TOWARDS A DIALOGIC UNDERSTANDING OF PRINT MEDIA STORIES ABOUT BLACK/WHITE INTERRACIAL FAMILIES

by

VICTOR KULKOSKY

(Under the Direction of Dwight E. Brooks)

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines print media news stories about Black/White interracial families from 1990-2003. Using the concept of dialogism, I conduct a textual analysis of selected newspaper and news magazine stories to examine the dialogic interaction between dominant and resistant discourses of racial identity. My findings suggest that a multiracial identity project can be seen emerging in print media stories about interracial families, but the degree to which this project is visible depends on each journalist’s placement of individual voices and discourses within the narrative of each story. I find some evidence of a move from placing interracial families within narratives of conflict toward a more optimistic view of such families’ position in society.

INDEX WORDS: Interracial marriage, Multiracial identity, Multiracial families, Race relations, Dialogism, Bakhtin, Media discourse, Newspapers, African American media, Interracial sexuality, Baha’i Faith
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Terri Lenisa Earl-Kulkosky, my son, Gregory Badi Earl-Kulkosky, and my niece, Alyson Simone Nicole Allen. Together, our little multiracial household journeys back and forth across the color line with as little tripping as we can manage. This project is also dedicated to all those interracial families, united in love and confused in racism, in the hopes that my work will, however slightly, alleviate the damage as they trip over the color line.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Isaac Newton, or someone else, at one time said something like, “If I have seen further than others, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants.” The people I wish to acknowledge may not be giants, and I have merely used their shoulders from time to time as leverage to hop up and glimpse a little further than I might have without their help, but many thanks are due in any case. Dr. Dwight Brooks has been a tireless and patient guide through the many stages of this project. His enthusiasm for this project has at times exceeded my own, and his support and advice have been invaluable. Dr. Carolina Acosta-Alzuru has been a role model, unacknowledged until now, who demonstrated that it is possible to have a family and be a graduate student at the same time (though it has seemed impossible at times). Her interest in Bakhtin has helped me believe I am onto something worthwhile. Dr. Ruth Ann Lariscy deserves thanks for teaching the first course I took at Grady College and providing a positive beginning to my graduate studies. It was in Public Opinion that the ideas for this thesis germinated, and her continued interest in my work is much appreciated. Thanks also go out to Dr. Louise Benjamin, who taught Historical Methods, through which I explored the work of William Lloyd Garrison. Thanks also go to Dr. James Hamilton and Dr. Horace Newcomb for evaluating my reviews of their work. I also wish to acknowledge my undergraduate journalism instructors at Fort Valley State University, Dr. Anna Holloway, Dr. John Omachonu, Dan Archer and Justice York, for getting me on track.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Justification and Purpose

“To be means to communicate. Absolute death (nonbeing) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered …” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 287.)

Who is allowed to speak, and with what words? It is possible to write a history of the United States centered on the recovered narratives of those groups and individuals who have suffered the kind of ontological erasure described in the epigraph above. Enslaved people and their freed descendants, Native Americans, women, sexually abused children, and various people deemed sexually deviant have all been silenced with greater or lesser success. Today, White and Black people in intimate relationships, and the multiracial children of those relationships, are speaking out, while at the same time searching for the words with which to speak. Although the situation of 21st Century interracial families pales in comparison to that of enslaved people and Native American survivors of genocide, their fight is intimately intertwined with America’s history of racial oppression. Today’s Black/White interracial families are the descendants of both the oppressors and the oppressed, except now the descendants are united in love. Their struggle to find their voice, which is at the same time a struggle to be heard, is the focus of this thesis. In particular, I will explore the relationship between people in Black/White interracial families and an institution that plays a major role in legitimizing the voices of those who wish to be heard: newspapers and other print news media. A strong impetus
for this project is my finding that critical media scholars have done little work that
directly addresses questions of the relationship between interracial/multiracial identity
and the media, as well as little work employing dialogism.

I will ask, and begin to answer, three research questions:

1. What is the role of print media in the multiracial identity project?

2. What contributions can dialogism make to deeper understanding of the
complex relationships between interracial/multiracial families, their identity project(s)
and print media?

3. How might this deeper understanding offer possibilities for dismantling the
dominant racial order and constructing a new, democratic and non-hierarchical racial
order?

In addition to addressing the above questions, this thesis will explore a few
interlocking themes. (The various terms I have introduced will be explained below).
One theme is interracial/multiracial families’ quest for a public voice, on their own terms.
A second theme is the sexual subtext beneath the competing narratives of Black/White
interracial relationships. A third theme is racial formation, racial projects and
contemporary multiracial projects. The fourth theme is the interlaced trio of dialogism,
media and identity.

**Multiracial People’s Quest for Voice**

People in interracial/multiracial families are engaged in a struggle to find their
voice. More accurately, they are trying to establish both an inner voice, to talk about
themselves to themselves; and a public voice, to tell their stories to anyone who will
listen. Dalmage (2000, p. 20) describes the search for the inner multiracial voice:
“Because they do not quite fit into the historically created, officially named, and socially recognized categories, members of multiracial families are constantly fighting to identify themselves for themselves. A difficulty they face is the lack of language available to address their experiences.” This story is my story. I am White (Lithuanian, German, Irish, born in New Jersey, raised in New York City) and married to a Black woman (African, English, Cherokee, born and raised in Georgia). We have a son (born and raised in other parts of Georgia). My wife has a “white looking” half sister, who has seven nieces and nephews, some of whom add Dutch to the family tree. Finding answers to the question, “What are we?” is a family affair. Answering the question “What are you?” is a public matter.

 Yanow (2003, p. 193), describes the simultaneous search for the public voice: “Individuals who cannot find their identity in available categories become invisible, in a sense: without a label, without a vocabulary, their stories are untellable and they themselves are unnarratable.” While Dalmage (2000) writes of the lived experience of multiracial families, Yanow (2003) writes of the complex, contradictory, and often irrational interactions between individuals, groups and the machinery of government policy making. Because of the state’s historical and continuing role in racial politics, Americans often address government in narratives that begin, “I am a (fill in the blank) American,” but the federal government only makes available some categories of hyphenated-American for people to use in telling their stories (Yanow, 2003). “Being unable to do so calls into question one’s membership in American society,” (Yanow, 2003, p. 194). The unsuccessful attempt to place a “multiracial” category in the 2000 U.S. Census was, Yanow (2003) asserts, just such a contested claim for membership.
(Not all people in multiracial families support the “multiracial” Census category. That debate will be discussed in Chapter 4.)

The Subtext of Interracial Sex

Sexuality has actually retreated from mainstream news stories about interracial/multiracial families, but the mixture of fear of, fascination with and attempts to control interracial sex are as old as America (Bell, 1980; Fowler, 1963/1987; Kennedy, 2003; Spickard, 1989; Wallenstein, 2002). Today, only White supremacists openly condemn sex between White and Black people and the resulting children (Ferber, 1998). Ferber (1998) cautions that by marginalizing White supremacists and their rhetoric against “mongrelization,” mainstream America displaces its still potent anxieties about interracial sex. Interracial sex certainly fills movie theaters. *Monster’s Ball, Mission Impossible 2, and Die Another Day*, the latest installment of the James Bond series, all featured White men with Black women. (The “Black” women in these movies were played by multiracial actresses Halle Berry and Thandie Newton; the sexual mythology around biracial women is explored, for instance, in Bost [2000]).

Racial Formation, Racial Projects and Multiracial Projects

Omi and Winant (1994) provide a clear and useful account of the historical development of the concept of race in the United States. Race in America has not always meant the same things, and, as Omi and Winant (1994) demonstrate, the meaning of race has been and continues to be hotly contested. Even as dominant Whites have tried to fix race into essentialist categories, those categories have in fact been built up and torn down many times, through what Omi and Winant (1994) call *racial projects*. Daniel (2002) has
taken Omi and Winant’s work and developed it further to describe *multiracial projects*. I will elaborate on racial formation and multiracial formation in Chapter 3.

**Dialogism, Print Media and Identity**


The work of Medvedev, who wrote books on Freudianism and the Russian Formalist school of literary criticism, does not play a role in this thesis. Dialogism has influenced various fields including literary studies, speech communication and education, and has also found a following among some scholars in African American studies, feminism, family therapy and, to some extent, cultural studies. Dialogism has only occasionally been applied to critical media studies. That small body of work will be the focus of Chapter 2.

Bakhtin’s dialogism is difficult to summarize, but for the moment I will say that dialogism offers a dynamic, interactive and highly contextual view of language, examined in the unstable environment of its everyday use. We find a hint of the democratic and ethical dimensions of dialogism in these words of Bakhtin (1981a, p. 292): “Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another *I* with equal rights (*thou*).” Dialogism, by implication, *affirms* the existence outside itself of another
consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities. The degree to which print media, White people and Black people either deny or affirm multiracial people’s “equal rights and equal responsibilities,” is a central issue of this thesis.

A Few Highlights in the History of Interracial Sex

Interracial sex has troubled America since early Colonial times, as suggested in this 1638 Virginia court record announcing that a man named Hugh Davis was to be publicly whipped, “for abusing himself to the dishonor of God and the shame of Christians, by defiling his body in lying with a Negro,” (Spickard, 1989. p. 238; Fowler 1963/1987, p. 33). In 1691, Virginia passed a law banishing from the colony any whites, Indians or mulattoes responsible for, “that abominable mixture and spurious issue which hereafter may encrease [sic] in this dominion,” (Zabel, 2000, p. 56; Fowler, 1963/1987, p. 44). Laws against interracial marriage existed in most states well into the 20th Century. The 1948 California Supreme Court decision in Perez v. Sharp began the downfall of laws regulating interracial sex, which continued with the 1965 U.S. Supreme Court decision McLaughlin v. Florida, which struck down laws that allowed stiffer penalties for White/Black cohabitation; and culminated in 1967 with Loving v. Virginia, in which the U.S. Supreme Court nullified Virginia’s anti-miscegenation law and invalidated all state laws against interracial marriage, although further court battles over the next few years were required to enforce the court’s decision (Bell, 1980; Kennedy, 2003; Wallenstein, 2002).

Battles around interracial marriage raged outside the courts as well. There were voices throughout American history that supported interracial marriage and questioned the nation’s dominant ideology. Nash (1999, p. 22) offers these quotes from Herman
Melville, written around the middle of the 19th Century: “You cannot spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world,” and “What are you? What am I? Nobody knows who anybody is.”

Radical abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison wrote this visionary statement in 1831: “If he has ‘made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth,’ then they are one species, and stand on a perfect equality: their intermarriage is neither unnatural nor repugnant to nature, but obviously proper and salutary,” and indeed, as democracy, education and Christianity spread, everyone would intermarry and, “... the earth is evidently to become one neighborhood or family,” (quoted in Ruchames, 1955, pp. 253-254, italics added).

Garrison fought a 12-year battle in the pages of his abolitionist newspaper The Liberator, in support of repealing Massachusetts’ ban against interracial marriage (Ruchames, 1955; Fowler, 1963/19887). He also attacked New York City’s newspaper editors, who returned the favor, in a weeks-long exchange surrounding the July 1834 riots in New York, which began in response to integrated abolitionist meetings and miscegenation rumors fanned with the help of the newspaper editors themselves (Harris, 1999).

Diverse voices spoke on the intermarriage issue. W.E.B. Du Bois argued that laws against interracial marriage were degrading on principal and that self-respecting Black men demanded repeal of the laws, though without interest in actually marrying anybody White (Spickard, 1989). Du Bois pointed out that White men, as they conquered and exploited around the world, had done most of the race mixing by force (Spickard, 1989). Marcus Garvey, head of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, had a different opinion, declaring in 1924 that his organization was, “against miscegenation and race suicide,” (Spickard, 1989, p. 300). The most extreme White
views against interracial marriage can be found in such books as “The Negro a Beast,” an early 20th Century work by Charles Carroll, who declared Blacks to be the Anti-Christ, mating with anyone they could seduce in order to take over the world; Carroll even stated that Christ would not have had to die on the cross if not for interracial mixing (Spickard, 1989).

The motivation behind White America’s long campaign to keep Black and White people out of each other’s nuptial beds can be expressed at the simplest level or at deeper levels. At the simplest level, Whites forbade interracial marriage, as distinct from interracial sex, to maintain the racial caste system that kept Whites at the top, with all the desired power, wealth and privileges; and Blacks at the bottom (with others groups closer to the bottom than the top), with the least power, wealth and privileges (Fowler, 1963/1987). On a deeper level, sociologist Gunnar Myrdal, in his 1944 book An America Dilemma, put prevention of interracial sex and marriage at the top of White priorities and the right to intermarry at the bottom of the list of Black priorities (Spickard, 1989). Whites were less interested in preventing social and legal equality, relative to preventing intermarriage, according to Myrdal’s findings, while Blacks were more interested in social and legal equality, relative to winning the right to intermarry (Bell, 1980). Black sociologist Oliver Cox rejected Myrdal’s findings and insisted that barriers to interracial marriage were part of White men’s desire to economically exploit Black people (Bell, 1980). Others replaced economic motivations with psychology.

Calvin Hernton argued in 1965 that Black men and White women were sexually attracted to each other due to their common condition of oppression by White men (Bell, 1980). In Black Rage, Grier and Cobbs explained the sexual attraction between both
genders and races through the complicated psychology of Oedipal fantasies, sexuality and power (Bell, 1980). While I have no doubt that race, gender, sexuality and power are intertwined in a sadomasochistic social, economic and cultural embrace, I find the analyses just summarized unbearably pessimistic, cynical and, most importantly, outdated.

Whatever the sordid history of past interracial sexual relations, contemporary conditions are very different. Root (2003) points out that major psychological and demographic changes have taken place in the 36 years since Loving v. Virginia. Those who have come of age in recent decades live in an age when social definitions of race are displacing biological definitions, when the human genome project has proven that there are no race genes, and civil rights legislation has weakened at least formal segregation and discrimination (Root, 2003). The present crop of first-generation multiracial people has not been born of rape, war or slavery and they can watch their peers in the media (Root, 2003). Today’s multiracial people are not interested in forming a new layer in a racialized hierarchy, but are refusing “to continue with the racial rules as generations of us have learned,” (Root, 2003, p. 4). Root (2003) references a scene in Senna’s 1998 novel Caucasia, in which the Black father of Birdie, the biracial protagonist, explains that “mulattos” were like the canaries once used to warn of danger in coal mines. If a canary died, that meant coal gas was present. Birdie’s father suggests that her generation (the fictional Birdie was born in 1967, the year of Loving) is the first generation of canaries to survive, albeit injured (Root, 2003).

Two generations have now been breathing poisoned, but not fatal air. A major metropolitan area on a smog alert day may be the right comparison. Root (2003, p. 5)
argues that ingrained discourses of racial essentialism mean, “Many people have a hard
time believing that someone can belong in several categories simultaneously.” While
children have no problem seeing how a ball can be red and blue at the same time, and
artists don’t trip over the fact that red and blue combine to make purple, many people
can’t make this conceptual leap with race (Root, 2003). “Not only do we have a hard
time doing this, but we have a hard time believing it can be done. At more of an extreme,
some people refuse to try,” (Root, 2003, p. 5). To search for the source of the poison gas
in the coal mine, some critical scholars employ the ideas of cultural studies.

**Cultural Studies**

I place myself within this broad, contentious (shall we say fratricidal?) camp
called cultural studies. In the broadest sense, Couldry (2000, p. 1) suggests, “cultural
studies is an expanding space for sustained, rigorous and self-reflexive empirical research
into the massive, power-laden complexity of contemporary culture.” Cultural studies is,
maybe, not exactly a discipline (although Couldry [2000] makes his own case that it
should be) that borrows freely from other disciplines including anthropology,
psychology, linguistics literary criticism, art theory, musicology, history, philosophy and
political science (Zardar & Van Loon, 1997). This theoretical and methodological
promiscuity leaves room for newcomers to bring in their own favorites, such as
dialogism. Cultural studies does not limit itself to the study of “Culture,” in the sense of
elite works of art (Da Vinci, Beethoven, Dante, etc.), but examines diverse meaning
making activities, including popular culture, entertainment, media, and lifestyles with the
same kind of intellectual depth long applied to studying the *Mona Lisa*, Beethoven’s
Fifth, or *The Divine Comedy*. Cultural studies strives to keep culture within a social and
political context, and has as overriding goals the critique and transformation of existing
dominant social orders, industrial capitalism in particular (Zardar & Van Zoon, 1997).

Such commitments mean to some that cultural studies thrives in a state of
permanent, or at least periodic, crisis. In a paper read at the (quite contentious) founding
praised Stuart Hall’s refusal, at a conference in 1986, to be “crowned” as something like
“the king of cultural studies.” Hall, as Hebdige (2003) explains, “defines the political
moment of cultural studies as the moment not of consolidation, but of challenge and
crisis …when its projected identity and destiny get derailed and re-routed by the
unconsidered remainder – by the attack of the 50-foot woman, for instance, by the
Empire striking back.” Some discussions of cultural studies and its ontological struggles
include the essays in Grossberg’s and Treichler’s edited volume (1992), three several
Studies: Two Paradigms.”

