1

Love and Revolution

Love promises happiness and wholeness. Contemporary marriage suggests that fulfillment of these promises is invaluable and worth sacrifices. With love as a beacon, a couple commits to a constructive and transformative phase of their life, believing that they—and the world—will be better off as a result. They believe they can become better human beings through marriage than they can by remaining single.[1]

Families support this ideology of love so long as their children uphold two conventions in their choice of partners. *Marry within your own race. Marry someone of the opposite sex.* Until quite recently, beloved sons and daughters who defied these rules were rejected and disowned. Fear and hate invaded homes that were previously full of love; racism rendered them loveless.

The pages that follow allow the reader a glimpse of the paths different families have taken through interracial marriage. While hate, fear, and anger are common responses to interracial marriage and have powerful short-term effects, love has proved a formidable opponent. With stealth, persistence, and a few legal twists, love carves a more hopeful path for future race relations through the sacrifices of many who have made and make their commitments to love for better or worse.

Carl, a twenty-year-old visionary and leader, noticed the girl in the crowd, fist stridently punched up through the

air, punctuating the fervor of the political rally. Catherine, twelve or thirteen years old, was with her parents, involved in a political campaign to reform institutions that have divided the world into haves and have-nots. By fate or coincidence, Carl and Catherine would meet several years later, in the 1940s, two young adults working for a mutual cause.

They were an unlikely pair. Catherine was an only and much-loved child. Carl, the youngest of eight children, was placed in foster care at an early age, only to be turned out with the rest of his siblings onto the streets of San Francisco when he was ten. His oldest sister was given $150 by the state of California to feed and house all eight of them.

Catherine's parents had taught her to appreciate persons from all walks of life. Specifically, they taught her not to judge a person by color. Carl's foster mother, in contrast, warned him, "Don't get yourself involved with some white woman. She will only make trouble for you."

Catherine knew stability, consistency, and comfort amidst political turmoil that anchored family life and values. Carl knew the struggle of finding the next meal, working small jobs, moving, and changing schools so many times that it was a miracle he finished high school. That Catherine would graduate was a given. And despite her parents' progressive racial ideology, they unconsciously assumed that she would marry a white man.

They liked Carl, Catherine remembers. They admired him when he was just a guest at the house. But when Catherine announced her intention to marry him, her parents turned their backs on her. It was years before Catherine and her parents were reconciled. Their opposition to her marriage was typical of the era, and their view of interracial marriage was widely held by both black and white Americans. The legal system supported their prejudices; interracial marriage was illegal in 1946 in California. Carl and Catherine took a train to Washington state to formalize their commitment to each other. Even there, however, they were met with threats of physical harm, intimidation, and name calling. They returned home quickly to the safety and support of friends, and spent the rest of their married life as part of a quiet revolution fueled by love.

Fast-forward several decades and the effects of this revolution are strikingly apparent. The Supreme Court's 1967 decision in *Loving v. Virginia*, the result of nearly twenty years of civil rights reform, lifted the ban on interracial marriage nationwide, which has gradually made

a significant difference in people's thinking about race. Just before their fiftieth anniversary, Carl and Catherine renewed their marriage vows in San Francisco, as it was Catherine's wish to be legally married in California. This was the wedding they never had. Living family members came for the ceremony: Carl's brothers, Catherine's mother, and their three children and their families. Several other longtime friends, other married interracial couples, also attended.

Although not intended as a political tool, each interracial marriage helps to change long-held assumptions and social conventions. And as these assumptions gradually change, the ideology of love allows many families to stand strong as their children make a commitment to transform their lives and cross color lines in marriage. Interracial relationships, including interracial marriage, are natural consequences of increased social interaction between races. Familiarity leads people to challenge and eventually break down stereotypes. Love does not always stay within color lines even when people are determined to enforce racial apartheid.

On a beautiful June day in Akron, Ohio, in 1994, thirty-year-old Keith and twenty-nine-year-old Marcia committed themselves to each other before their beaming parents and 250 guests. Their brothers and sisters served as groomsmen and bridesmaids as these two clans vowed to support this couple's commitment to create a life together. Keith, a high school teacher, and Marcia, a bank teller, had met five years earlier at the local community college, where they were taking the same evening class. Marcia comes from a religious black family in a small town in Alabama. Her father owns a cabinet business and her mother had been a housekeeper, when she was younger, for more well-to-do families. Keith was raised in a white family that still celebrates its Irish heritage. His father owns a small appliance store and his mother has helped with various aspects of the business.

