respondents to think about their friendships and whether there was any particular pattern to the kinds of friendships they developed and what they look for in their friends. Here respondents were asked to talk about the friendships they have developed in both formal settings and informal settings and the kinds of people they have as friends. So respondents were asked:

Tell me about your friendship circle.

How would you describe your friends? (gender, race, ethnicity, class)

Can you describe your friendship circle in your youth

When you were in education (primary, secondary, university, college)

What about adult friendships?

### **3. Forming intimate relationship**

Similarly, in forming relationships, the aim was to explore why people got involved in a particular relationship and for respondents to explore what they looked for in a relationship and to encourage them to articulate the criteria they used to decide with whom to form a relationship.

Here respondents were encouraged to list all their relationships from early childhood, in terms of their first crushes from primary and secondary school, to their first sexual experience and their current relationship. The probes and prompts were used to enable respondents to talk about how they met their partner, what they found attractive about him/her, what were the features which caught their eye and the yardstick used to decide their suitability and compatibility. Respondents were asked:

Can you remember your first boy/girl friend (and subsequent partners)?

Can you describe him/her?

How did you meet?

Where did you meet?

What attracted you to him/her

Do you have criteria in your mind that you judge potential partners by?

What are your criteria?

What do you look for in a relationship?

What would you say are/were the main differences between you and your partner?

Have you encountered difficulties because you are/were involved in an interracial relationship/s?

What difficulties/problems/do/did you experience?

#### **4. Recognition of racial and cultural difference**

Leading on from the above, the attempt was to elicit respondents' early experiences of different racial and cultural groups. The aim was to highlight the range and the nature of the contact between the respondents and the race and culture of their future partner. Looking at the earlier experiences of the 'other', also provided the opportunity to enquire into the kind of images that were held about the race and culture of their partner prior to their meeting and the extent to which these images had an impact on their choice of partner. Respondents were asked

What did you know about other races and culture?

At what age did you become aware of colour, ethnicity and cultures?

#### **5. Experience of being in an interracial relationship**

In this section, the focus was to build on the above by prompting respondents to explore when they had their first experience, sexual and non sexual, of developing a relationship with a partner from a different racial group. Respondents were asked to consider what impact their early experiences of forming friendships had on their decisions to develop a relationship with such a partner. The probes and prompts attempted to get the respondents to think and talk about the experience of being in an interracial relationship and how it differed from their previous experience of being in a mono racial relationship. They were also invited to talk about the difficulties they face as a result of being in such a relationship. This provided the opportunity to explore the nature of interracial relationships and the way the respondents managed, both practically and conceptually, being in the relationship. Specifically the respondents were asked:

What was your family's reaction when they discovered you had a black/white partner?

What do/did your family think of you being in an interracial relationship?

What do/did your friends think of your involvement in such relationship?

What other reactions have you encountered outside the family and friendship circles?

What influence do/did your friends/family have on your relationship?

What influence did your partners friends/family have on the relationship?

How would you characterise your friends (black-white)?

Do you know other interracial couples?

Is there a difference in the way strangers react to you and your partner (black, white, men and women)?

Are there things you do in the relationship that are different than when you were in a mono racial relationship? (if applicable)

## **Part 2 Popular Explanations Advanced about the Motivation of People Entering Interracial Relationships**

In this section it was the explanations offered by significant others for the relationship that was the focus of attention. Respondents were asked directly about their reaction to the explanations that are often advanced to explain their involvement in the relationship. Here the respondents were given the opportunity to address the points raised by significant others and strangers about the relationship and to discuss the points in the light of their own decision to enter such relationships. Both the probes and prompts used in this section of the interview required the respondents to look in depth at each of the explanations advanced and for them to respond to them specifically to the different explanations. For example;

- *Racial denial*
- *The quest for cultural inclusion and social mobility*
- *The quest for economic mobility*
- *Sexual and colour curiosity*
- *Revenge for racial and social oppression*
- *Sexual attraction*
- *Geographical propinquity*
- *Shared interest*

## **Part 3 - Experience of Hostility and Disapprobation from Significant Others**

Under the heading of reaction of significant others, the aim was to elicit from the respondents the reactions they encountered from people outside the relationship and the way they coped and related, individually and as a couple,

to significant others. In this section the focus was to highlight the range of reactions that were displayed by significant others and strangers, and this provided an overview of the kind of problems that people involved in interracial relationships have had to confront in their relationship with 'others'.

- *Racial and cultural dilution*
- *What were your family's reactions when they discovered you had a black/white partner?*
- *What other reactions have you encountered outside the family and friendship circles?*
- *How would you say people react to you and your partner (black, white, men, women)?*
- *Why do you think they react the way they do/did? (if applicable)*
- *What were your friends' reactions towards your relationship?*

#### **Part 4 Strategies Adopted to Minimise Negative Impact upon the Relationship**

The Strategies for dealing with the reactions was to an extent, a continuation of the reactions already highlighted. But more specifically, the aim in this section was to allow respondents to discuss the ways in which they cope with the reactions shown towards them and about the strategies they have developed to help them deal with reactions towards them. Respondents were asked:

How do you react to the views held by others about interracial relationships?