If confronting power is the raison d’être of cultural studies, then out of this
consciousness grow three core issues for the cultural studies researcher: “openness,
complexity and reflexivity,” (Couldry, 2000, p. 4). Openness includes who “does”
cultural studies, what we study, what theories, methods and interdisciplinary resources
we draw upon; complexity, again, means staying conscious of the myriad forces and
voices involved in our studies; and reflexivity means maintaining awareness of both who
and what we study and our own relationships to the materials and people we study. This
reflexivity or self-consciousness means that, “Cultural studies … involves an ethic of
reciprocity, a mutual practice of both speaking and listening, which is inextricably tied to taking seriously the complexity of cultures,” (Couldry, 2000. p. 5).

Couldry’s summary of cultural studies points to why Bakhtin may have been neglected by most cultural studies scholars, and why it may be time to call upon the principle of openness to pay him more attention. Unlike, say, Foucault or the various Marxist-oriented sources of much cultural studies work, Bakhtin addresses power relations only in the abstract, but we must understand his position. Bakhtin lived in the Soviet Union in the darkest days of Stalinism and suffered exile to Kazakhstan in the 1930s. We would not expect a bold confrontation with all-too-powerful – and quite material – forces under such circumstances. Bakhtin’s work does, however, address power relations in an oblique manner, through his concepts of dialogue, monologue, and centripetal and centrifugal forces. In one of his most quoted passages, Bakhtin (1981a, p. 292) asserts: “Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another I with equal rights (thou).” We may associate monologism, or monologue, with those (relatively) more powerful forces of the dominant groups in society, and dialogism, or dialogue, with those who believe “each person’s voice and reflections about power are valuable,” (Couldry, 2000, p. 2).

Couldry (2000) reminds us that culture tends to concentrate, rather than disperse, voices. Bakhtin (1981a, pp. 272-273), writes of “the unifying, centralizing, centripetal forces of verbal-ideological life,” to which are opposed “the centrifugal, stratifying forces,” of everyday life. The fields that attempt to systematize language, such as linguistics, stylistics and philosophy of language, have “made no provision for the
dialogic nature of language, which was a struggle among socio-linguistic points of view,” (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 273). Patricia Yaeger (1991, p. 241) writes, “If our normative language is saturated with the forms and desires of a dominant culture, this saturation is met, day after day, with abrupt counter-languages that scorch with their contrary logic. In tracing the struggle among sociolinguistic points of view, Bakhtin draws our attention to the contestatory violence of everyday speech.” With phrases such as “abrupt counter-languages that scorch with their contrary logic,” and “the contestatory violence of everyday speech,” cultural studies might well find in Bakhtin a source of some revolutionary energy.

Why Media, and Newspapers in Particular, Matter

I work from the assumptions that media do not simply reflect society and culture but shape, and are shaped by, both; and that print media hold a privileged status compared to their competitors television, radio and the Internet. Kellner (1995, p. 5) observes: “Media stories provide the symbols, myths and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture.” To tie Kellner’s statement into Dalgate’s (2001) statement on page 2, we can say that media stories play an indispensable role in establishing the “historically created, officially named, and socially recognized categories,” that complicate multiracial people’s self-definition. The news is a major source of the labels and the vocabulary that Yanow (2003) sees privileging and enabling some personal narratives and inhibiting others. The New York Times’ motto is, “All the news that’s fit to print,” but as a rejoinder, we may ask, “How do you fit people into the news you print?”
Kellner (1995) highlights the *constitutive* role of the media in culture and society, but the news media do not invent symbols, myths and resources; rather, journalists *select* from the materials they encounter in their daily practices. Schudson (1995, p. 54), writes: “News, in a newspaper or on television, has a relationship to the ‘real world,’ not only in the content but in form; that is, in the way the world is incorporated into unquestioned and unnoticed conventions of narration, and then transfigured, no longer a subject for discussion but *a premise of any conversation at all,*” (my italics). One aim of this thesis is to unearth the premises of the print media’s conversation about interracial families.

I have also chosen to focus print media because of my familiarity with print news through 20 years of writing for magazines, newsletters and newspapers. I continue to be more interested in critical study of print media, despite my frequent perception that most critical academic efforts are aimed at visual media. Also, print media, especially urban dailies, are committed to comprehensive coverage that encompasses all other media. Newspapers write about television, radio, books, movies and the Internet, through reviews, features, business news and hard news. Every day, each urban daily – the source of the most of the sample for this study – runs dozens and even hundreds of stories, thus we are likely to encounter news of interracial families in many possible contexts, *including* their treatment in other media, such as happened when the 1999 PBS documentary *An American Love Story* garnered widespread coverage and commentary.

**Explanation of Racial Terms**

Throughout this thesis, I will use the terms Black and White. I use initial capitals on these terms to stress that the words are not adjectives but categories. While I will raise many doubts about the integrity of these categories, they are still, at this point in time and
space, categories held to be concrete by sociocultural forces, not all of them conservative or racist; it is still difficult to think outside these boxes, at least not consistently. I use color terms, rather than more geographic phrases such as African-American or European American, to emphasize the physicality of these racial concepts, which is a sub-text of this project. Omi & Winant (1994) define race as: “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies.” I will elaborate on Omi & Winant’s work in Chapter 3.

*Interracial and multiracial* are terms that often occur together and are sometimes used interchangeably. I find it useful to use *interracial* when discussing relationships, including sexual relationships, between people who self-identify as, and are identified by others as, either White or Black, while acknowledging that these discrete identities can be and are often transformed radically in long-term interracial relationships. As a footnote, a Yahoo Internet search on the word “interracial” yielded a majority of hits linking to pornographic websites. *Multiracial* is a broader term, which I have found often used by and in reference to people or families whose racial and ethnic background includes more than two identifiable groups. The term also is used generically, as in a phrase like “our multiracial society,” or in reference to “the multiracial movement.” I have not found *multiracial* to have any sexual connotations. *Biracial* (sometimes hyphenated) most often refers to people whose parents are from two distinct races. Articles about model/actress Halle Berry (who self-identifies as Black) often discuss her “bi-racial
background.” A worthwhile research project might look into the origins and development of these terms and their use in print media.

**Thesis Plan**

In this introduction, I have laid out my research questions and touched on the main themes and concepts I will discuss in this thesis, as well as provided a very brief historical sketch of interracial marriage. For more on Black/White interracial marriage in history, see: Bair (1999); Bell (1980); Fowler (1963/1987); Harris (1999); a number of essays in Hodes, Ed. (1999); Kennedy (2003); Omi and Winant (1994); Pascoe (1999); essays in Sollors, Ed. (2000); Spickard (1989); Wallenstein (2002); and Zabel (2000).

In Chapter 2, I discuss three articles that more or less thoroughly integrate dialogic themes. Newcomb (1984) lays the theoretical groundwork for dialogic studies of mass communications, while Hamilton (1998) examines the role of newspapers in community formation, and Kraidy (1999, Dec.) studies how some subjects construct hybrid identities through the consumption of diverse media products. Next, I discuss Barker-Plummer’s (1995, Sep.) study of the contrasting media strategies of the National Organization for Women and more radical feminist groups, and the different relationships with mainstream news organizations to which each strategy contributed. I then review critiques of *Time* magazine’s 1993 special issue on multiracialism by Bost (2003) and Streeter (2003). The chapter concludes with some discussion of how scholars of multiracialism study the news media’s coverage of issues of concern to multiracialism. I find that scholars of multiracialism have yet to undertake a sustained in-depth analysis of news media.
In Chapter 3, I begin with a discussion of dialogism as presented by Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle, including the key concepts of *dialogue* and *monologue*, *centrifugal and centripetal forces*, *heteroglossia*, and *authoritative discourse* and *internally persuasive discourse* (Bakhtin, 1981a, 1984; Morson & Emerson, 1990; Gardiner, 1992). After explaining key concepts, I then discuss the differences and similarities between Bakhtin’s use of the terms *discourse* and *ideology* and the use of the same terms in Marxist, Structuralist and Poststructuralist work. I follow this section with a discussion of Bakhtin’s account intersubjectivity. I then discuss Daniel’s (2002) extension of Omi & Winant’s (1994) account of *racial formation* and *racial projects* into *multiracial formation* and *multiracial projects*.

In my method section, I will explain my use of *textual analysis*, with explanations from Shah (1995) and Kellner (1995) on Cultural Studies applications of textual analysis. Next, I offer suggestions on textual analysis using the work of Bakhtin and Voloshinov, as found in Maybin (2001). I follow with some cautionary comments from McKee (2001) on the limits of textual analysis and the need for explaining to readers the researcher’s assumptions and methods. I then discuss some examples of textual analysis. I begin with studies by Brooks and Rada (2002) and Shah (1995) of how media carry out the social construction of race through the hidden ideology of Whiteness. I next discuss Rhodes’ (1999) study of the relationship between print media and the Black Panther Party, which makes limited use of dialogic methods. Next, I review a study by Squires and Brouwer (2002) of a case of racial “passing” as treated in both dominant and marginal media. This is an apparently unique example of a textual analysis of multiracial identity in print media. I conclude this section with a preview of Chapter 4, using my
own analysis of one story about the pending referendum in South Carolina to remove the state’s moot law against interracial marriage from the books.

In the next section, I discuss the methods I used to select representative texts for analysis. I discuss the themes found in my reading, including the difference in style and voice of stories in Black publications. After the themes, I discuss the main questions I asked of each article and how those questions apply to the research questions listed in the Chapter 1.

In Chapter 4, I analyze 19 newspaper and magazine articles spanning 1991 to 2003, following several themes as discussed in Chapter 3. I begin with stories that treat interracial families as a problem, or as having problems. Next, I analyze a story in which members of the Baha’i Faith who are in interracial marriages offers a different perspective on the problems and challenges that such families do face. I follow with three stories from Black publications, two from Essence and one from Ebony, which offer personal experiences with interracial marriage and relationships. I preface this section with a brief account of the history of rape and sexual exploitation of Black women by White men. The first story from Essence is largely negative about intimate relationships between Black women and White men, but with some ambivalence. The second story, from Ebony, offers a story of an interracial relationship that at first failed due to racial tensions, but later succeeded. The second story from Essence, by a Black man married to a White woman, offers a sometimes defiant account of love overcoming racial barriers. After hearing some Black voices, I return to dominant media with analysis of stories about the debate over proposed changes to Census 2000 that eventually allowed more freedom for multiracial people to identify themselves on Census forms. The articles
demonstrate how the Census can serve as a proxy for broader political battles, and the extent to which the media serve as the battleground for the contending parties. In this section, I find that the voices of everyday people in interracial families tended to be drowned out by the voices of official spokespersons for established political groups, and that the “official spokespersons” identified for the multiracial “movement,” as selected by the press, sometimes carried out political agendas contrary to the antiracist struggle which is in the best interests of multiracialism.

In the next section, I move from news stories about events and issues to news about cultural products that from other media that bring different perspectives into print media. Specifically, I analyze print media coverage of the 1999 PBS documentary *An American Love Story*. I discuss my finding that this innovative documentary brought out sophisticated and fresh thinking about interracial families from reporters and reviewers. I then discuss a single review of James McBride’s *The Color of Water*, written by a reviewer who brought her own similar experiences to the review. I conclude the chapter with analysis of two recent newspaper stories that suggest journalists may be taking a more positive view of interracial families and their place in society.

In Chapter 5, I offer tentative answers to the three research questions listed at the beginning of this thesis and conclude with suggestions for further research. I conclude with an invitation to join a fully dialogic world.

I conclude with a brief Epilogue, which brackets my subjectivity as a member of the Baha’i Faith who is interracially married. I briefly outline the Baha’i view of interracial marriage as an instrument for uniting humanity and suggest some parallels between the Baha’i Faith and some aspects of Postmodernism.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature examining mass communications questions through dialogism is limited. Below, I discuss three articles that more or less thoroughly integrate dialogic themes. Newcomb (1984) lays the theoretical groundwork for dialogic studies of mass communications, while Hamilton (1998) examines the role of newspapers in community formation, and Kraidy (1999, Dec.) studies how some subjects construct hybrid identities through the consumption of diverse media products. Next, I discuss Barker-Plummer’s (1995, Sep.) study of the contrasting media strategies of the National Organization for Women and more radical feminist groups, and the different relationships with mainstream news organizations to which each strategy contributed. I then review critiques of *Time* magazine’s 1993 special issue on multiracialism by Bost (2003) and Streeter (2003). The chapter concludes with some discussion of how scholars of multiracialism study the news media’s coverage of issues of concern to multiracialism. I find that scholars of multiracialism have yet to undertake a sustained in-depth analysis of news media.

A Pioneering Project

Newcomb’s (1984) article, “On the Dialogic Aspects of Mass Communications,” fittingly appeared in the debut issue of *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, which remains a major outlet for scholarship outside the social science paradigm that still
dominates mainstream media studies. This piece appeared only three years after the English translation of some of Bakhtin’s major statements on dialogism in the volume *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981). Newcomb (1984) performed a service by ably demonstrating how dialogism could provide new and vital theoretical grounding for the critical study of mass communications. Newcomb’s invitation to dialogue has, unfortunately, rarely been answered by mass communications scholars.

Newcomb (1984) opens by stating that cultural studies approaches to mass media texts have struggled to account for the relations between mediated texts and social practices. Techniques of close reading borrowed from literary studies have yielded increasingly sophisticated analyses, but couldn’t by themselves reveal the social practices that produced the texts. Newcomb observes that mass communications scholars dissatisfied with overly textual practices had, by that time, moved towards evaluating the political economy of production and reception and relegating texts themselves to secondary importance. (These pendulum swings, are, it appears, an eternal recurrence within cultural studies). The concept of hegemony, with which scholars seek to discover the media, social and cultural practices that the dominant classes use to obtain consent for the status quo, has proved more successful in linking texts and sociocultural practices (Newcomb, 1984). Newcomb (1984, p. 35) observes that the hegemonic model “focuses on complex and subtle patterns of commonsense thought, suggesting that many forms of communication present as ‘natural’ that which is socially motivated and politically framed.”

Newcomb (1984) writes that while hegemony offered a flexible method that accounted for both text production and audience/reader reception, shortcomings emerged.
Newcomb recalls Morley’s work on the *Nationwide* TV show in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which carried out both textual analyses and audience research. Newcomb (1984) notes that Morley discovered that the socioeconomic class of “readers” could not predict their responses to TV programs, but did place limits “‘on the *repertoire* of discursive or ‘decoding’ strategies available to different sectors of an audience.’” Newcomb (1984) observes that even powerful discursive forces such as state, school and family cannot completely determine outcomes when a subject enters into active meaning making. The response to such discoveries by those committed to the hegemonic model was to keep expanding the reach of hegemony to cover any apparently unpredictable results (Newcomb, 1984). “Hegemony theory in most media analyses, then, gestures toward complexities of textual and social processes,” (Newcomb, 1984, p. 37) writes, “but expands at will to explain complexity in conventional terms of dominance. Challenge and change are already accounted for with pre-defined concepts of accommodation and co-optation.”

What, then, becomes of resistance and change, if hegemony simply expands, *Matrix*-like, to co-opt anomalies? It is possible for ideological systems to change and for individuals to change their minds about them, and we can conceive of groups rising up to challenge these systems, Newcomb (1984, p. 37) declares. For instance, I argue, interracial/multiracial families change their minds, or never agreed with racial ideologies, and are arising to challenge the system. We can study the role of mass communications in these processes of change because media texts are dialogic, Newcomb (1984) argues, but realizing the dynamic conditions of both reception and production calls for new forms of textual analysis and audience research, Newcomb (1984, p. 37).
Newcomb (1984) first describes Voloshinov’s Marxist rejection of the commonsense idea of language as a product of consciousness. Languages are created in social practice and enter consciousness from without. “Precisely because it is grounded in practice, this creation of meaning is the site of ideological struggle,” Newcomb (1984, p. 37) writes. Voloshinov (like Bakhtin) offers “a general critique of theoretical systems that extract particular moments from an ongoing process and lock them into an explanatory model,” (Newcomb, 1984, p. 38). Newcomb (1984) suggests that we can apply Voloshinov’s attack on abstract theoretical systems to mass communications theories, whether psychological, structuralist or hegemonic, that tend to turn social practices into a “text,” and then read this text “as if it were a closed system, a dead language, a world without struggle and change,” (Newcomb, 1984, p. 38). Research or analysis that “confronts actual experience,” on the other hand, must acknowledge this struggle (Newcomb, 1984, p. 38).

Newcomb (1984) stresses that dominant groups very much attempt to impose limited meanings and restrict debate, but Voloshinov argues that the attempt can never completely succeed. Because material, social language is mutable, “Makers and users, writers and readers, senders and receivers do things with communication that are unintended, unplanned for, indeed, unwished for,” (Newcomb, 1984, pp. 38-39, italics added).

To study these unintended, unplanned-for and unwished-for outcomes of communication, Newcomb (1984) turns to Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia (literally, “other languagedness.”) Language, in the broadest sense, is actually an amalgam of what Bakhtin (quoted in Newcomb, 1984, p. 39) calls “socially typifying ‘languages,’”
assembled from the “languages” of various social groups, such as professions, classes, religions, and social movements, as well as languages from different historical periods. Every word or utterance carries this polysemic baggage with it (Newcomb, 1984). This “multiplicity of voice,” is present, “even in forms we might think of as uni-vocal, as purely rhetorical, or as persuasive – political speech, journalistic prose, advertising,” Newcomb (1984, p. 39) writes (italics added).