Marcia's parents described her as very independent. Initially surprised by her choice of a white husband, they worried that this might make her life harder, but they were able to appreciate Keith, whom they considered a fine young man. They hoped that the marriage would withstand the pressures that still burden interracial couples. Marcia had been married in her early twenties and divorced. Since then, her mother observed, she had matured, and her parents trusted her judgment. Keith possessed the values they had taught her to respect.

Keith's parents, who had met Marcia only once and were also worried about the social consequences of their son's choice, reluctantly gave the couple their blessing. By the time the wedding day arrived, however, Keith's parents sincerely welcomed Marcia into their family.

This country has fixated on black-white intermarriage since the days of slavery.[2] The prohibition on these marriages eliminated black economic competition and black competition for white women. Today, however, racial intermarriages cover a wide spectrum of racial mixing, particularly as the demographics of this country have changed. And, as with earlier patterns of economic motivation and competition for women, as men of Asian, Mexican, and Native American descent were used as laborers and isolated from access to women of their culture, white men began to prohibit mongoloids, Chinese, Filipinos, Hindus, Mexicans, and mulattos from intermarriage with the white population. And although black-white intermarriage still provokes the most hostile response among families, other types of intermarriage can also generate anger, fear, and divisiveness.

A summer wedding in Denver in 1996 was marred by parental disapproval, though friends of Jeff and Joy expressed great love and support. Members of their softball league, coworkers, and high school and college friends attended the wedding. Jeff's father, a second-generation Chinese American, refused to show up for the ceremony; his mother, torn between love for her son and loyalty to her husband, reluctantly attended. Jeff tried to persuade his mother to open her heart to Joy; he assured her that Joy was everything she wanted in a daughter-in-law—except Chinese. He reminded his mother that a Chinese American wife was no guarantee of cultural continuity and that his last Chinese girlfriend had not even liked rice.

Joy's Midwestern parents invoked the racial yardstick, telling her that she could have done better. Although they came to the wedding, their attendance had been in doubt until the last minute. Joy and Jeff had even considered eloping to avoid the tense, embarrassing scenes they envisioned. With the encouragement of friends, and after much strategizing, they decided to go forward with a public ceremony. They welcomed both sets of parents, but asked that they not attend if they planned to object publicly to the marriage or otherwise embarrass them. Joy arranged for a friend to give her away in case her father refused this ceremonial privilege.

Joy is a physical therapist and Jeff a nurse; they had met at work at the clinic. Joy's parents had always wanted her to "marry up," perhaps to a doctor; given Jeff's race and profession, her parents saw Joy's marriage as "marrying down." Since Jeff was their only son, Joy represented for his parents an end to the cultural line. They told him bluntly that he was contaminating their Chinese blood. They saw Jeff's decision to marry a non-Chinese as a personal affront and a disavowal of pride in his cultural heritage.

Joy and Jeff were in their early thirties when they married. Both had worked for years and had saved money. Able to finance their own wedding and support themselves, they were not dependent on parental approval in the way that earlier generations or younger couples might have been.

Another interracial couple, Linda and Charles, developed a friendship while attending the local community college. In spite of the usual assumptions that they would marry "among their kind," in 1993 twenty-three-year-old Linda and twenty-five-year-old Charles married in a quiet ceremony in Madison, Wisconsin, attended only by their immediate families and followed by a garden reception for friends and extended family. They and their parents and grandparents received their guests graciously and happily.

Charles had never considered marriage with a white woman desirable or even possible. In fact, as one of the student leaders of the Black Student Association on campus, he was accused of "selling out" and "dissing his black sisters" when he began dating Linda. Linda had never imagined marrying a black man either. In childhood fantasies enacted with her girlfriends, Prince Charming was always white.

Because of their families' initial opposition to their marriage, Charles and Linda were both practical and patient in introducing each other to their respective families. Linda's family, while acknowledging that Charles was a "great young man" so long as he was just a friend, opposed the engagement on the familiar grounds that "Marriage is hard enough; why make it more difficult?" "How will you raise children?" they asked. "You don't have enough life experience to know the difference between infatuation and love." Charles's family made fun of Linda's habits and naïveté about race, but they eventually accepted her. His sisters and aunts questioned his motives repeatedly, and one sister told him, "You insult me and all black sisters" and "You know, she's gonna use you

up and leave you broke." After three years of dating and socializing with each family, they decided to go forward with marriage over these objections. When Linda's parents saw that they could not change her mind, they did "a 180-degree turn" and welcomed Charles into the family. She concludes they were testing the conviction of her love for Charles. Charles's family slowly warmed to Linda, though one sister still refuses to be in the same room with her when they visit. Linda has learned not to make this her problem. She realizes that she cannot make Charles's sister accept her and has resolved not to waste her time trying.