How do you feel about it?

How does your partner react to it?

What do you and your partner do when you come across such views and attitudes?

Can you give examples of how you've reacted?

Do you respond verbally? Physically? Or do you ignore it? What do you do?

Where do you go for recreation/enjoyment?

Do you go alone or with your partner?

Do you care about where you go?



## **Appendix ii**

### **Second Draft Interview Schedule**

#### **Part 1 - Introduction (explanation of the research, process of the interview)**

##### **1. Early childhood history and experiences**

Can you remember your early childhood?

Can you remember your earliest friends?

Describe the range of friends you had up to when you were 11 years old

Describe the friends you had from the age of 12 years old

When you were a child did you have any black/white friends?

Was there anyone you knew, when you were young, who was involved in an interracial relationship?

Did your parents/carer ever said anything about interracial relationships?

##### **2. Friendships**

Tell me about your friends. Can you describe your friendships in adulthood?

##### **3. Forming intimate relationships**

Can you remember your first boy/girl friend (and subsequent partners)?

Can you describe him/her?

How did you meet?

Where did you meet?

What attracted you to him/her?

Do you have criteria in your mind that you judge potential partners by?

What are your criteria?

What do you look for in a relationship?

What would you say are/were the main differences between you and your partner?

Have you encountered difficulties because you are/were involved in an interracial relationship?

What difficulties/problems/do/did you experience?

#### **4. Recognition of racial and cultural difference**

What did you know about other races and culture?

At what age did you become aware of colour, ethnicity and cultures?

#### **5. Experience of being in an interracial relationship**

What were your family's reaction when they discovered you had a black/white partner?

What do/did your family think of you being in an interracial relationship?

What do/did your friends think of your involvement in such a relationship?

What other reactions have you encountered outside the family and friendship circles?

What influence do/did your friends/family have on your relationship?

What influence did your partner's friends/family have on the relationship?

How would you characterise your friends (black-white)?

Do you know other interracial couples?

Is there a difference in the way strangers react to you and your partner (black, white, men and women)?

#### **6. Reaction of significant others**

What were the reactions of when they discovered you were involved in an interracial relationship?

#### **7. Impact of significant others**

How did/does the reaction of others affect you?

How does the reactions of others affect your relationship

## **Appendix iii.**

### **FIRST DRAFT**

#### **1. Early History**

Can you remember your early childhood?

Can you remember your earliest friends?

Describe the range of friends you had up to when you were 11 years old

Describe the friends you had from the age of 12 years old

When you were a child did you have any black/white friends?

Was there anyone you knew, when you were young, who was involved in an interracial relationship?

Did your parents/carer ever say anything about interracial relationships?

#### **2. Relationship Formation**

Can you remember your first boy/girl friend (and subsequent partners)?

Can you describe him/her?

How did you meet?

Where did you meet?

What attracted you to him/her?

Do you have a criteria in your mind that you judge potential partners by?

What are your criteria?

What do you look for in a relationship?

#### **3. External Relationships**

What was your family's reaction when they discovered you had a black/white partner?

What do/did your family think of you being in an interracial relationship?

What do/did your friends think of your involvement in such a relationship?

What other reactions have you encountered outside family and friends?

**Appendix iv**

**SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

**ABOUT YOU**

Are you aged:      Under 30.....  
(please tick)        30-40 .....  
                              Over 40.....

Sex:                Male (1)  
                              Female (2)

Place of birth.....

How would you describe your ethnic background?

- White British.....
- White European.....
- Black African.....
- Black Caribbean.....
- Black British.....
- Asian (Indian).....
- (Pakistan).....
- (Bangladeshi).....
- Mixed race.....
- Other.....

Are you:            Single.....  
                              Married.....  
                              Co-habiting.....  
                              In a relationship.....

## ABOUT YOUR PARTNER

Your partner's place of birth.....

How would you describe your current partner's ethnicity?

White British.....

White European.....

Black African.....

Black Caribbean.....

Black British.....

Asian (Indian).....

(Pakistan).....

(Bangladeshi).....

Mixed race.....

Other.....

## ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

In the following section please circle the number indicating on the scale of 1-5 whether and how strongly you agree with the statements given.

1. The colour of the person is important in my choice of partner

Strongly agree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly disagree

2. The level of education of the person is important in my choice of partner

Strongly agree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly disagree

3. The level of income of the person is important in my choice of partner

Strongly agree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly disagree

4. The personality of the individual is important in my choice of partner

Strongly agree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly disagree

5. Compatibility is an important factor in my choice of partner

Strongly agree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly disagree

**6. For a successful relationship both partners must be of the same racial group**  
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly disagree

**7. Interracial relationships have more to do with current fashion and status than genuine commitment.**

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly disagree

**8. Have you ever had a relationship with a partner from a different racial group?**

Yes..... No.....