The hegemony of intent of a message producer cannot completely succeed because the process of reception is also dynamic (Newcomb, 1984). Newcomb (1984, p. 40) quotes Bakhtin’s poetic image of a “ray-word” that is transformed on the way to its “object,” (the intended receiver of the communication): “the social atmosphere of the word, the atmosphere that surrounds the object, makes the facets of the image sparkle,” (quoted in Newcomb, 1984, p. 40). Newcomb (1984, p. 40) writes that it is “this ‘social atmosphere of the word’ that is at work in the reception of mass-mediated content”. “Meaning is made in use, not in theory,” (Newcomb, 1984, p. 40).

Unfortunately for my purposes, the bulk of the rest of Newcomb’s article examines television, a very different medium from print. Newcomb (1984) points out that television today has the status that the novel still had in the 1920s and 1930s when Bakhtin did his major work on that medium, that is, as something “popular,” and therefore not worth scholarly attention. The status of newspapers falls in a range between that of TV and “serious” literature. The New York Times, with its upper-middle-class readership, relatively dense news style and influential arts and literature coverage, enjoys relatively high status compared to a plebeian competitor such as Rupert Murdoch’s New York Post or papers in smaller cities. The quotidian flux of newspaper prose places print
media into the scope of what Morson and Emerson (1990), in their study of Bakhtin, call *prosaics*, to contrast with all the privileged phenomena invoked by the term *poetics*.

Cultural studies scholars – as opposed to scholars who study “Culture” – are however, interested in such prosaic fare as television and newspapers as the material for, “sustained, rigorous and self-reflexive empirical research into the massive, power-laden complexity of contemporary culture,” (Couldry, 2000, p. 1). Newcomb (1984) proposed dialogic theory as the basis for a methodology that acknowledges the fullness of that “power-laden complexity,” by studying the process of meaning-making at the sites where meaning is made, i.e., daily social practices, including media. Newcomb (1984, p. 47) quotes Bakhtin thus: “To some extent, primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle: it creates the ground for an active and engaged understanding.” Newcomb (1984) argues that mass communications scholars have often denied the reciprocity Bakhtin posited. “The ‘dialogue’ has generally been marked as one-sided, with little opportunity to ‘talk back,’” Newcomb (1984, p. 47) writes. “But such an attitude is based on a narrow sense of how meaning might be generated and exchanged.” Newcomb notes that then available studies showed that TV viewers have complex interactions with programming, working it into other forms of dialogue and employing their own experiences in their responses. It is possible that newspaper readers interact with news content in a similarly dialogic fashion, but proof awaits research into that question. “An adequate response to the dialogic aspects of mass communication, then, calls for a fully developed, critical sociology of interpretation,” Newcomb writes, which may require completely new skills, but the testing is necessary because in a dialogic view of mass communication, discourse is not ‘given.’ It is made,” (Newcomb, 1984, pp. 47-48).
For whatever reasons, the responses to Newcomb’s invitation to dialogism have been sporadic in the subsequent 19 years, and Newcomb himself has not followed up on this earlier work (personal communication, 2002). There is, however, at least one study that directly applies Bakhtinian theory to news texts.

**Raymond Williams, Cultural Studies and Bakhtin**

James Hamilton’s (1998) article brings to light the under-explored influence of Bakhtin on Raymond Williams, an influential figure in British cultural studies. Hamilton (1998) also demonstrates scholarly resourcefulness in applying Bakhtin to a forgotten source: a newspaper published in the late 1930’s and early 1940’s for the residents of a California migrant labor camp. Hamilton (1998) notes that Williams had praised Voloshinov in his *Marxism and Literature* (1977). Hamilton (1998, p. 400) recounts Williams’ summary of Voloshinov’s attacks on both idealist and structuralist accounts of language, which left unasked questions “about the constitution of the individual and society, leading to a static, a-historical conception of both as pre-formed and pre-existing.” Voloshinov had, Williams (quoted in Hamilton, 1998, p. 401) points out, shown language to be a “‘socially shared and reciprocal activity, already embedded in active relationships, within which every move is an activation of what is already shared and reciprocal or may become so.’” Thus, for the media scholar with an interest in historical developments, the important story is not the progress of various communications technologies but the cultural forms (such as various types of newspaper stories: features, columns) through which people socially experience themselves and their worlds. “Correspondingly, the work of continually producing and maintaining the social
order requires the production, circulation, and use of cultural forms with which to organize experience and social life,” Hamilton (1998, p. 401) concludes.

Hamilton (1998) studied issues of a newspaper published in one California migrant labor camp from about 1938-1942. Hamilton (1998) sees such migrant camp newspapers as the sites of complicated ideological struggle among various migrant worker interests, agribusiness and the state, and unions. The Farm Security Administration, which ran the camps (and also very much served agribusiness interests) and the food and commercial workers’ union both used the camp newspaper to get camp residents to identify with institutional interests, which meant abandoning previous identities, “in a very real sense, denying important parts of their personal and collective histories,” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 415). Some migrants, on the other hand, used the papers to assert a resistant identity that maintained relationships with old communities left behind (Hamilton, 1998). The union voice in the migrant camp newspapers tended to emphasize the “field” (where migrants worked) as site of struggle for labor rights, emphasizing personal experience, while other migrants used sentimental, pastoral forms that looked towards the “home” they had left behind (Hamilton, 1998). What the above forms shared was the sense “that a community was locatable and obtainable,” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 418). A third voice was also heard in the camp newspapers, which created “a space of alienation, with migrants de-centered, displaced, without a community or even its possibility,” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 418).

That space of alienation to what Hamilton (1998, p. 424) calls the “paradoxical community” of modern consumer capitalism, which involves “collective participation in a nation of mobile, individual consumers,” a “community” that “not only defines the
legitimate range of action in capitalist societies, but prevents the development of positive, alternative visions on which political movements can be built.” It remains to be seen whether the current racial order constrains change to the same degree as the socioeconomic order, but the hope of interracial/multiracial people is also one shared by Raymond Williams (quoted in Hamilton, 1998, p. 424): “the [steady] belief that human beings can live in radically different kinds of ways, by radically different values, in radically different kinds of social order.”

Hybridity and the Dialogic

Marwan Kraidy’s (1999, Sep.) article uses ethnographic methodology to explore the fluid process of hybrid identity formation among a group of young Maronite Christians in post-Civil War Lebanon.

Kraidy (1999, Sep., paras. 2-5) employs the fairly new term “glocalization,” a blending of “global” and “local,” to explore the hybrid identities of his Maronite subjects, who live in a cultural, social and political environment where European/Western, Arab, Christian, and Muslim, elements co-exist uneasily. This is a hybridity, which, Kraidy (1999, Sep., para. 10) notes, Homi Bhabha has displaced “from its biological context of miscegenation into the semiotic realm of culture and the political field of power,” (which is also the realm of American multiracial hybridity). Kraidy (1999, Sep., para. 12) emphasizes that “both global and local cultural formations are inherently hybridized,” (and the multiracialist chimes in that so, too, are racialized cultural formations), so that, “Hybridity is thus construed not as an in-between zone where global/local power relations are neutralized in the fuzziness of the mélange but as a zone of symbolic ferment where power relations are surreptitiously re-inscribed.”
Kraidy (1999, Sep., para. 13) acknowledges that, “As a slippery and constantly shifting entity, hybridity is not easily grasped, rendered, and understood. Inhabiting an interstitial space between local traditions and global modernity, hybridity requires a pliant methodology grounded in a flexible epistemology.” Here is richly suggestive material for another study of interracial/multiracial families, outside of this thesis: an ethnographic study that would begin to unearth how such people locate themselves through cultural forms such as movies, television, painting and sculpture, literature, news and the Internet. Kraidy (1999, Sep., paras. 3-5) found his subjects, enjoying the freest press and most diverse media in the Arab world, living in a dialogic tug-of-war between competing discourses of modernity and tradition constructed through the mass media. “Sweepingly identified as ‘the West’ and ‘the Arabs,’ these two discourses functioned as dialogical counterpoints whereby meaning was created at their intersection,” (Kraidy, 1999, Sep., para. 22). Kraidy (1999, Sep., para. 22) stresses that his subjects steadfastly refused to “belong” in either realm. “This double-voiced posture embodies Bakhtin’s definition of linguistic hybridization, which is applicable to the wider cultural realm,” (Kraidy, 1999, Sep., para. 22) he then quotes Bakhtin (para. 23): “‘What is hybridization? It is a mixture of two social languages within the limit of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different … consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor.’”

Kraidy (1999, Sep., paras. 45-51) found his Maronite subjects using the diverse media available to them to practice a deliberate form of cultural “nomadism” in which they wander freely from one “location” to another, taking what they need and moving on. They used favored and unfavored programs “as dialogical counterpoints between which
symbolic codes and cultural discourses were harnessed to construct, preserve and defend hybrid identities,” (Kraidy, 1999, Sep., para. 52). This constructing, preserving and defending of hybrid identities is what we see among multiracial people in America, as represented in Root’s (1996, p. 7) declaration of multiracial rights: “I have the right/to create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial/to change my identity over my life time – and more than once/to have loyalties and identify with more than one group of people/to freely choose whom I befriend and love.”

Speaking from his intercultural perspective, Kraidy (1999, Sep., para. 57) sees conceptualizing hybridity as a way out of the bifurcated world of “buoyant models of resistance and inauspicious patterns of domination.” Articulating hybridity and hegemony together “is a step towards exiting the material(symbolic, political economy/cultural studies impasse,” (Kraidy, 1999, Sep., para. 57) and moving beyond a dialectical view of global/local (we may substitute Black/White or “one drop rule”/multiracial) through which differences are synthesized away. He sees hybridity as an act of identity formation “…which is simultaneously assimilationist and subversive, restrictive and liberating,” (Kraidy, 1999, Sep., para. 57). Kraidy (1999, Sep., para. 57) concludes with a quote from Trinh Minh Ha: “‘… no matter how desperate our attempts to mend, categories will always leak.’”

**Feminism, Bakhtin and the Dialogic**

Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep.) compared the media strategies of the National Organization for Women and more radical feminist groups, from 1966 (the year of NOW’s founding) to 1975. Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep.) begins by noting that the contemporary women’s movement has been able to change political discourses, such as
the distinction between public and private and what can legitimately be called a political issue. Arguing that there has been less discussion about how social movements create and communicate new discourses, Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep., para. 1) asks two questions: “What are the concrete communication strategies involved in building and diffusing these new political identities? In particular, what role(s) have the news media played in the mass communication of new social movement discourses?” (I will discuss the significance of such questions for multiracialists in the next section).

Following Ericson, Baranek and Chan, Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep.) finds the opportunity for a social movement to establish its voice in news discourse a prized, if in some ways expensive, form of cultural capital. “News voice translates into legitimacy in the knowledge system for the speaker, and news’ distributive capacity allows the speaker to communicate that knowledge widely, and so structure the public information environment,” (Barker-Plummer, 1995, Sep., para. 10). Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep., para. 12) asks whether social movements seeking to alter the status quo can use news as cultural capital to the same degree as government and business, and at what cost?

Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep., para. 13) mentions Gitlin’s oft-cited study of Students for a Democratic Society, a 1960’s radical group, and their relations with the mainstream news media. Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep., para. 13) notes that Gitlin concluded that radical movements would never be able to overcome mainstream media’s ties to dominant institutions and the media’s practices that reinforce dominant ideologies. According to Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep., para. 14), Gitlin had argued that oppositional social groups would either have to play by the media’s rules, and thus weaken their message, or else be marginalized by the media’s framing of them. Summarizing Melucci,
Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep., para. 15) argues that social movements are not “already constituted entities that who act in coherent ways;” social movements actually develop their identities over time, partially through interaction with the media, not independently of, or simply in opposition to, the media. Without citing Bakhtin, Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep., para. 20) writes that the relationship between movements and media is “dialogical,”: “an interactive, reflexive relationship that takes place over time. It is a relationship in which both media workers and movement strategists are knowledgeable, strategic agents, seeking to learn about and use each other’s discourses.” She makes this suggestion: “When we see movements and media engaged in strategic interaction, or dialogical struggle, instead of inquiring how a movement is covered by news organizations, we can ask: How do movement strategists and journalists interact?” (Barker-Plummer, 1995, Sep., para. 22). She asks how social movements understand news as a resource and the constraints of using that resource, what media strategies they employ, and how they assess their strategies. “In short,” Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep., para. 22) asks, “what has worked and what has not? A dialogical understanding may produce critical or strategic knowledge, knowledge that may be used to produce change,” (italics added).

Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep.) concludes that NOW’s strategy “succeeded,” in the sense their highly professional campaign to cultivate journalists and news organizations eventually established NOW as an official source on a narrow range of issues centering around liberal notions such as workplace and education equality. NOW’s early membership included media professionals and people who had worked in Democratic Party politics, people who considered mainstream media an ally and a resource (Barker-
Plummer, 1995, Sep., para. 30). NOW distributed detailed media kits to local branches, and paid staff monitored print and broadcast media coverage of the organization and issues it promoted; this feedback led to adjustments in media strategy (Barker-Plummer, 1995, Sep., para. 33). “It is this kind of reflexive process – in which an organization can analyze its own representation and shift its strategies accordingly – that illustrates the essentially dialogical nature of the media-movement relationship,” (Barker-Plummer, 1995, Sep., para. 44).

The more radical groups, with their generally younger memberships, distrusted NOW’s bourgeois professionalism and focus on a limited mainstream political agenda; they also deeply distrusted the news media as an instrument of the patriarchal order they sought to overthrow (Barker-Plummer 1995, Sep., paras. 53-58). The radical feminists’ media strategies were, at least compared to NOW’s, less coherent, and “unsuccessful” in conventional terms (Barker-Plummer, 1995, Sep., paras. 69-70). The radical groups were often hostile to male reporters, sometimes banning them from events and even physically harassing them (Barker-Plummer, 1995, Sep., para. 61). They were hostile in general to mainstream news organizations, refusing to provide the kind of official spokespersons journalists are trained to seek out, and the radicals’ relationships even with sympathetic women reporters were difficult and even hostile. These strategies (if indeed “strategies” is the right word) “failed” in the sense that the younger feminist groups did not get their views and voice into mainstream news coverage (Barker-Plummer, 1995, Sep., para. 74). The radical groups tried, largely unsuccessfully, to get the women reporters they did talk to take an interest in their “personal is political” view of gender relations; these younger feminists failed to see that even sympathetic women journalists operated with the same
news values and practices as their male colleagues (Barker-Plummer, 1995, Sep., para. 74).

While NOW’s understanding of news values and practices helped its conventional media strategy “succeed” in one sense, NOW “failed” in the sense that the strategy severely constrained the group’s ability to speak beyond a narrow band of issues (Barker-Plummer, 1995, Sep., paras. 48-51, 73). NOW earned the hostility of lesbians for shunning them and their issues, and alienated some heterosexual feminists for avoiding issues of social and sexual gender relations that were and are “at the heart of feminist concerns,” (Barker-Plummer, 1995, paras. 50-51).

But Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep.) draws conclusions different from the obvious one that Gitlin was right. Yes, NOW got better press than the more radical feminists, but not simply because the media favored the former and marginalized the latter. Instead, the two group’s different political identities were already at play before they began to interact with the media. “Their media strategies intervened between any given identity and any given representation,” (Barker-Plummer, 1995, Sep., para. 76). “What is at work here.” (Barker-Plummer, 1995, Sep., para. 77) writes, “is a subtle discursive process of struggle over forms of knowledge, in particular over what forms of knowledge can be carried adequately by news, and so make it into the public sphere.” Again, this is a question that ought to be of vital concern for anyone interested in interracial/multiracial issues.

One other article warrants brief mention for its dialogic explorations of the ethical relationships between news organizations and readers and audiences. Gladney (1994), discusses newspapers’ increasing use of electronic means of interacting with, and gathering information from, readers, and found the development to indicate a monologic
turning away from direct interaction with readers. Gladney (1994) suggests that his concerns would apply to the then emerging world of electronic newspapers, and indeed, research would be welcome in 2003.

**Time’s High-Tech Hybrid: Two Critiques**

In Fall 1993, *Time* magazine published a special issue dedicated to the phenomenon of multiracialism/multiculturalism in America, featuring a computer-generated cover illustration of the face of a virtual woman who supposedly represented the nation’s racially ambiguous future (*Time*, Fall 1993). On the face of it, this big media event appeared to be good news: an influential national news magazine trumpeting the transformation of America’s collective identity. Looking behind the face of the new Eve, Bost (2003) and Streeter (2003) saw less to celebrate. Their critiques of *Time’s* attempt at millennial prophecy illustrate the need for multiracialists to be sophisticated and skeptical about media representation of their issues of interest, and to actively engage with media texts and media institutions in order to alter, however slowly, the dominant racial and gender discourses still operating in mainstream media.