The stories go on and on. Black men with white women, Asian women with white men, white men with Indian women, Chicana women with white men. And, increasingly, black women with white men, Asian men with white women, black men with Asian women. Love alone motivated these women and men to cross the color line, despite a lifetime of cultural indoctrination. None of these or any of the other couples I interviewed entered into their marriage for the purpose of making a political or social statement. As a result of the hatred and fear they encountered, however, most of them developed a political outlook of mindful action and responsible reaction that became another means, along with their love, of withstanding the assaults of bigotry, fear, hate, and misunderstanding. These women and men have been the scouts on the front lines of a quiet revolution.

Trends in Interracial Marriage

Interracial marriage has grown at least 500 percent since 1970. Numerically, black-white intermarriages represent the greatest number of relationships, while the largest proportion of intermarriage occurs across various Asian American communities, where rates can be higher than 50 percent in some cities.[3] White people, however, intermarry in the greatest numbers. This fact does not escape the attention of white supremacist groups, who distribute hate-filled literature warning that intermarriage will be the end of the white race.

Historically, rates of intermarriage of whites with American Indians and persons of Mexican descent have been high but have met with less opposition and generated less legislation than white marriages to African and Asian Americans. The likely explanation is that American

Indians and persons of Mexican descent have been intermixed with the white population for more generations than have other groups. The longer history of intermixing has resulted in some light-skinned members of both these populations, which makes them less threatening to many whites. The phenotype of a person of Mexican or American Indian descent is apt to be more similar to that of a white person than is the phenotype of a person of Asian or African descent—and the children of these intermarriages are more likely to be phenotypically indistinguishable from the white population.

Intermarriage tends to be more acceptable—and has certainly become an established fact of life with each succeeding generation—within ethnic and racial minority communities, though it is not always welcome there. Historically, a general pattern has prevailed with all immigrant groups to the United States. The first generation has a very low rate of intermarriage. Second-generation immigrants are a bridge generation between the American and native cultures. They are still affected by certain cultural values and imperatives that may set them apart from their mainstream peers. Their children, however, the third generation, fluent in English and American popular culture, share much in common with their peers of the same socioeconomic standing. Several researchers have noted that intermarriage becomes significant by the third generation following immigration.[4]

Although Hawaii has the most intermarriage proportionally, five states account for the largest numbers of intermarriages: California, Florida, Oklahoma, Texas, and Washington.[5] With the exception of Washington, these states historically had anti-miscegenation laws that specifically outlawed black-white intermarriage.[6] California also forbade white and Asian (Mongolian) marriage. California, Florida, and Texas declared such marriages void. Florida, Oklahoma, and Texas had severe penalties for violating the anti-miscegenation laws, including a two-year prison term. Much has changed since the repeal of those laws more than thirty years ago.

The particular configurations of interracial marriage vary by state and region. In California, where more than a quarter of all interracial couples live, all mixtures are present.[7] With the numerically largest Asian American population in the United States, California is home to the largest proportion of interracial marriages involving Asian Amer-

icans. In Oklahoma, most intermarriages occur between American Indians and whites. In Texas, black-white and Chicano/Latino-white intermarriages prevail.

Appendix A provides a detailed discussion of intermarriage trends since 1960. For the purposes of this overview, a few summary statements will suffice. The civil rights movement prompted the repeal of anti-miscegenation laws and promoted greater social interaction among people of all races. Interracial dating became increasingly common and, once the legal barriers toppled, so did interracial marriage. Between 1960 and 1970 the number and rate of interracial marriages doubled; between 1970 and 1980 they tripled. After 1970 black men married white women in unprecedented numbers, reversing the pattern of black-white marriages.[8] By the 1980s Asia had become a more common source of foreign spouses than Europe; Mexico and the Philippines became the leading countries of origin for foreign spouses.[9] Even if interracial marriages represented less than 1.5% of all marriages, these rapid changes were significant and would continue into the 1990s.