**9. If no, can you think of an explanation?**

(you can tick more than one)

Financial reasons.....

Cultural reasons.....

Educational differences.....

Personality.....

Colour.....

Compatibility.....

Other.....

**10. Sexual attraction has very little to do with my choice of partner**

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly disagree

**11. Sexual curiosity forms the only attraction for interracial relationships**

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly disagree

**12. Would you consider having a relationship with a partner from a different racial background to yourself?** Yes.....(1) No.....(2)

**13. If your answer is no what factors would influence your decision?**

(you can tick more than one)

Financial reasons.....

Cultural reasons.....

Educational differences.....

Personality.....

Colour.....

Compatibility.....

Other.....

**14. What attracted you to your current partner**

(you can tick more than one)

Financial reasons.....

Cultural reasons.....

Educational differences.....

Personality.....

Colour.....

Compatibility.....

Other.....

**15. People from the same race are more likely to have lasting relationships than others:**

Strongly agree    1        2        3        4        5        Strongly disagree

**16. People in interracial relationships are more likely to have lasting relationships than others:**

Strongly agree    1        2        3        4        5        Strongly disagree

**17. Do you think people in general approve or disapprove of interracial relationships?:**

Approve.....(1)

Disapprove.....(2)

Don't Know.....(3)

**18. Access to one's culture of origin is extremely important and the black partner will lose this if they get involved in an interracial relationship:**

Strongly agree    1        2        3        4        5        Strongly disagree

**19. Race/colour should not play any part in the choice of one's partner:**

Strongly agree    1        2        3        4        5        Strongly disagree

## **Appendix v**

### **Advert for Respondents**

#### **CAN YOU HELP?**

**Are you involved in an Inter-racial Relationship?**

**If yes,**

**Take part in a research project! Inter-racial couples only!**

- Are you a black Afro-Caribbean/ African male?
  - Is your partner white female?
- or
- Are you a white female?
  - Is your partner black Afro-Caribbean/ African?

Then Toyin Okitikpi (Brunel University) would like to talk to you about your experience.

**The interview does not take more than 1 ½ hrs and confidentiality is assured.**

Interested? Please ring me for more details. If I am not around please don't give up try again or leave a message.

0208-891-xxxx.extention-xxxx

After 6.00pm then ring 0208-969.xxxx



## **Appendix vi**

### **Letter to Respondents**

Dear .....,

My name is Mr Toyin Okitikpi and I am interested in talking to you about an area that I am currently researching. As you are aware a great deal has been written about people involved in interracial relationships, but many of these studies have not really given an account of the way the relationship is experienced by the people who are actually involved in the relationship.

My study is particularly interested in your experience of your relationship. Specifically I am interested in trying to find out;

- How the relationship was developed
- What role cultural differences play in the relationship
- How the relationship is managed
- What kind of difficulties, if any, you have encountered, both with your partner and on your own.

As you can see there are many aspects of the relationship, which are of interest to me and the interview would centre on your experience of these areas. I shall be interviewing 40 people in all (20 white women and 20 black men). The criterion is that you are or have been involved in an interracial relationship.

The interview will take approximately 1½ hours or less and it will be done in private. The conversation is confidential and your name will not be mentioned unless you specifically ask to be acknowledged in any published material.

I hope you will be able to meet me and take part in the study. If you are interested but unsure of what is expected, please ring 0208-xxx-xxxx for more information. If you agree to take part I shall send you a copy of the questions I shall be asking.

Yours sincerely

GLOSSARY.

In this study there are a number of terms that are used that require clarification.

- Terms such as **black and white** are used extensively in this study. In this study black is used to mean people of African and African Caribbean origin. The term does not include Southern Asians or people of mixed parentage. White is used to denote white people of European descent.
- Although this author is aware that **race** is a social construct and therefore to talk about racial differences between black and white people is to imply that such differences exist. Whilst clearly the term itself is biologically incorrect, since there is only one human race, and although there is variation within the species, there are as much variations within the black and white groups as there are between the two groups. However despite the inaccurate usage of the term it is still widely used and understood by people at large.
- The terms **significant others and strangers** is used widely in this study but they are used in a modified way to the usual usage. Although the term 'significant others', in its sociological sense, tends to refer to people in society, including people who are both close and distant, however in this study the term 'significant others' is used to mean those who are close to the respondents, including acquaintances. Conversely 'strangers' is used to mean people who are distant from the respondents.
- The expression '**the look**' is mentioned in relation to how all respondents feel black women react towards their relationship. The look is a disdainful, negative and disapproving gesture.