The entire text of *Time’s* special issue cover reads: “Take a good look at this woman. She was created by a computer from a mix of several races. What you see is a remarkable preview of … THE NEW FACE OF AMERICA: How Immigrants Are Shaping the World’s First Multicultural Society,” (quoted in Streeter, 2003, p. 306). *Time* meticulously lists the racial/ethnic composition of its virtual “Eve,” including Anglo-Saxon, Middle Eastern, African, Asian, Southern European and Hispanic (Streeter, 1996). Magazine staff reportedly fell in love with the image and felt heartbroken that she wasn’t real (Streeter, 2003). Bost (2003), p. 2 sees something more than high-tech
flirtation: “Her near-white beauty attracts readers coaxed by popular rhetoric to fear the demise of whiteness, as her apparently ‘white’ femininity makes her seem innocent and non-threatening.” The threat is further eased because “the magazine’s cover elides the topic of miscegenation, allowing the apparently more palatable multicultural to stand in for multiracial,” (Streeter, 2003, p. 305). Bost (2003, p. 2) finds a palpable sense of dread in an article in the special issue entitled “Intermarried … With Children,” in which we read: “‘ever increasing numbers of couples crash through racial, ethnic, and religious barriers’; ‘Americans are being forced to rethink and redefine themselves’; ‘the number of couples breaching once impregnable barriers of color, ethnicity and faith is startling.’” (Bost’s italics). To me, this sounds more like an invasion of rapists than a benevolent wave of immigrants. Bost notes the Time reporter’s apparent nostalgia for America as “‘an unhyphenated whole,’” which she points out derives from “a fictitious, mythic monoculturalism that exists only in ethnocentric imagination.” Bost (2003), whose book explores 150 years of the representation of mixed-race women in the Americas, points out the mixing so ambivalently announced in Time has been going on throughout our history.

A particularly disturbing historical connection arises in Time’s article that describes the process by which staff produced the issue’s imagery. Both Streeter (2003) and Bost (2003) point out the significance of the headline, “Rebirth of a Nation.” The title recalls the 1915 classic film by D.W. Griffith, Birth of a Nation with its racist imagery of freed Black mean running amok and “corrupt and oversexed mulattos,” (Streeter, 2003, p. 307). “…Time’s Freudian slip is especially meaningful because it betrays the extent to which ambivalence about miscegenation, which in The Birth of a
Nation, was the most depraved result of Black emancipation, persists in contemporary discourse about race,” (Streeter, 2003, p. 307). Bost notes how Time described using its software, descended from the special effects software used for Terminator 2, to make various combinations of virtual offspring from the images of 14 real people, a process which created not just racial mixtures but images of ambiguous gender, even one with a feminine face, huge muscles and a hairy chest. Bost comments, “Linking actual racial mixture in America with this Frankensteinian computer hybrid inflects interracial mixing with a sense of deviancy.” Streeter (2003, p. 307) wryly comments on Time’s production of ambiguously gendered figures from male and female images, “undermining the myth of heterosexual normativity, at least in cyberspace!” Yet the reassuringly feminine image on the cover was generated only from 7 women’s images Time started with (Streeter, 2003) – not exactly the way real humans reproduce.

The two critiques of a single textual event suggest the challenges faced by a researcher looking into news media treatment of interracial/multiracial themes. I find Time’s combination of anxiety and millennial optimism common in print media stories about interracial/multiracial families. Fortunately, most of the news stories about mixed-race families are not afflicted with Time’s practice of making grandiose statements about apocalyptic transformations of the world.

**Scholars of Multiracialism and Media Issues**

My survey of the scholarly literature on interracial/multiracial issues suggests researchers in this area have yet to carry out sustained and in-depth study of mass media and their role in the social construction of race. I have not read all or even most of the multiracial literature, but in the sources I read for this thesis, and the reference lists within
those sources, I found, for the most part, only scattered mentions. In two large edited volumes published by Sage Publications (Root, 1996; Winters & DeBose, 2003), out of a total of 42 chapters, only one in each book concentrates on mass media issues, and both are by the same author (Streeter, 1996, 2003). In Funderburg (1994), dozens of people of Black/White descent speak about their lived experience with racial ambiguity, in their own words, without ever mentioning the media. It is almost certainly the case that few people of any racial, gender or sexual identity give much thought to the role of media in their lives, but apparently, when multiracialism in the media is at issue, scholars of multiracialism aren’t giving it much thought, either.

The profile of the current small roster of multiracialism scholars may help explain this situation. This is a compact group, in which members heavily rely on each other’s research, and, as a scan of their acknowledgements sections shows, multiracialism scholars edit, co-author and advise each other on their work, as well as argue with each other. In looking through contributor lists and background information on individual articles, I find that multiracialism scholars are currently concentrated in a few disciplines, with sociology in the lead, followed by history, psychology and the various branches of women’s, ethnic and racial studies.

At the risk of making a broad generalization, I will say it is my impression that disciplines such as sociology, history and psychology do not tend to scrutinize media texts with the intensity that media scholars give to the task (although media scholars borrow techniques from sociology, history and psychology). People in these disciplines do use media texts as evidence of various social, historical and psychological developments, generally without interrogating the relationship of media texts to those
developments. An unfortunate handicap of disciplinary boundaries is that researchers in one field tend to place under their scholarly microscopes only those phenomena that the discourse of each discipline specifies as of interest within the field. This may explain why Bost and Streeter, for instance, have closely read some media texts about multiracial issues; both women come from backgrounds that include literary studies, women’s and ethnic studies, three interrelated fields with varied interests in close reading of texts. It may simply be that multiracialism as a scholarly pursuit – it cannot really be called a field or discipline – is still in its infancy and awaits the entry into its ranks of critical media scholars who can tie their interests in with multiracialism.

**Interracial/Multiracial News in the Past**

I conclude my literature review with a discussion of some historical research on interracial marriage that uses newspaper articles as evidence. This research includes Ruchames’ (1955) account of the abolitionist campaign to repeal Massachusetts’ ban on interracial marriage, Fowler’s (1987/1963) book-length account of legislation and public opinion on interracial marriage outside the South, and Lewis & Ardizonne’s (2001) account of the Rhinelander divorce trial in the 1920s.

Ruchames (1955) tells the story of how the American abolitionist movement used its campaign to repeal Massachusetts’ ban on intermarriage to establish the movement as a political force. Ruchames (1955) tells much of the story through the nasty battle between William Lloyd Garrison, editor of *The Liberator*, the leading abolitionist newspaper, and the editors of various New England newspapers. The blatant, sexually charged racism that Ferber (1998) found today only in marginalized White supremacist publications was the norm at the time. Early in the Massachusetts campaign, one New
England paper declared, “Law should combine with public opinion to prevent alliances, the consequences of which are so foreign to our habits and prejudices,” (Ruchames, 1955, pp. 251-252). Of a group of women who petitioned the state legislature to repeal the law, one paper remarked, “perhaps some of these ladies despair of having a white offer, and so are willing to try de colored race,” (Ruchames, 1955, p. 257, italics in original).

Garrison was not one to sit back and take punches, nor did he pull any. “Come, thou sagacious discriminator of skins,” he responded to a critic, “define thy boundary line! Let us know the exact shade and the particular curl of the hair which justly deprive a man of his right of choice!” (Ruchames, 1955, p. 253). What we see operating in these exchanges is the role of sexuality in the strategies of both abolitionists and proslavery forces. In the 1830s, abolitionists launched a frank campaign to expose and attack the sexual mores of Southern plantation owners, as well as Northern patrons of urban prostitution (Harris, 1999). The counterattack accused abolitionists and moral reformers of wanting Black mates for themselves, although there is no evidence that any White abolitionists ever crossed the color line (Ruchames, 1955; Harris, 1999). The sexual counterattack had its impact on those who worked to repeal Massachusetts’ ban on intermarriage. Most of them were careful to insist that they were not advocating amalgamation; one legislator who introduced a bill to overturn the ban called interracial marriage “the gratification of a depraved taste,” while insisting he was acting on his belief in the principle of equality (Ruchames, 1955, p. 253).

While Ruchames’ (1955) article uses newspaper quotes as vivid evidence of the sexually charged rhetoric surrounding race relations in Antebellum America, Ruchames does not interrogate the papers themselves and what role they played in the debate. It
may be that such questions were not being asked in 1955. Fowler (1963/1987) also treats newspapers as unproblematic evidence.

Fowler (1963/1987), wrote a pioneering book-length historical study of legislation and public opinion about interracial marriage from 1780-1930, concentrating on the Northeast and Midwest. In surveying about 300 years of history (the introduction deals with Colonial developments), Fowler (1963/1987) offers numerous newspaper quotes, but, as does Ruchames, he treats newspaper articles and editorials as unproblematic evidence that mirrors public attitudes for or against interracial marriage. The print media’s own role in both shaping, and being shaped by, public attitudes towards interracial marriage gets more attention in a study by Lewis and Ardizonne (2001).

**Sex and Racial Ambiguity in the 1920’s**

Lewis and Ardizonne (2001) offer a book-length study of a divorce trial that was national news in the U.S. in the mid-1920s, because it offered an irresistible mix of class, race, sex and scandal. Only a few weeks into their marriage, Leonard “Kip” Rhinelander sued his wife Alice Jones for divorce on the grounds that she had deceived him about her racial background, although he had not seem concerned about her race before news reports made her race an issue. Rhinelander was a member of a wealthy and socially prominent family, Jones the daughter of a British immigrant of uncertain racial background who ran a cabstand in New Rochelle, N.Y., just north of New York City. When local reporters caught on that a scion of the Rhinelander house had married a humble hometown girl, their inquiries led to the headline “Rhinelander’s Son Marries Daughter of Colored Man,” in bold capitals (Lewis & Ardizonne, 2001, p. 10). Lewis & Ardizonne (2001) note the confusion of the newspaper’s staff evident in the headline: not
knowing exactly what to call Alice Jones, they implied her racial identity by referring to her father as “colored;” but in the days immediately after the story broke, other papers avoided mentioning the race of Jones or her father, choosing to emphasize the class gap between the bride and groom. The subsequent trial demonstrated that the couple had been sexually active for about three years; the defense’s strategy included reading out loud sexually explicit love letters (Lewis & Ardizonne, 2001). Newspapers did not quote these letters directly (and the trial transcript no longer exists), but one paper even guided readers to the section of the state penal code defining sodomy, which in New York State at the time included anal and oral sex (Lewis & Ardizonne, 2001, p.143). The most stunning moment of the trial happened when Alice Jones partly undressed in front of judge, jury and attorneys (the press and the public did not witness this scene), which the defense intended as physical proof that Leonard Rhinelander must have had ample signs of his lover’s race, evidence which was not apparent from the parts generally seen in public (Lewis & Ardizonne, 2001). In a scoop that created “photojournalistic” history, one paper photographed a model, partially undressed, and selected to resemble Alice Jones (Lewis & Ardizonne, 2001, p. 173). The photograph was then cut-and-pasted into what the paper called a “composograph,” made of several photographs of judge, jury and lawyers; the image boosted the paper’s one-day circulation from 60,000 to several hundred thousand (Lewis & Ardizzone, pp. 173-174). The defense’s tactics also worked: the all-White-male jury decided in favor of Alice Jones, refusing to grant Rhinelander the divorce he had sought (Lewis & Ardizonne, 2001).

Lewis & Ardizonne (2001) explore the contradictory evidence and reasoning that led reporters to refer to Alice Jones as “colored” or “Negro.” Unlike Southern states,
New York had no legal definitions of race and had never banned interracial marriage, which forced reporters to consult public documents about Alice Jones and her family; the documents yielded contradictory evidence (Lewis & Ardizonne, 2001). Interviews with neighbors, teachers, classmates and church members also produced conflicting answers (Lewis & Ardizonne, 2001). Alice’s father, a British immigrant of West Indian descent, further confused both reporters and the court, since he came from a place with different customs of racial classification; George Jones vehemently denied being “colored,” and Alice Jones also publicly denied being “colored” or “Negro,” (Lewis & Ardizonne, 2001). What mixed families such as the Jones’s did was to inhabit “an ambiguous space in the American system of racial classification,” (Lewis & Ardizonne, 2001. p. 36) avoiding any explicit claims of racial identity. Journalists, however, failed to recognize that space; for them, father and daughter were “colored,” although if pressed, those 1920s reporters probably wouldn’t have been able to explain their conclusions.

Lewis & Ardizonne (2001, p. 39) write that the early ambiguity around Alice Jones’s race “foreshadowed the major issues of the trial and stirred up an already contentious set of concerns for white America: What defined the difference between white and black? How could one tell?” Almost 80 years later, those questions are still being asked.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined some of the limited literature available on two subjects: dialogism and media, and media treatment of interracial/multiracial issues. The articles by Newcomb (1984), Rhodes (1995), Hamilton (1998) and Kraidy (1999) give a taste of the potential fruits dialogic approaches to mass media can yield. Newcomb
(1984) suggested that mass communications scholars might have to acquire new skills to study mass communications dialogically. Indeed, dialogism requires a kind of intellectual and ontological juggling act that Kraidy’s (1999) article suggests may be easier for people consciously living dialogic lives, such as his Lebanese Maronite subjects who steadfastly refuse to “belong” exclusively to West or East, Arab or European, tradition or modernity. It is useful to recall Kraidy’s (1999, Dec.) insight that conceptualizing hybridity as a way out of the bifurcated world of “buoyant models of resistance and inauspicious patterns of domination.” Articulating hybridity and hegemony together “is a step towards exiting the material/symbolic, political economy/cultural studies impasse.” (Kraidy, 1999, Dec.) and moving beyond a dialectical view of global/local (we may substitute Black/White or “one drop rule”/multiracial) through which differences are synthesized away. Dialogism offers the balancing needed to take that step beyond dialectics without dropping any of the balls.

Dialogically constituted subjects such as Kraidy’s Maronites or American multiracials call into question the literal definition of identity as “the distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity: individuality,” (American Heritage Dictionary, 1982, p. 639). The words “regarded as” connote the role that others play in identity. When we encounter someone who refuses to be a persistent enough entity (or is an entity with which we’re not familiar), we may experience what Omi & Winant (1994, p. 59) call “a crisis of racial meaning.” Such a crisis is evident both in contemporary news stories about interracial marriage and in stories from earlier periods.

We saw in the historical research about interracial marriage (see above) both William Lloyd Garrison’s contemporary sounding prophecy of a de-raced utopia and the
vehement racism, sexualized anxiety and fear of mongrelization in Antebellum America (Ruchames, 1955; Fowler, 1963/1987). This mixed fear and lurid fascination was still intense in the mid-1920’s, as Lewis & Ardizonne’s (2001) study of the sensational Rhinelander case revealed. *Time*’s (1993) special multiculturalism issue, with its jumble of utopian prophecy and eschatological dread, demonstrates that another crisis of racial meaning is upon us, or at least upon *Time* (Bost, 2003; Streeter, 2003). One of Bost’s (2003, pp. 5-6) main points in her account of the history of representation of “mulattas and mestizas” is that American fascination with racial mixing is not at all new, and that periods of increased attention to miscegenation and hybridity correspond to heightened concern with and anxiety about the nation’s racial identity. The 19th Century’s fascination with racial mixing corresponded with scientific racism and the articulation of White supremacy, which leads Bost (2003, p. 6) to ask cautiously if history is repeating itself. “It is thus imperative to measure these contemporary representations against the history of mixture in the Americas to see to what extent historic taboos and fears of difference remain underneath the changing categories by which we organize race in America,” Bost (2003, p. 6) writes.

Bost’s historically founded skepticism is a needed counterweight to the celebratory popular and even academic discourses of multiracialism and hybridity, but a dialogic view of history throws into the works the additional caveat that history cannot repeat itself. After her historical caution quoted in the previous paragraph, Bost (2003, p. 6) then explains she is interested in mixed identities “because of the ways in which they challenge universalizing notions of selfhood and highlight the complexities of subjectivity.” The epistemological weapons with which to challenge universalism and
“highlight the complexities of subjectivity” are available to 21st Century multiracialists; they were not available to previous generations. Members of Black/White interracial families have a nascent language available to begin to address their experiences and to narrate their selves (Dalmage, 2000, p. 20; Yanow, 2003, p. 193). I highlight these epistemological weapons in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3
THEORY AND METHOD

Theory
This thesis is based on dialogism, as expressed in the work of Bakhtin and others, with support from theories of multiracial identity formation and media discourse. I begin with a discussion of dialogism as presented by Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle, including the key concepts of dialogue and monologue, centrifugal and centripetal forces, heteroglossia, and authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1981a, 1984; Morson & Emerson, 1990; Gardiner, 1992). After explaining key concepts, I then discuss the differences and similarities between Bakhtin’s use of the terms discourse and ideology and the use of the same terms in Marxist, Structuralist and Poststructuralist work. I follow this section with a discussion of Bakhtin’s account intersubjectivity. I then discuss Daniel’s (2002) extension of Omi & Winant’s (1994) account of racial formation and racial projects into the Multiracial Identity Project.