Broad trends since 1960 can be summarized as follows:

1. Women (except for black women) intermarry more than their male counterparts;
2. Later generations have higher rates of intermarriage than the first generation;
3. High rates of intermarriage, as in the Hispanic and American Indian populations, yield more similar rates of intermarriage for women and men;
4. Later age of marriage is associated with intermarriage;
5. Uneven sex ratios influence patterns of intermarriage;
6. Similar size groups of different races and ethnicities in proximity are associated with intermarriage for younger persons, at least in Hawaii, California, and Arizona;
7. When first marriages for black partners are separated from all marriages for black partners, there is a significant trend toward substantially increasing rates of interracial marriage;
8. Variables influencing intermarriage differ by racial and ethnic group; and
9. Younger age is associated with greater acceptance of racial intermarriage.

Increasing rates of intermarriage with each generation and changing patterns of interracial marriage support the observation that we are in the midst of a quiet revolution. It started decades ago. Consider Debbie, who blends into the forty-something crowd in New York state. She is an ordinary middle-class white woman living an ordinary middle-class life. She has a loving husband, children, and family and can boast being married for twenty years, longer than many of her friends. The first phase of her marriage, however, challenged her family's intellectual and emotional values. Her marriage changed the way in which they experienced race in this country. They acquired black kin: a son-in-law and then grandchildren. She related her mother's reaction to her announcement that she was going to marry a black man:

> I know one of the things for my mom is how other people are going to view her. So I kinda felt for her, in that sense, when I heard her say, you know, "How am I gonna address what other people have to say to me?" She felt so much pressure on her. And in addition, you know, how's the child going to relate to the world? That concept. And then the other piece that she said to me was, she literally said, "We've grown up ten miles outside of New York, in a very white suburb that if it had a black family in there, it was because I think someone had come up and lived with the guidance counselor's family from the South," and went all through high school with us, and so that was, like, it. And then across the river from us, was Patterson, New Jersey, which in the sixties was going through riots, and so when, around the time when we were getting married, and maybe in the same conversation, my mother literally said to me, "You mean, you are actually acting on the values that we gave you?" because they espoused very liberal values. Of course I was acting on those values. I believed them. And she was like, "You really, really believe all this?" From my mom! And yes, I believed them!

Some very real structural changes imposed by legislation have allowed for increased opportunities to develop friendships, love relationships, and ultimately commitments to marriage between people of different races. Mariel, a twenty-four-year-old Chicana raised in a suburb of Los Angeles, reflected on what influenced her decision to marry her black husband:

> I was really active in La Raza [literally, the struggle, the Chicano movement] and feel committed to my people, so I always thought I would marry a Chicano guy. I love my older brothers and even thought

> I would marry one of their friends. When I went away to college at Berkeley I was just exposed to so many people. My political ideals didn't change. But I met my husband in my second year. He was very supportive of my commitments. We just started doing things together, studying, talking, going to parties. He fit in well with my friends and I liked his friends. It was like we would go to parties and there were all sorts of people there and I'd find I always had more in common with him than with just about anyone in a room. We had really good talks. And music. We both loved music and movies. So one thing led to another. I tried to talk myself out of my feelings for him, thinking I should just keep it as good friends, but then I thought, "Shouldn't the man I marry be my best friend?" My family liked him. I mean, like, if my brothers didn't like him, this would have been real hard. They have a lot of influence on me even though I make up my own mind. We talked a lot about what it meant to marry someone different than your own cultural background. But I realized I didn't have to give up my commitment to my people. We believed in the same issues. Now it might have been different if he was white. I'm not sure how that would have gone over.

Mariel explained her attraction in terms of romantic theories of love. The man she married should be her best friend. They shared much in common; there were no significant objections from her family; and they had time to get to know each other away from the watchful eye of their families. She also grew up in an area of the country where interracial and interethnic interaction is common.

What people often fail to ask is why intermarriage rates have been so low for certain groups. Certain established demographic factors predict that intermarriage should occur at a faster pace than has actually been the case in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Imbalanced sex ratios,[10] the small numbers of racial minorities in some communities and in the nation at large,[11] and the age composition should have guaranteed a quicker mix even despite in-group prohibitions on intermarriage.[12] But the caste connotations of race, particularly of blackness, slowed intermarriage trends. Across all groups, colorism makes darker skin a barrier to consideration of potential partners.

Despite some contemporary objections to Asian-white marriages, these marriages do not tend to provoke the same degree of antagonistic or fearful response that black-white relationships do. Nevertheless, Asian Americans were seen as similar to African Americans in being less desirable partners in a recent twenty-one-city survey of whites,

blacks, and Latinos on the subject of openness to racial intermarriage.[13] Although it has taken approximately a century, Asian Americans seem to be moving from a group representing a caste to a group with class mobility. Racialized gender stereotypes of Asian American women weigh heavily in this transformation. Asian American women have been stereotyped as more traditionally feminine—more sacrificing, obedient, and domestic—even in the 1990s.[14] They also have been perceived as small and petite, one criterion of attractiveness by white male American standards. In contrast, while Asian American men might be stereotyped as highly intelligent or as good wage earners, stereotypes have emasculated them, removing them from competition with white men. Their attractiveness might be compromised by height and build, generally associated with masculine attractiveness. On average, white and black men are taller than Asian men, a physical feature that connotes status, power, and physical attractiveness.[15] In addition, whereas Asian American women have slowly achieved a presence in video media, Asian American men in media roles are few and far between. The high rates of intermarriage for Asian American women with white men have made Asian Americans acceptable partners in some situations. White male involvement in this transformation has been critical; their privilege had facilitated a subtle change in Asianness from a caste to a class. The same change has occurred with Latino and Indian women, but not with black women—blackness still has caste connotations.

The concepts of structural and dyadic power, which refer to the similarity in status between two people and between groups in a community, help make sense of the demographics and of how Debbie's marriage—and others like hers—take place. The structural power constructed by whiteness and maleness has ironically given rise to several of the patterns we see now. Black women have been rendered less desirable by both race and gender and are thus partnered in intermarriages proportionately less than any other group. As a group, they have historically been opposed to intermarriage, particularly when compared to white women and both white and black men.[16] Thus, when a black woman suggests that "white women are out to get any man they can" or "are trying to take all the good black men," her statements reflect a demographic fact. White women are not to blame, however; the construction of whiteness and its control by white men are responsible. While white women are second-class citizens by gender, ironically they have more

room to search for other partners. The construction of whiteness, designed to provide white males advantages over everyone else, has backfired. White women are not that distant in power from men of color and thus can be expected to participate significantly in intermarriage. Moreover, male privilege still yields much structural power. Combined with institutional racism, which leaves fewer black men available for intermarriage—as we will see in Chapter 3, male privilege accounts for black men's ability to intermarry much more freely than black women can. Men are still in the position of choosing and women in the position of hoping to be chosen. If there were fewer black women, their mate choices would probably be more effectively guarded by black men. If black women are now marrying more frequently across racial lines, another surge in black female intermarriage will probably be revealed by the 2000 census.

Because they are already high, rates of intermarriage for women (except black women) and for Latino and American Indian groups are likely to stabilize. If families continue to produce more children who question race and gender stereotypes and who truly believe in the equality of all people, the structural barriers to interracial marriage will be further eroded. The grip of male power and white privilege on mainstream American culture will continue to weaken.

How we teach our children to think critically about equality, and to strive for it not only in thought but in deed, will make a difference in the world they pass on to their children. I am hopeful that the generation now coming of age will achieve more equity in relationships by gender, race, and sexual orientation than has any previous generation. I am confident that this nation will witness a noticeable increase in interracial marriage for white men, black women, and Asian American men. Intermarriage has ripple effects that touch many people's lives. It is a symbolic vehicle through which we can talk about race and gender and reexamine our ideas about race.

But the obstacles of culturally ingrained assumptions and prejudices remain to be overcome. One couple in an interracial marriage summed up both the difficulties and the hope when I first discussed this project with them years ago. In the privacy of their own homes, among friends, they relate to each other as people. They negotiate on chores, enjoy time with each other, pay bills, dream of a bigger house and a better life. They have their differences, but they treat each other with respect

through it all, trying to be aware of differences in their personalities and backgrounds that stem from class values, regional culture, family culture, and gender differences. But when they go out into the world, even if only to run an errand on a Saturday afternoon, they are jolted back to reality by the taunts of neighbor children chanting "jungle fever, jungle fever, they've got jungle fever." Under ten years of age, these children, some black and some white, are already policing their interracial union. These children cannot possibly comprehend the depth of meaning and history that this taunt communicates. Living in an integrated neighborhood, who will these children date? Who will be their partners twenty years from now?

Though interracial marriage has expanded and taken on new meanings over the decades, mixed and hostile attitudes, held most pervasively by whites, still exist, especially toward black-white intermarriage. Many white people remain unaware that blacks also have mixed, hostile, and suspicious attitudes toward whites, based on centuries of a reign of terror simply because of the invention of their race.[17] A potent and parallel prejudice exists within many Asian American communities toward interracial marriage, particularly when the pairing is with a black partner.[18] Extreme hostile attitudes are less common but exist within all groups to some degree. Wednesday morning, July 8, 1998, provides me an extreme reminder. It is just past 6:00 A.M. and the clock radio gently nudges me to consciousness. A few minutes later, I am jolted out of my grogginess by the news of a hate crime in Massachusetts. A married couple celebrating their twentieth anniversary at a cookout is attacked, the black husband beaten to death, his white wife widowed. Will the problem of the color line consume the twenty-first century, too?