In my method section, I will explain my use of textual analysis, with explanations from Shah (1995) and Kellner (1995) on Cultural Studies applications of textual analysis. Next, I offer suggestions on textual analysis using the work of Bakhtin and Voloshinov, as found in Maybin (2001). I follow with some cautionary comments from McKee (2001) on the limits of textual analysis and the need for explaining to readers the researcher’s assumptions and methods. I then discuss some examples of textual analysis. I begin with studies by Brooks and Rada (2002) and Shah (1995) of how media carry out
the social construction of race through the hidden ideology of Whiteness. I next discuss Rhodes’ (1999) study of the relationship between print media and the Black Panther Party, which makes limited use of dialogic methods. Next, I review a study by Squires and Brouwer (2002) of a case of racial “passing” as treated in both dominant and marginal media. This is an apparently unique example of a textual analysis of multiracial identity in print media. I conclude this section with a preview of Chapter 4, using my own analysis of one story about the pending referendum in South Carolina to remove the state’s moot law against interracial marriage from the books.

In the next section, I discuss the methods I used to select representative texts for analysis. I discuss the themes found in my reading, including the difference in style and voice of stories in Black publications. After the themes, I discuss the main questions I asked of each article and how those questions apply to the research questions listed in the Chapter 1.

**Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle**

The work of M. M. Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle is the chief sources of the dialogism and related concepts used in this thesis. The main works of Bakhtin I use this thesis are the long essay *Discourse in the Novel* (1981a), which is the last essay in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981). Bakhtin continued his study of dialogism in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, (1984). Voloshinov is known mostly for *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973/1986), in which he developed a Marxist-oriented account of the social construction of language that sought to overcome the crudities of early Soviet linguistics.
For this project, I find the following assessment from Gardiner (1992, p. 2) a useful summary of Bakhtin’s work: “it could be said that his life-long ambition was the development of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of socio-cultural life as it is constituted in and through forms of symbolic interaction – what has been generally referred to as ‘metalinguistics’ or ‘translinguistics,’” that is, a study of language that transcends the technical concerns of traditional linguistics. Beneath Bakhtin’s metalinguistics lies “his staunch belief that the establishment of linguistic and cultural freedom is a necessary prerequisite to the emergence of a truly egalitarian and radically democratic community,” (Gardiner, 1992, pp. 2-3).

The Dialogic Universe: Key Concepts

Dialogue is not anything as tidy as a theory or a concept; rather, it is a “complex of ideas” (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 49) that Bakhtin uses in many senses and contexts. It is vital to distinguish between Bakhtin’s account of dialogue and theories built around the conflict between binary opposites, such as dialectics, semiotics and structuralism, all of which Bakhtin viewed as examples of what he called theoretism, which “always understands events in terms of a set of rules to which they conform or a structure which they exhibit,” (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 50). He saw instead a world characterized by unfinalizability (nezavershennost’ in Russian), a term he used to suggest “innovation, ‘surprisingness,’ the genuinely new, openness, potentiality, freedom, and creativity,” (Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp. 36-37). If nothing really ends, then nothing really begins, either, and so, “It is therefore inaccurate to speak of entering into dialogue, as if the components that do so could exist in any other way … dialogue itself is always going on,” (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 50.) Bakhtin’s revision of Derrida’s (in)famous
dictum might say, “There is nothing outside dialogue.” Indeed, the following statement says as much: “Dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomenon than mere rejoinders in a dialogue laid out compositionally in the text; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life – in general, everything that has meaning and significance,” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293).

The key concepts in Bakhtin’s account of dialogue, which I use in this thesis, include dialogue and monologue, centrifugal and centripetal forces, heteroglossia, and internally persuasive discourse and authoritative discourse. The concepts are related, in the sense that they all refer to the contested and constantly evolving nature of language in everyday usage, but Bakhtin uses the terms in different contexts. As a “complex of ideas,” dialogue and its related terms all help to illumine in each other’s meanings – the presentation of dialogism is in itself dialogic.

Dialogue and Monologue. In dialogue, we find an account of the social life of language that is both political and ethical. In one of his most oft-quoted passages, Bakhtin (1984, p. 292) writes: “Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another I with equal rights (thou).” By implication, we can assert that dialogism affirms the existence outside of itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities. From the same passage: “Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word. It closes down the represented world and represented persons,” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293). Dialogue, then, denies the ultimate word, and opens up the represented world and represented persons.
We can characterize monologue as authoritarian/elitist and seeking to limit meaning, whereas dialogue is democratic/populist and seeks to expand meaning.

It would be a mistake, however, to peg monologue as bad and dialogue as good, in any absolute sense. By espousing dialogism, we are not rooting for the triumph of dialogue over monologue. The tug of war is a contest that neither “side” ever “wins,” nor is such a conclusion even possible. Monologue provides the stability of meaning that allows for communication throughout a society or culture in the broadest sense. Dialogue allows for the development of language and social and cultural relations and prevents sociocultural stagnation and the consolidation of authority.

**Centripetal Versus Centrifugal.** Bakhtin represents monologic forces as *centripetal* and dialogic forces as *centrifugal*, creating a metaphor of pressing together versus pulling apart. Centrifugal force operates in the spin cycle of a washing machine; it also creates the gut-wrenching thrill of amusement park rides. Gravity is a centripetal force, as is the force that binds together protons, neutrons and the various other particles that make up atoms. These physical examples remind us that both centripetal and centrifugal forces are necessary; only extreme imbalances between the two are undesirable.

In shifting from monologue/dialogue to centripetal/centrifugal, Bakhtin shifts from a personified trope of speaking styles to an impersonal trope of a contest between forces, although the clash still takes place through speaking subjects. “Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear,” (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 272). For instance, within a newspaper article, a member of an interracial family asserts a fluid identity; this utterance exerts
centrifugal pressure against the newspaper’s centripetal exertion of a standardized
narrative of Black/White identities and racial conflict. Morson & Emerson (1990, p. 30),
point out that centrifugal forces are not a unified opposition; they have in common only
opposition to the “official” centripetal forces. Furthermore, the official is never as
unified as it appears or pretends to be. Morson and Emerson argue (1990, p. 30) that in
everyday life it is not even possible to cleanly separate centripetal and centrifugal forces.
“These categories are themselves subject to the centrifuge,” (Morson & Emerson, 1990,
p. 30).

_Heteroglossia._ The result of the clash between centripetal and centrifugal forces
is _heteroglossia_ (in Russian, “raznorecie,” or “varied-speechedness.”) The Greek-
derived translation “heteroglossia” works well, suggesting the blending of diverse
languages. Any language, English in our case, is not a single, unified language but an
amalgam of the “languages” of various social and cultural groups: classes, ethnic groups,
races, genders, professions, regional and local dialects, generations – Bakhtin (1981a, p.
263) even stated that each day and hour can have a language. This diversity of what
Bakhtin (1981a, p. 291) called “socially typifying languages” has the same kind of vital
effect that biodiversity has on the natural world. Language diversity and species diversity
both make possible evolution and global survival.

The nature of the print media makes them a site for the production of
heteroglossia. Reporters are bound by news values and practices to focus on what people
say, and so the varied speeches of sources clash, blend and interact on the pages of
newspapers and magazines. The language of government officials and experts meets the
language of “the man on the street.” The languages of liberals and conservatives, of pro-
choice and pro-life activists, of all sorts of contending political, social and economic voices, all vie for position in news columns. The heteroglossia of news runs deeper.

Each type of news has its own style or language: the language of hard news differs from feature or human interest stories; the sports section has its own way with words, which is different from the editorial page or the business section. The heteroglott languages of each paper meet and turn each other into hybrids: political news talks of “leveling the playing field”; the narrative techniques of feature writing find their way into hard news.

Print media, more so than other media, are subject to further sources of heteroglossia: particularly with large urban papers, print media are committed to coverage of other media through reviews, features and interviews. Movies, books, television shows, dance, theater, etc. all insert their own languages into the news. Stories about other media can often bring a point of view about interracial families that challenges print journalist’s own conceptions, as happened, for instance, in the wide coverage given to the innovative PBS documentary *An American Love Story* in 1999.

Is print news, then, a wide-open medium or a dominant force that invisibly establishes “the premise of any conversation at all?” (Schudson, 1995, p. 54). This question could (and probably will) be the basis for a lengthy research project of its own.

For now, my view is that print media are a site of conflict. Newspapers, especially a quasi-official “paper of record” such as the *New York Times*, occupy a privileged position that gives great weight to their particular account of events and the state of the world; newspapers are powerful forces that help establish “the premise of any conversation at all,” which would make newspapers a monologic, or centripetal force. On the other hand, I join Schudson (1995) in rejecting the extreme view of Chomsky and Herman that U.S.
newspapers are the equivalent of Pravda, the old Communist Party organ of the former
Soviet Union. The political and economic elite do have privileged access to the daily
papers, but the voices of the less privileged do find their way into print, and every day
news hits the presses that contradicts the views and interests of elites, whose interests,
Furthermore, are by no means monolithic. The press is committed to seeking out the
voices of everyday people, although that commitment certainly is not always carried out.
In keeping with dialogic principles, there can be no ultimate word on the question,
“Newspapers, monologic or dialogic?” The discussion to this point suggests that print
media have centripetal tendencies subject to the centrifugal forces of the daily news.
Further illumination of the contest comes through examining competing discourses.

**Authoritative Discourse and Internally Persuasive Discourse**

Bakhtin writes that a developing consciousness is at first composed of discourses
from outside the self. “… consciousness awakens to independent ideological life
precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding itself, and from which it cannot
initially separate itself; the process of distinguishing between one’s own and another’s
discourse … is activated rather late in development … what first occurs is a separation
between internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse …”
(Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 345). Note here Hall’s point, (quoted in Newcomb, 1984, pp. 36-37):
“Ideological discourses can win to their ways of representing the world … subjects
already positioned within a range of existing discourses, fully social speakers.”

Authoritative discourse, which is all we know at first, “demands that we
acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us … we encounter it with its authority
already fused to it,” (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 342). Such is how we encounter the daily
newspaper, “its authority already fused to it,” so that, like the *New York Times*, it can engrave into marble walls, “All the News That’s Fit to Print.” Authoritative discourse (such as we may encounter in the newspaper, although Bakhtin here is referring to its presence in the novel) “may organize around itself great masses of other discourses (which interpret it, praise it, apply it in various ways) … authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, *no play with its borders*, no gradual and flexible transitions …” (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 343, italics added). Though few newspaper people would agree with this view of their work, “[authoritative discourse] is indissolubly fused with its authority – with political power, an institution, a person – and it stands and falls together with that authority. One cannot divide it up – agree with one part, accept but not completely another part, reject utterly a third part,” (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 343). If the argument ended here, we would be left with an emphatic denial of the possibility of negotiated and oppositional readings posited by Hall (1980, see Chapter 2). Fortunately, with Bakhtin the committed democrat, internally persuasive discourse enters the fray.

Internally persuasive discourse (such as the assertion of a fluid multiracial identity) is “denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society (not by public opinion, not by scholarly norms, nor by criticism) not even the legal code,” (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 342). Such is the case with multiracial identity, which struggles for social acceptance, has only recently been accepted here and there by scholars, and which the legal code has actively suppressed and has yet to acknowledge. The internally persuasive discourse of multiracial people battles even to come into being through a nascent language, or as Dalmage (2000, p. 20) puts it, “members of multiracial families are constantly fighting to identify themselves for
themselves. A difficulty they face is the lack of language available to address their experiences.” Bakhtin (1981a, p. 342) continues: “The struggle and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness.”

The dialogic hope of internally persuasive discourse is this:

“In the everyday world of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half someone else’s. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words … it enters into an intense interaction, a struggle with internally persuasive discourses. Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view … The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open, in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever new ways to mean.” (Bakhtin, 1981a, pp. 345-346, italics in original).

At this point, we have encountered the terms discourse and ideology, which are familiar to many students and scholars engaged in critical study and research. It is important to remember that we encounter Bakhtin through a time warp. We read Bakhtin after several decades of Structuralism, Poststructuralism, Western Marxism and their offshoots, while his major work on dialogism was written before most of this work. Bakhtin uses the Russian word slovo in a sense somewhat similar to Foucault’s, as summarized by Stuart Hall:

By ‘discourse,’ Foucault meant ‘a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment’ … Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. …. Just as discourse ‘rules in’ certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it ‘rules out,’ limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it.

Without taking the parallel too far, we can suggest that Foucault’s description of discourse resembles Bakhtin’s authoritative discourse. Bakhtin, however, allows for at least a relative, relational subject capable of resisting through internally persuasive
discourse (see below for a discussion of Bakhtin’s intersubjectivity), while Foucault shares with Structuralists and Poststructuralists a belief in the death of the subject. (For more on the relationships among Bakhtin, Foucault, Structuralism and Poststructuralism, see Gardiner, 1992, Chapter 5.)

Bakhtin’s conception of ideology also requires spelling out. Gardiner (1992, pp. 6-7) explains that Bakhtin’s interpretation of ideology rejects the orthodox Marxist sense of ideology as “false consciousness,” or a “coherent belief system;” instead, Bakhtin views ideology as “the essential symbolic medium through which all social relations are necessarily constituted.” This view does not disavow a concern with power relationships. “When colonized (or ‘monologized’) by dominant cultural forms and institutional arrangements, particular ideological discourses can play a crucial role in the maintenance of asymmetrical power relations,” (Gardiner, 1992, p. 7). Racial ideologies operate in this way, as we see in this account by Hall (1981), from a study of racism in British television news: “Ideologies produce different forms of social consciousness, rather than being produced by them ... Ideologies tend to disappear from view into the taken-for-granted ‘naturalized’ world of common sense. Since, like gender, race appears to be ‘given’ by Nature, racism is one of the most profoundly ‘naturalized’ of existing ideologies.” Hall is interested in “de-naturalizing” racial ideologies; although Hall does not, to my knowledge, invoke Bakhtin in his own work, he appears to be engaging in the kind of dialogic or heteroglot resistance that Bakhtin celebrates.

The potential for the unpredictable and uncontrollable within each of us is a welcome, I argue vital antidote to much of the work based on Foucauldian discourse theory, as well as the various threads of Marxist-derived ideological critique and
Gramscian hegemony work, which, as Newcomb (1984) argued (see Chapter 2), tend to discount the possibility of resistance and change. If nobody (except French intellectuals) can escape ideology, discourse and hegemony, then why bother even to expose them? Better to be blissfully unaware, like the somnambulists of *The Matrix*, most of whom cannot even receive the truth without going insane. Whether from an underground city or a formerly obscure Russian thinker, there are *new ways to mean* available to the members of interracial/multiracial families that enable them to stand against the authoritative discourse often present in the newspaper. This is a resistance that is only possible if there is some kind of internal space available for cultivating internally persuasive discourse, a space only possible if we keep the subject out of the philosophical grave.

**Intersubjectivity and Interracial Marriage**

Interracial relationships demonstrate Bakhtin’s account of *intersubjectivity*, which rejects both the autonomous subject of Descartes and Kant and the almost disappeared subject of Poststructuralism (Gardiner, 1992, pp. 74-75). For each de-centered and unstable subject in an interracial relationship, Bakhtin offers an equally de-centered and unstable anchor: *The Other*. Bakhtin (1984, p. 287) declares: “To be means to be for another, and through the other for oneself. A person has no sovereign internal territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another,*” (italics in original). This being-for-each-other is especially strong, and strengthening, for interracial relationships, in which the partners wrestle with the socially constructed extreme otherness that is alleged to make them incompatible, and because the couples can be isolated from friends, family and neighbors (although this problem is declining). The multiracial family lives within a culture;
Bakhtin does not see culture as within borders, either: “it is entirely distributed along the boundaries, boundaries pass everywhere, through its every aspect,” (quoted in Morson & Emerson, p. 51).

Metaphors of border crossing and border policing turn up frequently in multiracial literature. Root (1996) entitled her edited book “The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier.” Heather Dalmage’s richly titled “Tripping on the Color Line: Black-White Multiracial Families in a Racially Divided World” (2000), discusses the practice of “borderism,” as “a unique form of discrimination faced by those who cross the color line, do not stick with their own, or attempt to claim membership (or are placed by others) in more than one racial group,” (p. 40). Dalmage (2000, p. 43) writes of “border patrolling,” the defense of essentialist racial categories, which both Whites and Blacks do, although she considers most White border patrolling as unconscious, whereas Blacks “generally see patrolling the border as both problematic and necessary.”

We see here the polysemy of the term dialogue itself. We have, in one sense, an idealistic presentation of fully conscious, equal partners being for each other and striving for genuine communication; and in another sense, a potentially violent contest over meaning, in which one side seeks equality and the other employs every means in its power to maintain inequality. At this point we must acknowledge that dialogic conflict is pervasive, while ideal dialogue is more of a vision towards which some of us strive. But even monologue, to maintain its authoritative position, must engage in covert dialogue. This is monologue’s dirty secret: monologue must gauge the response of the others it objectifies and adjust its speech, as, for instance, politicians do in refining their messages. Bakhtin (1981, p. 282) describes ideal dialogue thus: “… [the speaker’s] orientation
toward the listener is an orientation … toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse; it is in this way, after all, that various points of view … various social ‘languages’ come to interact with one another.” For Bakhtin, ideal communication requires “speakers” – in the literal or figurative sense – adjusting to each other, attempting to understand each other’s ‘language,’ and making parts of each other’s languages their own, that is, looking, “into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another.” This is the exact opposite of monologue, for whom, “another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness.” This model applies beyond one-on-one, direct forms of communication, to “dialogues” between, for instance, authors and readers, advertisers and consumers, or journalists’ or newspapers’ “dialogue with our readers.”