Research Aims and Methods

I began to formalize the research for this book in 1992. After publishing the first contemporary edited volume on children of interracial marriage, *Racially Mixed People in America*, I had the opportunity to talk with people at community conferences, most of them in California, dedicated to themes of multiracial families and people of mixed heritage.[19] These discussions established the direction of this research and helped clarify the questions I wanted to pursue. Several studies

have documented trends, unique issues, and problems,[20] and additional books by people involved in intermarriages had begun to appear.[21] I wanted to add something to the small but growing body of literature on interracial families. As a psychologist, my interest was in the transformations these relationships catalyze in families, as families are a primary source of socialization on the issue of race. I wanted to explore how interracial relationships reflected changing norms of family, gender roles, and conceptions of race, three issues that I did not think could be separated.[22]

Since 1992 I have completed some six hundred hours of formal conversations and interviews with couples, individuals, and groups representing all regions of the country. All of these interviews were conducted in person by one of the researchers connected with the project.[23]

In the first phase of this research (from 1992 to 1996), I interviewed couples or partners of thirty-five past or present interracial marriages. I asked them to describe how they met; what issues they dealt with at different stages of their relationship; their support systems; how they were received by each other's families and whether the reception of them or their partner would have been different had they been of the other gender; and what they had learned about themselves and race through their relationships. If the marriage had ended, I asked them to explain why they thought it had not survived. Each interview took, cumulatively, between one and eight hours. The last few interviews offered little new information, so I moved on to the next phase of research.

Because I wanted to understand how whole families were affected by these marriages, I needed to interview family members as well as the couples themselves. In 1996 and 1997, I started the Multiracial Families Project at the University of Washington. This second phase of the research involved twenty more individual interviews, each approximately two hours in length, but this time with mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers of persons who were interracially married. None of the interviewees were related. In addition, in 1997 approximately eighty-five people participated in seven focus groups, each two hours in length, in Seattle, Los Angeles, and Madison, Wisconsin. Although these groups were drawn from the local population, they included people from all regions of the country due to the mobility of the U.S. population.[24] The focus groups included interracially married people as well as mothers,

fathers, sisters, and brothers of people who had married across racial lines. The people within each group were not related.[25] No further focus groups or interviews were conducted because new information had ceased to surface.

I did not originally envision the last phase of research, but because of families' concerns about the children of these marriages, enough data was collected to help provide some well-researched reflection on these concerns—from the standpoint of children who grew up in interracial families. I conducted the Biracial Sibling Project under the auspices of the University of Washington from 1997 to 1998. In this study, I recruited two siblings, eighteen years or older, from families who shared the same biological parents, though they might not have been raised together. I sought to represent every possible type of mixed marriage, but the combinations were primarily black-white and white-Asian, with a smaller proportion of black-Asian. More than sixty people aged eighteen to fifty-two completed an average of four hours of interviews through this project. The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that affect identity development. Both family history and phases of development over each person's life span were explored.

Several more hours have been donated by people willing to fill out questionnaires or talk by phone. On many occasions since I began this project, I have been fortunate to have enlightening conversations with taxi drivers, strangers in hotel lobbies, fellow passengers on airplanes. I also participated in two radio call-in shows that took place in Detroit and Washington, D.C., on the subject of interracial marriage. Almost all fifty states are represented by the participants in this study.[26]

Since completing the first draft of this book, I have had time to test my conclusions by presenting them in community settings, conversing with groups composed of members of interracial families, and speaking informally with individuals. I am heartened that the stories and experiences people have shared with me corroborate the findings and conclusions of my research.

My study differs from others on interracial relationships in both method and the type of data collected. Seeking multiple perspectives on interracial relationships—the couples, the extended families, and children of interracial marriages—I recruited people through newspaper ads, newspaper articles, conference workshops, and word of mouth.[27] Personal friends were not included in the formal research.

I did not systematically research the influence of interfaith marriages, although information about religion spontaneously emerged in some of the interviews. The first phase of this study included several interviews with lesbian and gay couples. These interviews were informative in terms of sorting out the construction of race and gender roles, but an analysis of interracial same-sex relationships is not offered in this book.[28]

Approximately 175 families contributed to my research. More women than men participated; of intermarried persons and their relatives, more white persons participated than any other single group, a fact I attributed to two circumstances. First, women tend to volunteer more frequently than men in studies soliciting personal information. Research requests for personal disclosure are still much more consonant with female than with male socialization. Secondly, more white women than any other group of participants had been disowned or traumatized by their family's reactions. For the first two phases of the study, participants ranged in age from the early twenties to the early seventies; for the third phase with biracial siblings the range was eighteen to fifty-two, with an average age in the late twenties. Although the overall sample was influenced primarily by Judeo-Christian perspectives, persons of Baha'is, Buddhist, Islamic, and other faiths were included.[29]

Previous studies on racial intermarriage provide statistical information on education, age, numbers of marriages, trends, and attitudes, while others describe the themes and experiences that engage these couple's lives. My study focuses on understanding family systems, social factors, and the interplay between race and gender. I did not seek information on problems or issues commonly confronting these couples, though of course this information surfaced spontaneously at times. The questions behind this study were, "What enables some families to expand their embrace to include a new member and their family? Why do other families refuse to do this?" At first I approached these questions obliquely, but in the middle stage of the study I posed them directly. "Racism" did not seem an adequate explanation of why some families were unable to embrace the love, hope and commitment that marriage symbolizes; I wanted to go beyond that simplistic answer to examine the motives and values behind it. Nor did I assume that because family members might embrace a racially different newcomer they were free of racial prejudices.

Overview

Marriage engages many psychological processes, challenging everyone involved to share and trust, to give of themselves and make sacrifices for each other. Despite the rise in divorce rates, marriage is still regarded as a long-term commitment. Dating, on the other hand, is driven by curiosity, experimentation, and temporary alliances. Interracial marriage must be regarded very differently than interracial dating because of its permanence and demands on extended families.

Marriage requires the couple's parents to balance a connection to their children with a letting go. They may have to resolve feelings of jealousy and insecurity that arise when their child develops new bonds with his or her in-laws. Marital partners must strike a new balance between dependence and independence.

In my interviews, some participants spoke about how the level of commitment intrinsic to marriage caused anxiety, when families suddenly included relatives of a different race and blood kin of mixed race. Racial differences blind many people to the other ways in which a marriage seems perfectly appropriate—for example, similarities between partners in education, income, and class.[30] For the vast majority, the heterosexual imperative and racial homogamy still prevail over all other considerations.

I wanted to understand how loving families could reject beloved daughters and sons, could even attempt to erase them from the family history, because of their choice of a partner. I was struck by the similarity between stories of rejection when a child chose a racially different partner and rejection when a child announced that he or she was gay or brought home a same-sex partner. Several people spontaneously recounted that parents whose children were late in marrying feared they were gay or lesbian; in these instances the parents were more open to intermarriage, being relieved that their child was heterosexual and seeing intermarriage as the lesser evil.

Both interracial and homosexual relationships have brought about legal consequences or the invocation of religion as a higher moral authority. Both were often dismissed as merely sexual, as a way to undermine their legitimacy and potential for success and happiness.[31] Some couples had to keep their relationship secret in order to maintain family ties. In both types of relationship, individuals of any age were

treated as children and were told that their love was a passing phase, a sign of confusion, or a form of rebellion. Parents who had difficulty accepting their son's or daughter's choice of partner because of race or sexual orientation often blamed themselves or, conversely, saw their child's choice as an attempt to hurt or reject them.[32] Many family members, in their hurt and confusion, became angry; some defensively threatened to withdraw their love in the hope that this would force the child to change his or her mind. All of these reactions are based on a sense of injury to the parents' view of themselves and a feeling that they have been rejected.

A son's or daughter's choice of someone their parents would not have chosen for them does not mean the parents have failed. It simply means that integrated workplaces and social interactions increase the chances for interracial partnerships to form. Thanks to legal reforms, love can now venture into territory previously off limits. The law no longer sanctions irrational opposition, at least not to the degree that it did. Yet racism is still most prevalent and most pronounced when it comes to persons of African descent. Even in these allegedly progressive times, interracial marriages with black partners are still regarded more suspiciously and with more hostility in all communities than other interracial marriages are. The selection of white partners by black men and women is still regarded as an invitation to terrorism; it still evokes the sexual exploitation and rape of black women by white men and the lynching of black men by white mobs supposedly avenging the violation of white women.[33]

Family members may think that the motivation for an interracial marriage is a reprehensible desire to make a political or social statement. While such motives might underlie some dating of any kind, it did not drive *any* of the couples in this study. Although the septuagenarians, Catherine and Carl, introduced at the beginning of this chapter, felt that political inclinations allowed them to make their choice in the 1940s, their intention to marry was about love, not politics. They were among the most "political" of participants in this study, but they felt they could not live without one another.