One of the most vital possibilities I see in dialogism is a way out of simplistic models of journalism that either overemphasize the power of the producers, i.e. journalists and media institutions; or uncritically celebrate the consumer, i.e., the reader or viewer. If the producers are all-powerful, we rule out resistance, at least any effective resistance, and the possibility of change. On the other hand, we would be naive to pretend that hegemonic social, political and cultural forces don’t exercise powerful constitutive – but not determining – force on everyone, the news media being one quite imperfect hegemonic instrument. Moving beyond Bakhtin, I now turn to the theory of racial formation to further examine and contest that imperfect hegemony.

**Beyond Omi & Winant: The Multiracial Identity Project**

Daniel (2002) builds on the work of Omi & Winant (1994), who have developed a theory of *racial formation* carried out through *racial projects*. Omi & Winant define race
as: “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies,” and we should think of race “as an element of social structure rather than an irregularity within it; we should see race as a dimension of human representation rather than an illusion.” Omi and Winant (1994) see the concept of race evolving through *racial formation*, “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed,” through an evolving series of *racial projects*.

Daniel (2002) locates the origins of the “Master Racial Project,” in the European Renaissance, when materialist scientific rationalism based on sensate data began to displace the more holistic Medieval world view (whatever its many faults may have been). The Renaissance worldview “… was based on an almost sacred ‘Law of the Excluded Middle’ that supported an ‘either/or’ paradigm of dichotomous hierarchical ranking of differences,” (Daniel, 2002, p. 27). In matters of race, this paradigm required that races be divided into exclusive and ranked categories, with European Whites at the top and African Blacks at the bottom (Daniel, 2002).

This Eurocentric paradigm guided the “Binary Racial Project” in Colonial America and the U.S., which invoked the “One Drop Rule,” (the rule that rendered anyone with any Black or African ancestry as Black) to maintain the exclusivity of its categories (Daniel, 2002). Daniel (2002) then discusses “Ternary Racial Projects” such as Apartheid South Africa’s, which developed an intermediate category of mixed-race “Coloureds,” with more privileges than Blacks but fewer privileges than Whites; and Brazil’s, which has forged a multitude of subtly differentiated categories from darkest to lightest, with White on top (Daniel, 2002).
Daniel (2002) detects a developing multiracial identity project, fueled by Post-Colonialism’s deconstruction and de-centering of Eurocentrism and celebration of hybridity; and Postmodernism’s rejection of hierarchical categorization and totalizing universalism. Daniel (2002), advocates a “constructive Postmodernism.” “In the 1990s, the appearance of multiple or plural identities, be they racial or otherwise, are not merely symptomatic of the tendency of fin-de-siècle relations between humans to become ‘deranged’ or ‘disjointed,’” Daniel (2002, p. 183) writes. This “explosion of plural identities …” seeks to “… transcend this loss of continuity by reconnecting and reintegrating humans with the life history of the universal and collective self,” (Daniel, 2002, p. 183). This emerging multiracial identity is based on “the ‘Law of the Included Middle,’” and thrives on concepts of “‘partly, ‘mostly’ or ‘both/neither,’” (Daniel, 2002, p. 189). But he does not see multiracial identity as a panacea that can end racism and inequality by itself (Daniel, 2002). “There is no single multiracial voice but many different voices, including those of reactionaries and radical visionaries,” (Daniel, 2002, p. 189). The hope is that those who live within a multiracial identity will resist the rules of the dominant racial order and “build bridges across the racial divide,” (Daniel, 2002, p. 189). “In the process, these individuals will become part of the larger antiracist struggle for human liberation,” (Daniel, 2002, p. 190).

Method

Textual Analysis and its Role in Cultural Studies

Shah (1995, Vol. 5, No. 2-3, para. 1) argues that American mass media research about racial questions “is too narrowly focused on traditional content analyses and lacks a critical emphasis relating representations of racial groups with larger contextual issues
such as identity, class, and culture.” Researchers can begin to address the resulting limited understanding of the relationship between mass media and race using “an approach to studying the role mass media assumes in assigning cultural and social positions and labels to various racial groups,” (Shah, 1995 Vol. 5, No. 2-3, para. 1). This is the approach used in cultural studies.

Kellner (1995) writes that, for cultural studies, the political economy perspective, which studies the relations of production, distribution and reception of texts from a more or less Marxist perspective, tends to reduce media culture to a vehicle for dominant ideologies, if used by itself. Media culture does overwhelmingly support capitalist values, “but it is also the site of intense struggle between races, classes, genders and social groups,” (Kellner, 1995, p. 10). Neither content analysis or political economy ask and answer enough questions, so for a fuller understanding of media texts, Kellner (1995, p. 11) points to textual analysis, which borrows the formal techniques of literary criticism, but “needs to be concerned with showing how the cultural meanings encoded into a text’s various ‘languages’ convey ideological effects.” He lists various approaches, such as Marxist, feminist, anti-imperialist, antiracist and others, each of which has strengths and weaknesses. He points out that any ideological analysis of a news text is only one possible reading from the subject position of a particular critic, which may differ considerably from that of everyday readers (Kellner, 1995). We may attribute
these multiple readings to the dialogic nature of media texts, as elaborated by Bakhtin and Voloshinov.

**Textual Analysis Through Bakhtin and Voloshinov**

Maybin (2001) outlines an approach to textual analysis using the work of Bakhtin and Voloshinov. Maybin (2001) notes Bakhtin’s point that meaning in language does not derive from fixed dictionary definitions but from everyday usage. She (Maybin, 2001, p. 68) offers this quote from Bakhtin: “All words have a taste of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions.” Maybin notes research, for instance, which shows that people consistently associate the word “undergo” with painful experiences, although dictionary definitions of the word do not show this.

The partly inherited tastes of words demonstrates that we speak words of others that have been put in our mouths; that is, much of our speech is “reported speech,” that we have heard someone else, or heard or read in the news (Maybin, 2001). Invoking authoritative voices (or authoritative discourses) gives weight to our own speech, as is the case with academic writing’s invocation of sources endowed with some kind authority (Maybin, 2001). Reported speech may also distort, deliberately or not, the intended meaning of the original speaker, as happens in political rhetoric; a source in a news story may complain of words taken out of context (Maybin, 2001). Thus, reporting matters.

Voloshinov identifies two basic styles of reporting speech: the *linear style*, which reproduces verbatim the speech of another and clearly delineates the voice of the original speaker and the reporter; and the pictorial style, in which “the reported speech is
infiltrated with the reporter’s speech, and the boundaries become much more fuzzy,” (Maybin, 2001, pp. 68-69). Voloshinov suggests that the linear style is more often used to report the speech of authoritative sources (Maybin, 2001).

Maybin (2001, p. 69) specifically sites newspaper stories as heteroglot sites filled with multiple voices: “The voices of witnesses and spokespeople (of varying degrees of authority), the journalist, sub-editor and editor all participate in constructing the message for the reader.” Meaning, however, is not made only in the text. Voloshinov (quoted in Maybin, 2001, p. 69) states: “In essence, meaning belongs to a word in its position between speakers; that is, meaning is realized only in the process of active, responsive understanding.” In this thesis, I do not examine the entire process of meaning making in news stories about interracial families; my study concentrates on the dialogic interactions within the texts themselves, but I include material that suggests how multiracial people might interact with news stories about people like themselves. Actual reader response must wait for another project. For the moment, I turn to examples of textual analyses that touch on themes related to those in my own project.

**Textual Analysis of News: Applying the Theory in Practice**

McKee (2001, p. 9), goes back to basics in defining textual analysis: The mass media scholar does not use his prodigious knowledge to discover the “true” meaning of the text, but the interpretations various actual readers might make. McKee (2001, pp. 10-11) cautions against reading undifferentiated racism and sexism in every text, since “such an approach robs of us the ability to distinguish between texts on the basis of their differences and different uses,” (McKee 2001, p. 11). McKee (2001) argues in favor of Cultural Studies scholars maintaining a reflexive attitude towards their work and making
public the theoretical bases for our interpretations. We can do no better than “attempt to understand how others understand [and] to attempt to make them understand how we do,” (McKee, 2001, p. 13). With McKee’s caveats in mind, we can now study examples of textual analysis of news.

**News and the Ideology of Whiteness**

Shah (1995) argued for a textual analysis that studied the role of media in assigning social positions on the basis of race, class and gender. He followed his own advice in his 1999 study, in which he read every story about Asian Indians in the *New York Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle*, plus a few other sources, from 1906 to 1923. The time period spans the year Asian Indians first applied for U.S. citizenship and the year when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled them ineligible for citizenship (Shah, 1999). He searched his texts for discourses linking sociopolitical constructions of race, nation and citizenship (Shah, 1999, p. 251). “Discourses about race and nation help create a national identity and racial hierarchy that renders Whiteness a sign of superiority and inclusion while relegating non-Whites to an inferior status, at times excluding them altogether from the social, political, and cultural life of the nation,” Shah (1999, p. 251) writes. Shah (1999, p. 253) cites Hall’s introduction to *Paper Voices*, in explaining his method as “the close examination ‘of language and rhetoric, of style and presentation’ supported by and linked to the social, political and cultural context in which the texts are produced.” Shah (1999, p. 254) found that news stories between 1907 and 1917 “depicted a split image along the lines of what U.S. journalists simplistically thought was caste,” depicting “low-caste” Asian Indians as stupid, lazy and inept, while “high-caste” Asian Indians were often cited positively for their intellect, education, spirituality and “pure blood,” (Shah,
A 1917 trial of a number of Asian Indians accused of subversive activities related to the campaign against British rule in India was dubbed “the Hindu conspiracy,” in the papers, which lead to a shift to negative treatment of all Asian Indians (Shah, 1999, pp. 257-259). “News coverage of Asian Indians between 1906 and 1923 helped to stake out a cultural boundary that defined what it meant to be American,” Shah (1999, p. 261) writes, in this case indirectly privileging Whiteness through “naming of the supposed inferior qualities of non-Whites.”

Research on contemporary news coverage demonstrates Whiteness remains an ex-nominated norm. Brooks and Rada (2002) found this to be the case in an examination of news stories about the Black community’s continued strong support for President Bill Clinton during the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal. Brooks and Rada (2002, p. 116) found that newspapers, magazines and television network news used five discursive frames to explain African American’s support for Clinton: “morality, political pragmatism, distrust of the criminal justice system, forgiveness/redemption, and Clinton’s rapport with African Americans.” Brooks and Rada (2002) argue that these frames contributed to the social construction of race in two ways. One ways was that the frames treated “Black people in near universal and essentialist ways.” The second way these media stories constructed race was to focus on Black support of the President without any examination of the White support or non-support of Clinton, which “reinforced a racial hierarchy whereby whiteness served as an invisible racial norm,” (Brooks & Rada, 2002, p. 117).
“Such constructions,” Brooks and Rada (2002, p. 117) write, “work to maintain the privilege and power associated with whiteness and ultimately strengthen it as a racial standard.”

**The Black Panthers vs. Authoritative Discourse**

Jane Rhodes’s (1999) study of the relationship between the Black Panther Party and national media seeks to find an alternative to the leftist view that dominant media simply demonized the party and its leaders, as well as right-wing views that assert the press glamorized a group of self-promoting thugs. Under the heading “Dialogics and Power,” Rhodes (1999, p. 96) explains: “This study relies on the idea that the national news coverage of the Black Panther Party was part of a dialogic relationship between media subjects, media producers, and consumers in a rich mix of communication, ideology, and history. These interlocking components – the mode and substance of news stories, the political and cultural beliefs underlying the stories, and the national histories that made these stories newsworthy – form what Mikhail Bakhtin called a heteroglot of language.” Rhodes (1999, p. 96) goes on to say, “Through the dialogic model, the Black Panther Party and the journalists who covered it can be understood as agents active in the production of ideas and images … it can offer ways of understanding media coverage that move beyond an ahistorical, one-way model of media effects.”

Rhodes’s study works mostly through the concept of framing, and she does not mention dialogism for several pages after the second page, but we can see the dialogic struggle that took place in the 1960s when the Panthers made their dramatic entrance onto the national stage. I read the Panthers highly conscious media strategy as an assertion of internally persuasive discourse, attempting to gain the power of authoritative discourse.
Rhodes (1999, p. 99) writes: “The Black Panthers, like many activists before them, were intent on reshaping and redefining the image of black America.” The Panthers were fighting an uphill battle against the authoritative discourses of White supremacy and law and order, as voiced in the national media.

Ultimately, authoritative discourse triumphed in this story. Rhodes (1999) argues that the press framed the issue as a problem of Black men wielding guns and using militant rhetoric, rather than as a problem of the desperate conditions of the Black community that spawned the anger and militancy. One former Panther commented that that the party’s aggressive publicity did make news but “ultimately damaged their attempt at self-representation,” (Rhodes, 1999, p. 113). She cautions that the press’s transmission of dominant ideologies should make scholars cautious about using news stories as historical evidence (Rhodes, 1999). “To reconstruct the story of the Black Panthers through the pages of the New York Times and U.S. News and World Report would tell a great deal about elites’ responses to the group but fairly little about who they were, what they did and how they were received in black communities.” (Rhodes, 1999, p. 115).


A Multiracial Identity Case Study

Squires and Brouwer’s (2002) study of three cases of “passing” offers a rare example of a textual analysis that directly addresses media treatment of multiracial identity, although in this case not somebody who attempts to claim such an identity. Squires and Brouwer (2002) analyzed the cases of a woman who unsuccessfully
petitioned the state of Louisiana to change its official designation of her as Black, and of two transgendered individuals. Passers, they explain, “… are charged with performing a privileged identity … in order to mask non-privileged identities …” (Squires & Brouwer, 2002, p. 283). The charge comes from an “in-group clairvoyant,” somebody from the marginal group who “can see through the pass,” unlike the “dupe,” someone from the privileged group who believes the passer (Squires & Brouwer, 2002, p. 283).

The racial passing case is that of Susie Guillory Phipps, a Louisiana woman who self-identified as White, but who had Black ancestors and relatives (Squires & Brouwer, 2002). After discovering that her birth certificate designated her as “colored,” Phipps unsuccessfully campaigned to force the state to alter the designation; the case drew attention from national media and Black-oriented media (Squires & Brouwer, 2002). Squires & Brouwer (2002) examined coverage of the Phipps story in what they call “dominant” media, such as the New York Times and New Yorker, and “marginal” media, such as Jet, in order to compare and contrast how each media group framed the story, as well as to emphasize that the unequal power and influence of dominant media are not absolute.

Squires & Brouwer (2002) find that dominant and marginal media both tended to reduce Susie Phipps’ identity to monoracial, although for different reasons. Dominant media tended to limit the context of the Phipps story to Louisiana and its particular multiracial history (Squires & Brouwer, 2002). The New Yorker noted Louisiana had long had “…a substantial number of residents who are not easily categorized racially or by their appearance,” while the New York Times wrote that the story, “… has elements of anthropology and sociology special to this region,” (Squires & Brouwer, 2002). Maps
highlighting Louisiana, phrases such as “local color” and references to the ambiguous term “Creole” framed the Phipps story as a tale of exotic racial intrigue without any nationwide implications (Squires & Brouwer, 2002). The dominant media focused on the question of definitions of Blackness and how much “Black blood,” it took to make someone Black, and never the definition of Whiteness or questions of White privilege (Squires & Brouwer, 2002).

Black publications, however, did place the Phipps story in a wider national and historical context (Squires & Brouwer, 2002). *Ebony* recalled the long history of “passing, racial double-standards, and a host of other laws that punished those who crossed over the color line,” (Squires & Brouwer, 2002). *Ebony* stated: “Whatever the outcome of the Phipps case, the problem of racial classification will continue, for the national definition of race is still vague,” (Squires & Brouwer, 2002, p. 293). But in the Black media, Susie Phipps, the individual, tended to disappear behind the issues of state designation of racial identity and the history of civil rights (Squires & Brouwer, 2002.)

Squires & Brouwer (2002) also found that the Black media still framed the issue of racial identity around the question of “Who is Black?” rather than on “Who is White?” although in their case this framing was influenced by the political necessity of maintaining a well-defined Black identity.

Squires & Brouwer (2002) conclude that the framing of the Phipps case in both dominant and marginal media limited the impact of the story. The interests of both dominant and marginal groups “can serve to narrow the scope of debates over identity, and, by extension, affect the length and quality of discourses concerning these events and issues in the public sphere,” (Squires & Brouwer, 2002, p. 302). The dominant press
never challenged the “one drop rule,” while the Black press, while criticizing the rule’s double standard, “implicitly endorsed” the rule “in the name of solidarity,” (Squires & Brouwer, 2002, p. 302). They do point out that the contemporary visibility of multiracial celebrities such as Tiger Woods and Mariah Carey, and the increased visibility of multiracial families and issues, provide resources not available to the press during the Phipps story in the 1980’s, but caution that the availability of new “identity markers” does not solve the problems of people trying to live outside traditional race and gender categories (Squires & Brouwer, 2002). Better labels aren’t the issue; rather, “It is the ability of individuals to move through different identity performances and to choose their identity performances that we believe ought to be the ‘lessons’ of these case studies,” (Squires & Brouwer, 2002, p. 306).