More often than not, sons and daughters chose interracial partners with characteristics that would otherwise meet with parental approval. Their fiancées or spouses loved them, were willing to make a long-term commitment, were at similar levels of responsibility, and had shared

goals and visions. These things were true of all the couples introduced so far in this study. If a child's partner fulfilled the stereotypical gender expectations that parents had, this helped soften the blow of the partner's racial difference. This meant daughters-in-law who were loving, able to put family needs before their own, even willing to sacrifice their own aspirations for the success of their husbands' careers. And it meant sons-in-law who were responsible, ambitious family men willing to make sacrifices to ensure the happiness and financial security of their wives and children.

The collision between racism and parental hopes and expectations was the subject of the 1967 film, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner.* The only child of wealthy white parents, Joanna (Katherine Houghton) announces her intended engagement to John Prentice (Sidney Poitier), an internationally renowned physician active in humanitarian causes in impoverished areas. Sophisticated, worldly, and sensitive to their daughter's needs and naïveté, Prentice ought to be a dream come true as a son-in-law. In fact, however, his race unmasks the prejudices deeply imbued in Joanna's progressive white parents. Prentice's own parents are also prejudiced, but for different reasons, and Prentice tries to give them the news of his engagement without immediately revealing the race of his fiancée.

As in the film, otherwise loving, supportive parents may suddenly become irrational, cold-hearted, punitive authoritarians, quick to accuse their children of poor judgment. This dramatic change in behavior added significant tension—and necessitated significant strategizing—to the wedding plans of Jeff, the Chinese American, and Joy, the white Midwesterner. Such behavior emerges as the parent grieves over some perceived loss. Reasoning, begging, and soul searching ("What did I do wrong?") fail to resolve the tension because the negative reaction stems from social stereotypes of irreconcilable racial differences.

When parents grieve, what exactly do they perceive they have lost? The loss may appear imaginary to an impartial observer, though no less real to parents in despair or humiliation over their son's or daughter's choice. The parents' expectation of their children's happiness, fairy-tale marriage, happy family vacations together, proud boasts to friends of their daughter- or son-in-law are suddenly swept away. The cultural construction of race creates and fuels fears that lead to parents' grief over the imagined loss of social status and social mobility for

themselves and their children. Their cultural beliefs tell them that interracial relationships bring tragedy, violence, grief, and heartache. These themes permeate popular culture, especially mainstream motion pictures made for white audiences—for example, *Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Pinky* (1949), *Show Boat* (1951), *Sayonara* (1957), *South Pacific* (1958), *Imitation of Life* (1959), *West Side Story* (1961), *Jungle Fever* (1991), *Zebrahead* (1992), *Mississippi Masala* (1992), and *Heaven and Earth* (1993), to name only a few. Portrayals of human intolerance and prejudice, films like these, geared to white audiences, foster propaganda that interracial romance is dangerous and doomed to tragedy.

At the same time, such films are less critical than they might be of the harassment, violence, and prejudice directed at interracial couples. Interestingly, a more positive look at interracial love can be found in movies featuring same-sex romance, for example, *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love* (1995) and *The Wedding Banquet* (1993).

For families of color who actively participate in ethnic communities and maintain cultural traditions, anticipated grief may be complicated by worries that intermarriage will dilute cultural tradition and "purity," as Jeff's parents feared. Parents fear that their daughters and sons will become strangers to them, at the least, or will turn against them and their culture, at worst. *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) is the gay interracial analogue to *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner.* A beloved Chinese American son plans to introduce his white American partner to his parents. The son first introduces the partner as a friend, which allows the parents to assess him as a person. He prepares an elaborate Chinese meal, speaks some Chinese, and is an attentive, respectful host—everything parents could want in a son-in-law. With his appreciation of Chinese culture, his respect for his partner's parents, he is perfect in every way, except, of course, gender and race. A complex set of maneuvers designed to hide his homosexuality is eventually foiled. The parents move through their shock and grief that their son is gay, and before long, like the parents in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, they are able to realize that their son has chosen someone who has the qualities they value.

Parents' grief over the race of their child's partner seems to be grief more for what they themselves have lost than for their child. Resolving that grief means that they must reconcile their disappointed hopes with a reality they did not anticipate. They must be able to accept their child's autonomy. They must also honestly face the fact that they grieve not