A Preview of My Own Analysis

As an example of my own study, I examine a story from the Atlanta Journal Constitution (Riddle, 1998, Apr. 18, para. 1), which begins: “Reuben Wright is all set to marry the woman of his dreams. What he didn’t know until recently is that technically he will be breaking South Carolina law when he does.” This is because: “Wright is black; his fiancée, Susan Gentry, is white. And South Carolina remains one of only two Southern states where the state constitution specifically outlaws interracial marriage,” (Riddle, 1998, Apr. 18, para. 2).

The contest of discourses in these few sentences is already intense. Readers have already been cued by the headline, which tips them off that the story is about South Carolina’s referendum to eliminate a law against interracial marriage still on the books, but not in force after Loving v. Virginia. The story opens with a discourse of people in an
interracial marriage as outlaws. Such a lead is a standard practice for reporters: introduce an individual, or in this case a couple, whose situation represents some kind of issue, in this case, continuing social conflict over interracial marriage and race relations. The “taste” of the words is the taste of transgression. There is, I must add, a kind tease going on here, since the reader learns quickly that the couple is really breaking the law. Such playful deception is a device reporters use to draw in the reader, who is now curious to know more about these “criminals.” This said, the first words we read are, in essence, “here are two people whose relationship is problematic.” It is the reporter who tells us this, not the would-be interracial outlaws, only of whom speaks, and only at the end of the story. This is a case of what Voloshinov identified as “the pictorial style”: the reporter draws for the reader a picture of the interracial couples. Before Reuben Wright speaks, we hear from a state representative who declares, “… a good Southern Baptist ought not to do this,” (Riddle, 1998, Apr. 18, para. 10) that is, marry interracially – although this representative did vote to put the bill eliminating the ban on the upcoming election ballot. We also hear from one of the sponsors of the bill, who “believes that interracial marriage strikes at the heart of many people’s beliefs,” more so even than the controversy over the Confederate flag on the capitol dome, mentioned just before this passage. The legislator bravely asserts, “‘It’s better to face it head-on. It [repealing the law] won’t unleash anything that’s not already there,’” (Riddle, 1998, Apr. 18, para. 13). What, then, has already been unleashed? Miscegenation? Vengeful Klansman? It is also possible that I am reading more into this statement than was intended. The legislator might have meant, “It’s not big deal. It’s already happening.”
Which is what Reuben Wright seems to think. In the reporter’s paraphrase, he says he hopes “South Carolinians will not create an uproar over this issue,” (Riddle, 1998, Apr. 18, para. 14) which seems to be the case even in this “small conservative city” where Reuben teaches and coaches high school football, and he is the only black person in his neighborhood. Students, we’re told, don’t seem to mind Wright’s White girlfriend. The story concludes with Wright’s words, the only ones that are exactly his own: “ ‘A lot of people didn’t even know it was in the Constitution,’ he said.” That is, it isn’t a big deal after all, except it is a big deal, because it’s in the news. Reuben Wright’s and Susan Gentry’s relationship stirs up feelings. This relationship is a bigger deal than the Confederate flag, which was big news for months. The weight of the story is against Reuben Wright’s view of the situation: he speaks directly only once, sounding naïve after almost six hundred words about the passions aroused in the state by interracial marriage. I should point out that I am not reading this story as against interracial marriage; the story clearly views laws against interracial marriage as archaic and deserving to be erased, but most clearly of all, we are left with a discourse of interracial marriage representing racial conflict, the persistence of which we may read as pessimistic. There are other stories that better highlight the internally persuasive discourses of interracial couples, which I will examine in the next chapter.

The Search for Representative Texts

My search for news texts to analyze faced the contradictions of being thorough enough to yield examples that I could justify as representative, while keeping the search within the physical and time limits of what one individual could do. What I ultimately
worked with was a sample of convenience that does not pretend to be a scientific sample, but hopefully my search was thorough enough to yield valid, if preliminary results.

To find representative examples of print media articles about interracial families, I searched articles from general-interest newspapers, and news magazines, as well as consumer publications aimed at African American readers. I conducted searches and downloaded stories from Lexis/Nexis Academic Universe, EBSCO and Academic Search Premier. This search yielded a sample comprising metropolitan and national newspapers and magazines in every geographic region of the Continental U.S. No stories from publications based in Alaska or Hawaii met the search criteria, which may be due to the low numbers of African Americans in these states. The time period covered spanned 1990 to the present. Aside from the interest of manageability, this time span is significant for two reasons. First, 1991 is the first year a slim majority of Americans in a Gallup Poll expressed a favorable opinion on interracial marriages (Gallup, 1999). Second, my own interracial marriage began in 1991, and so began my personal interest in media treatment of relationships such as mine.

My search terms included all possible combinations of “interracial marriage,” “interracial family” “interracial relationships” “multiracial family,” “bi-racial,” “Black” “White” “African American” “marriage” and “family.” To be included in my analysis, the articles had to come from United States publications and cover events and people in this country, and have as their main topic interracial marriages, interracial/multiracial families (see Chapter 1 for explanations of terms), individuals from such families, or public debate surrounding issues of interest to interracial/multiracial families. I excluded stories about multiracial celebrities such as Tiger Woods, Mariah Carey and Halle Berry
because these stories highlight individual celebrities. The representation of multiracial celebrities, and who and what they are used to represent, are vital questions. In this thesis, however, I am interested in hearing interracial/multiracial families speak, in their own untutored voices, about how they negotiate racial borders in their everyday lives.

This thesis will cover only heterosexual marriages/families including one Black and one White parent, the children of which were conceived within the relationship, or in some cases, families in which a parent is of mixed ancestry. I will not address interracial or interethnic relationships between Whites and Asians, Whites and Latinos, Whites and Native Americans, or Blacks and other groups. In his book on multiracial identity, Daniel (2002) notes there have been many recently challenges to the adequacy of the Black-White paradigm for understanding past, present and future race relations, but he argues that there are good reasons to continue focusing on the Black/White question. Among these reasons are that Black people have long been the largest designated minority in the country, and that American law has been, and continues to be, preoccupied with Blackness (Daniel, 2002). He further argues that “the black-white paradigm has been the touchstone for the treatment of all racialized ‘Others’ in the United States,” despite that paradigm’s limited application to the experience of other minority groups; and the black-white paradigm continues to historically ground those experiences (Daniel, 2002, p. xi). In justifying her own focus on Black/White families, Dalmage (2001) points out that only Blacks have been held to the one-drop rule. Dalmage (2001, p. 7) also stress that “black-white multiracial families have a unique history in the United States because of the legacy of slavery, and black-white familial relations (or the regulation of such relations) have been inextricably linked to white supremacist and patriarchal power:”
This thesis’s geographical limitation to the U.S. is necessary, aside from purely practical matters of limiting the number of articles, because the matrix of historical, social, cultural and journalistic factors is different in each country, even if we limit the discussion to the English-speaking West. I do not claim knowledge of any social and cultural conditions outside the U.S. (and only limited knowledge of conditions within this country).

I have also excluded transracial adoption from the current analysis. Although a number of transracial adoption stories turned up in my searches, I decided that this volatile issue does not engage questions of sexuality or the physical ambiguities that result from interracial intimacy. Transracial adoption does, however, engage enough questions about the social construction of race to merit future research.

Over 100 stories met my search criteria. Year by year, the number of interracial family stories varied widely, from 9 in 1997 to 19 in 1999, 20 in 1991 and 26 in 1996. There appears to be no obvious trend: for instance, the count varies from 9 stories in 1995 to 26 stories in 1996 and back to 9 the next year. In less than half of 2003, 13 stories on interracial families have already appeared, after only 9 in all of 2002.

The wide variation suggests that interracial marriage appears only sporadically on the news radar screen. Unlike the routine activities of government, business and sports, interracial families appear on the news radar screen only around non-routine events. In the mid-1990’s, the emergence of the debate about the proposed multiracial category for the 2000 Census prompted several stories a year, some of them analytical pieces well over 2,000 words long – a lot of real estate in the tight market of column inches. The year 1999 featured the PBS documentary *An American Love Story*, an event that sparked
coverage around the nation. Recently, Randall Kennedy’s (2003) book on “interracial intimacies” made news, due at least as much to the celebrity of the author, whose previous book about the history of the word “nigger” grabbed much attention.

The question of interracial intimacy, however, still struggles to stay on the public radar screen. In 1997, President Bill Clinton initiated a public “Conversation on Race,” but, according to Kennedy (2003), interracial families and sexual relations barely came up. (For that matter, six years later, it is difficult to recall anything discussed in that “conversation.”)

**News Values and the Placement of Stories**

There are also stories in my sample that do not appear pegged to any particular event. Most interracial family stories appear as features in sections with labels such as “Life Style” “Living,” which indicate what news culture calls “soft news.” In these stories, the reader learns of various social trends, such as child rearing, living arrangements, school issues, health and nutrition, relationships, and sexuality.

Such stories are constructed as “soft,” for two reasons. One reason simply has to with time: “hard” news just happened or is happening today, while “soft” news is current, but not pegged to immediate events. A soft news story can appear today, tomorrow or next week without losing impact. More fundamentally, soft news is placed lower on the hierarchy of news values, and physically inside the paper. In news magazines, soft news tends to appear towards the front and towards the back, while the “big” stories occupy the privileged middle of the magazine and the cover. News culture places politics, wars, disasters, crime, and business and economics on the front page and immediately following pages.
Arguments about the hierarchy of new values are complex, but relevant to this thesis. If we wish to examine who is allowed to speak about what, it matters very much where news culture places speakers’ words on the stratified real estate map of news columns, and on what levels of the hierarchy of news values speakers are placed. In Barker-Plummer (1995), we saw how the National Organization for Women managed to establish a relatively prestigious address of news real estate, but only by adopting the values of mainstream news organizations, and at the price of limiting the scope of what issues NOW could address (see Chapter 2). Other feminist organizations, which refused to adopt mainstream news values, never “moved in.” News media did not share their view that “the personal is political.” (Barker-Plummer, 1995). The commonplace phrase “that’s not exactly front page news” could also mean, “it may be personal, but it’s not political.”

Interracial/multiracial families have found an address in the news, but they have not won full-time occupancy. Nonetheless, regular visits to this neighborhood can reveal that something’s going on, even if hardcore news jocks, like Bob Dylan’s Mr. Jones, don’t know what it is. An article may be slotted in the “soft news” section, but this does not mean it can’t tell a story of profound social significance. It is, I suggest, in the inside sections, with their big color photos and elaborate layouts, that we can hear bits and pieces of internally persuasive discourse, spoken by everyday people who do not speak the language of officialdom, and who therefore are less bound by the rigid categories of
authoritative discourse. Challenges to the naturalized categories and narrative forms of the front page may not be front-page news, but an alert reader can find these challenges.

**Themes Found and Questions Asked of Each Story**

Having identified a selection of stories, I began to scan each story, with particular attention to the leads and endings, to see what patterns might emerge. As I scanned the stories, I found that the stories were built around a few basic themes, which were the “unquestioned and unnoticed conventions of narration,” that became “the premise of any conversation at all,” (Schudson, 1992, p. 54). One theme, the heteroglossia of stories from other media, is a theme I read into the stories based on my theoretical foundations, explained above. Each story did not necessarily stick to one theme. Often two themes clashed within one story.

One theme was *the problems of interracial families, or the problem of interracial families*, which focused on the difficulties such families face relating to relatives, friends and communities; as well as the challenges these families pose to others. Another theme was *interracial families as “The New Face of America.”* This theme describes the interracial family as the vanguard of a utopian future in which “race no longer matters,” or matters much less. In stories that sound this theme, phrases such as “colors of the rainbow,” “the color of love” “the face of the future,” and pepper the headlines and bodies of these stories. Readers may hear of “crumbling barriers,” “our increasingly color blind society” and the “multiracial/multiethnic/multicultural future,” although my analysis will suggest that some soundings of this theme are not as progressive as they seem.
Another theme was *interracial families and public controversies*. Events such as lawsuits, proposed legislation, racially charged crimes, and school incidents can propel interracial/multiracial families into the spotlight, which effectively frames the families as controversial. The states of Alabama and South Carolina held public referenda, in 1998 and 2000 respectively, to erase statutes against interracial marriage. These statutes were still on the books, although unenforceable since *Loving v. Virginia*. The campaigns to eliminate these null and void laws, now deemed embarrassing to their respective states, stirred reporters to locate interracial couples and frame them, however facetiously, as outlaws; and to dredge up people willing to go on the record as against interracial marriage, or at least against eliminating the laws. Such stories employ complicated discourses suggesting that, on one hand, the old laws were anachronisms no longer worth the fuss; and, on the other hand, that these anachronisms could still stir up dangerous, if now largely private, emotions.

The battle over revising the Census’s racial categories heated up well before the 2000 Census. Changes to Census forms and procedures require elaborate research and testing, with initial inquiries and proposals appearing before the middle of the decade between each Census. Even the most preliminary news of these activities mobilizes political forces that either advocate or oppose the proposed changes; these mobilizations easily set off the antennae of reporters, and a few of those stories will be analyzed in the next chapter.

*Some Black Voices.* To get at least some sense of a Black perspective on interracial unions, I turned to consumer magazines *Ebony* and *Essence*, both of which yielded examples from my keyword searches. I worked on the assumption, supported by
the works discussed in the Chapter 2 and above in this chapter, that print media not specifically designated as Black media work from a predominantly White, male and middle-class perspective, and that this perspective holds even if an individual journalist is Black or female. (For most stories in this thesis, I did not know the race of the reporter unless the writer identified himself or herself by race.) I did conduct an original search in *Ethnic News Watch* for stories in Black newspapers, including established papers such as the *Amsterdam News* and *Chicago Defender*, but the stories I found included little in-depth discussion of interracial marriage. I cannot say whether Black newspapers actually cover interracial marriage less often and in less depth than mainstream papers. I found a number of polemical arguments about Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and his interracial marriage, and repeated mentions of federal appeals court nominee Charles Pickering and his 1959 law review article suggesting ways to defend laws against interracial marriage. Pickering’s decades old stance clearly angered columnists in the Black papers, who included this point in arguing against his appointment to the federal bench. This suggests interracial marriage is in some way a salient issue for Black newspapers. A project examining interracial marriage in Black print media and other media would be welcome.

The *Ebony* and *Essence* stories offer a chance to explore interracial marriage in publications written by and addressed to African Americans. Squires and Brouwer (2002, see Chapter 2) found that what they called marginal media treated stories of passing differently than did dominant media. I found this to be the case in *Ebony* and *Essence* as well. In these stories, an individual voice speaks for several pages, whereas the same voice might have earned a few sentences or paragraphs in a newspaper story,
sandwiched between the experiences of other sources, without the time and space to speak in full voice.

The stories in these magazines differ from the newspaper stories in most of my sample, using looser formats and blurring lines between opinions and reporting. What we hear clearly in these stories, more so than in newspapers and news magazines, are personal voices less bound by news standards of objectivity and the reporter’s anonymity. In these articles, Black men and women speak. They speak the painful history of White men’s sexual exploitation of enslaved women, and of their descendants, and of contemporary problems between and among races and genders. In these articles, the sexual subtext boils to the surface. Some of these speak of overcoming history and subtext through loving relationships.

_Heteroglossia: Stories from other media._ Newspapers regularly report news from other media. Newspapers review TV programs, movies and books; these cultural products may also spark coverage of their producers, directors, actors and authors. The genesis and production of these cultural products can be news as well. The PBS documentary _An American Love Story_, first broadcast in 1999, produced in-depth articles in many papers. Reviewers and feature writers were unusually alert to the racial dialogue speaking in _An American Love Story_.

James McBride’s autobiographical _The Color of Water_ introduced an unusual story of a White woman who adopted a Black, or partly Black identity – an almost unheard of reversal of the passing narrative. The novelty of the story made McBride, his mother and his book naturals for extended reviews and interviews; those stories at least suggested alternatives to dominant narratives of conflict around interracial families.
To focus my investigation, I asked two multipart questions of each news story. Below, I list each question and elaborate on its significance to the larger questions of this study:

**Who speaks, in what voice, and saying what?** I divide the voices in these stories into two basic categories: sources and the reporter. The reporter’s voice is largely anonymous, speaking as an impersonal narrator, but this unnoticed narrative voice also speaks with the power vested in it by the authority of the newspaper. It is this voice (in collaboration with even more invisible editors) who chooses who will speak and in what order, and organizes the scattered pieces of information and speech into a simple, coherent narrative, which is largely determined by conventions. Recall here Schudson’s (1995, p. 54) insight into the invisible power of news forms: “News … has a relationship to the ‘real world,’ … in the way the world is incorporated into unquestioned and unnoticed conventions of narration, and then transfigured, no longer a subject for discussion but a premise of any conversation at all.” The premise of the conversation is often shaped by authoritative discourse, which comes “with authority already fused to it,” authority granted either by the newspaper’s own status or from the status of the source who speaks the discourse.

Members of interracial/multiracial families rarely speak from a position of authority. Their voices are more likely to speak internally persuasive discourse, and to argue with authoritative discourse. The extent to which such people “win the argument” or at least hold their own, depends on how the reporter shapes the narrative. The first and last words spoken, or the first and last events narrated, may have the most effect on the overall narrative, on the ‘taste’ that stays in the reader’s ‘mouth’ after reading the story. I
found, however, that in some stories the voice of an individual person in an interracial family, or the voices of a whole family, disappeared under the weight of official voices. This drowning out was more noticeable when the politics of interracial issues was the focus of the story, as in the Census debate. In all the stories, the “tastes” inserted by the reporter throughout the story, especially the beginning and end, give hints that the supposedly neutral reporter has snuck in an ideological judgment: it may be positive, negative or ambiguous, but not neutral, not objective – and possibly not conscious.

_Are dominant, and resistant or alternative racial discourses, present?_ Dominant racial discourses include sharply defined, binary racial categories, the “one drop rule,” the inevitably of racial conflict, and often subtle implications of White superiority and Black inferiority. Sexual anxiety and fear of the loss of racial purity and White privilege may also be present. Resistant or alternative racial discourses assert fluid multiracial identities, critique racial essentialism, racism and inequality, and offer optimistic visions of the racial future. Both kinds of discourses may be heard in the same story, sometimes alternating, sometimes clashing, or sometimes interwoven. Discourses bring into the article voices not actually interviewed, although they may speak through individuals.

In asking these questions, I am investigating what relationships print media might have with the multiracial identity project. Do the print media acknowledge the possibility of such a project, partially or on occasion? Do the print media help this project advance or impede it, and to what degrees? In interrogating these news texts, I am looking for signs of the struggle between monologue, which “closes down the represented world and represented persons,” and dialogue, which opens up the represented world and represented persons. As to the question of how a dialogic understanding of print media
stories about Black/White interracial families can contribute to dismantling the dominant racial order and constructing a new racial order, this is, perhaps, a matter of speculation. In carrying out this project, and others that may follow, I seek to empower internally persuasive discourses and reveal “ever new ways to mean.”

My sample spans 13 years. In selecting articles, I made a point of including articles from the beginning, middle and end of this period, in order to get some sense of any development. Although I do not have enough evidence to make a declaration, I have a sense that articles published in 2002 and 2003 suggest a greater sophistication among reporters about the issues around interracial/multiracial families and a more positive outlook about the position of interracial families in America.
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I analyze 19 newspaper and magazine articles spanning 1991 to 2003, following several themes as discussed in Chapter 3. I begin with stories that treat interracial families as a problem, or as having problems. Next, I analyze a story in which members of the Baha’i Faith who are in interracial marriages offers a different perspective on the problems and challenges that such families do face. I follow with three stories from Black publications, two from *Essence* and one from *Ebony*, which offer personal experiences with interracial marriage and relationships. I preface this section with a brief account of the history of rape and sexual exploitation of Black women by White men. The first story from *Essence* is largely negative about intimate relationships between Black women and White men, but with some ambivalence. The second story, from *Ebony*, offers a story of an interracial relationship that at first failed due to racial tensions, but later succeeded. The second story from *Essence*, by a Black man married to a White woman, offers a sometimes defiant account of love overcoming racial barriers. After hearing some Black voices, I return to dominant media with analysis of stories about the debate over proposed changes to Census 2000 that eventually allowed more freedom for multiracial people to identify themselves on Census forms. The articles demonstrate how the Census can serve as a proxy for broader political battles, and the extent to which the media serve as the battleground for the contending parties. In this section, I find that the voices of everyday people in interracial families tended to be
drowned out by the voices of official spokespersons for established political groups, and
that the “official spokespersons” identified for the multiracial “movement,” as selected by
the press, sometimes carried out political agendas contrary to the antiracist struggle
which is in the best interests of multiracialism.

In the next section, I move from news stories about events and issues to news
about cultural products that from other media that bring different perspectives into print
media. Specifically, I analyze print media coverage of the 1999 PBS documentary An
American Love Story. I discuss my finding that this innovative documentary brought out
sophisticated and fresh thinking about interracial families from reporters and reviewers. I
then discuss a single review of James McBride’s The Color of Water, written by a
reviewer who brought her own similar experiences to the review. I conclude the chapter
with analysis of two recent newspaper stories that suggest journalists may be taking a
more positive view of interracial families and their place in society.

Black + White = Problem

News practices are consistent, which is in many ways a good thing, since
consistency helps ensure the paper gets printed every day; but these practices can limit
possibilities as they become “the premise of any conversation at all.” One of those
premises is that there is a problem, in this case the existence of interracial relationships.

The Black/White problem opens several stories in this sample: “The problem?
Michelle is black, Kelley is white,” (Sheppard, 2000, Sep. 26, para. 2); “Wright is black;
his fiancée, Susan Gentry, is white,” (Riddle, 1998); an interracial couple has broken the
law “because Tony is African-American, Barbara is white, and Alabama is the last state
in the union to have a law prohibiting interracial marriages,” (Parker, 1999, Mar. 23,
para. 2). All of these stories use a couple to represent the conflict over Alabama’s or South Carolina’s impending votes to eliminate their laws against intermarriage. The stories open with this premise: There’s a problem with this relationship. The discourse speaking through the reporter’s narration reproduces the knowledge that Black/White relationships as trouble, and sometimes, that the people in the relationship are outlaws. In every one of these examples, it is the reporter who says the couple has a problem; the supposedly troubled couple has not yet spoken. To stress this point is not to argue that interracial relationships don’t have problems, either internally or socially; the point here is the consistency of presenting the relationship as being a problem or creating a problem.

The story may go on to mitigate the troubled state of the couple. For instance, in Sheppard (1999, Sep. 26, para. 3), one paragraph after “the problem,” we read, “As it turned out, nobody blinked an eye,” when the couple appeared their local courthouse to get their marriage license. Another pattern is that the couple gets lost in the issue. The Johnson’s, positioned as “outlaws,” get only one utterance, from the wife: “‘It’s time to get it off the books,’ says Mrs. Johnson. ‘Once it’s gone, it will take away some of the stigma that comes with this type of marriage,’” (Parker, 1999, Mar. 23, para. 6). Alas, we leave Barbara Johnson with her stigma and hear no more from her, as the rest of the story goes over Alabama’s racist history. Like Reuben Wright of South Carolina (see Chapter 3), the Johnson’s are introduced as law-breakers and speak little. The last word in the story that opens with the Johnson’s “illegal” marriage is a Black man engaged to a White woman, who argues that repeal of the intermarriage ban “‘…sends a loud signal that it is time to set aside old prejudice and call for a new day in Alabama,’” (Parker, 1999, Mar. 23, para. 6).
23, para. 22). We can read this conclusion as admitting that the new day has not dawned, or optimistically, that Alabama is ready for the dawn. In other stories, a much stronger dialogic struggle takes place.

**A Taste of Postmodernism**

An *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* article takes on a Postmodern taste in its headline: “Not black, not white, but biracial; Mixed-race people questioning labels,” (Watts, 1991, Dec. 1). The Postmodern taste comes from this rejection of established racial categories and advocacy of more fluid, self-selected identities. This article is not actually participating in the Multiracial Identity Project, but suggests that “mixed-race people” are doing just that. The lead says: “Larene LaSonde lived as a black American for 37 years: She participated in civil rights protests, she read widely in black history, and she twice married black men,” (Watts, 1991, Dec. 1, para. 1). Here is a demonstration of the great efficiency with which a skilled reporter works. In one sentence, the reader understands that Larene LaSonde “lived as a black American,” but no longer lives that identity. Here is a challenge to the monologic discourse of a fixed racial identity: playing with its borders, a gradual and flexible transition. The possibility that an individual can change racial identity, something still widely regarded as fixed, is a Postmodern challenge to identity formerly “regarded as a persisting entity,” (see the Conclusions section of Chapter 2).

In answering her son’s questions about identity, LaSonde catches herself “‘saying dumb things, like, ‘you may have white skin, but you are affirmatively black’ … Here I was telling them to find acceptance in the black community – I, who had never found acceptance in the black or white community,’” (Watts, 1991, Dec. 1, para. 4). LaSonde’s
unlikely solution is to adopt the old term “mulatto.”5 “Mulatto,” a term long abandoned because of its generally negative connotations, appears to be taking on what Voloshinov called an “evaluative accent,” (Maybin, 2001). Bost (2003) and Streeter (2003) both use the feminine form, “mulatta,” with a taste that is at least sometimes positive, which suggests that a resistant discourse can adopt a term discarded by a dominant discourse and reclaim, or claim it. Senna (quoted in Bost, 2003, p. 5), multiracial author of the Novel _Caucasia_ (1998) writes of waking up to discover herself in style: “‘It was the first day of the new millennium and I woke up to find that mulattoes had taken over.’” The news and the airwaves are full of Tiger Woods, Lenny Kravitz, Sade and Mariah Carey. “‘According to the racial zodiac, 2000 is the official year of the mulatto.’” (Bost, 2003, p. 5). LaSonde’s personal identity project seems devoid of the irony in Senna’s discovery, but perhaps, seven years earlier, the mulattos and mulattas had not yet become self-conscious.

Watts (1991, Dec. 1, para. 6) writes that LaSonde is among growing numbers of people from interracial families “who are demanding a radical rethinking of the classifications that have defined race relations in this country for hundreds of years.” The newspaper is not demanding this rethinking; such a stance might be found in an editorial, but not in reporting. In presenting this story to readers, the newspaper is making a judgment that this demand for rethinking racial categories is newsworthy, but the paper makes no commitment to this rethinking for itself. The newspaper does not appear to have a stake in the matter, although we might argue that this radical rethinking has implications for the paper’s reporting and language use.
Within its neutrality, the paper can adopt the voice of a source, who asks a question on its behalf. In this article, an editor inserted the subhead “Where do we fit?” one paragraph above the passage in which LaSonde asks that question. Mixing the pictorial and the linear reporting style, we first read, “When Larene LaSonde speaks of her life as mulatto, the term she prefers, she speaks with an intensity born of years of wrestling with the question of her racial identity,” (Watts, 1991, Dec. 1, para. 15, italics added). The reporter gives readers something we can’t see: the intensity of LaSonde’s expression and the source of that intensity; there is a hint of empathy here. We then read of a dialogic struggle: “‘You got white folks with their perceptions of black people, black people with their perceptions of white folks’ …. ‘We are the product of their mating. Where is that middle ground where we are comfortable? Where do we fit?’” (Watts, 1991, Dec. 1, para. 16). LaSonde is in the grips of the challenge described by Dalmage, quoted in Chapter 1; she too, is in search of a vocabulary to address her experiences. Like some biracial people, LaSonde has borrowed the existing but mostly abandoned term mulatto and rearticulated it. If no suitable new term presents itself, adopt an old one to try and answer the question, “Where do we fit?”

Other sources in the same article have less trouble with the question.). A 13-year-old named Amy of mixed heritage prefers “‘biracial’” or “‘mixed’” to “‘mulatto’” (Watts, 1991, Dec. 1, para. 25). The girl can’t call herself Black or White, because she has one parent of each race. “‘I’m just biracial,’” she insists, which sounds easy for her. Amy’s mother recalls that during her pregnancy, she was determined that her child
wouldn’t be called Black, because she would be both Black and White. Watts (1991, Dec. 1, para. 27) writes, “Amy says being biracial isn’t as difficult as many people suspect. She says she can embrace the best of the black and white worlds.” No tragic mulatta here, but the “Who am I” question lurches back towards an image of war at the article’s close.

Watts (1991, Dec. 1) does not decide the answer to the question but the article’s conclusion leaves a bitter taste. In the next to last paragraph, Watts (1991, Dec. 1, para. 42) quotes Southern Christian Leadership Conference leader Joseph Lowery suggesting that the multiracial movement may cause some Whites to question the “illogic” of racial classification – a positive development. But, the reader is left with this: “‘We’re talking about an identity, a raison d’être. We are the children of two mighty nations at war with each other since the beginning of time in this hemisphere,’” LaSonde says (Watts, 1991, Dec. 1, para. 43).

In leaving his source with the last word, the reporter merges her voice with his, which is also the voice of the paper. We begin with Larene LaSonde’s choice of dialogic identity, we learn of the biracial demand for a rethinking of racial categories, we the see the beginning of the rehabilitation of “mulatto.” The reader walks with Larene LaSonde on her path of struggle; then we are left an image of permanent war. A dominant discourse of racial strife gets the last word. The reporter may have been attracted to the colorful language of LaSonde’s rhetorical flourish, which does not resemble her previously reported utterances in style or tone. The selection, though, leaves doubts
about the utility of this struggle, as old as the hemisphere. Pessimism need not reign everywhere, however.

**Divine Intervention in the Border War**

On occasion, an alert or lucky journalist gains access to a discourse from outside the American racial conflict. Such is the case in a *Dallas Morning News* story (Wicker, 1998, June 10), in which members of the Baha’i Faith talk about the religious inspiration of their interracial marriages. The opening is a familiar one for interracial marriage stories: “Rhonda Palmer is white. Her husband, Walter is black.” (Wicker, 1998, June 10, para. 1) but then the story moves in an unexpected direction, noting, “Their religion teaches that God is particularly pleased with such interracial unions,” (Wicker, 1998, June 10, para. 2). Here is a hint of discourse as authoritative as discourse can get, however, “Not everybody shares that certainty, of course.” Of course, religious justifications for racial separation have been the rule; of course, not many people believe God favors race mixing. We learn that the Palmers, married since 1973, were run out of town by a Mississippi sheriff and verbally abused by a neighbor, but instead of mighty nations at war, “In each case, the Palmers proceeded calmly, secure in Baha’i teachings,” (Wicker, 1998, June 10, paras. 4-5). Few accounts of interracial marriages offer phrases such as “proceeded calmly.” The source of the Palmers’ calm proceeding is the teachings of Baha’u’llah, the prophet-founder of the Baha’i faith, who said, “‘The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens,’” (Wicker, 1998, June 10, para. 5). If such a sentiment is not unheard of today, it is not the norm in newspaper stories of interracial families.

Nor is the Palmers’ response to the Mississippi sheriff’s harassment: “‘We thought it was hilarious. In those days we thought everything was funny. We were so in
love,’” (Wicker, 1998, June 10, para. 6). The image of the menacing, beefy Southern sheriff slims down with this anecdote. The Palmers’ insulting neighbor eventually transforms as well, announcing she’s sorry to see them move (Wicker, 1998, June 10, para. 7). The workings of this so-far marginal discourse have educational potential, if enough people listen. “ ‘You realize that other folks haven’t gotten there yet, but you’ll help them,’” (Wicker, 1998, June 10, para. 11) says another Baha’i, Robert Henderson, a Black man with an Irish American wife and three children. Most readers probably need help to catch up with people who say such things as, “ ‘ … I thought it would wonderful to have an interracial marriage. To be able to live out this teaching and to be a living example,’” says a Kenyan woman married to White man from Alabama (Wicker, 1998, June 10, para. 16). Here is an idea not often heard in the interracial marriage debate: Not just that interracial marriage is okay if it happens, but it is a good thing to actually seek out. A religious justification for and motivation for interracial marriage takes the debate outside its usual legal, social and cultural confines. Entirely absent in this story is the commonplace talk of Jungle Fever, racial solidarity, sexualized others, lusting after forbidden fruit – all of the mythology of interracial unions is shut off – and gone as well is “what about the children?”

“ ‘Our kids were not taught about barriers. They were taught about the absence of barriers … It makes you see things fundamentally differently, because you see the points of unity,’” says Robert Henderson (Wicker, 1998, June 10, para. 23). This fundamentally different vision is only possible because it stems from what the Baha’is believe is authoritative discourse, but this is an authoritative discourse whose authority is not yet recognized. “ ‘It helps to have the reassurance that this is of God’ … ‘It helps to balance
out the rest of the society, which sees our marriage as an aberration,’” says Walter Palmer (Wicker, 1998, June 10, para. 26). The story maintains its atypical tone to the end. The Alabama man married to the Kenyan woman (say this to yourself: “White man from Alabama married to Black woman from Kenya,”) speaks the final word: “‘To me, it’s physically attractive just to see our hands holding, the ebony and the ivory’ … ‘I love the contrast on the outside. While on the inside, we’re so much the same,’” (Wicker, 1998, June 10, para. 32).

As in the story by Watts (1991, Dec. 1), Wicker (1998, June 10) appropriates the speech of a source to leave the final ‘taste’ in the reader’s mouth, but instead of the bitter taste of “mighty armies” at war, we get the sweet taste of two people holding hands. This story stands out as an oasis among a desert of story after story about conflict.

*Essence and Ebony: Dueling Dispatches From the Front*

Among Black/White interracial marriages, those with a Black wife and White husband are about one third of the total. Black women are less likely to marry someone of another race than Black men. A major reason for the lower number of Black women/White men is the history of rape and sexual exploitation of enslaved women, and continuing sexual exploitation after Emancipation. Spickard (1989, pp. 240-241) writes that there is an ample record of forced sex between White men and enslaved women; rape is one of the main features of slave narratives. Aside from outright rape, concubinage and prostitution, with varying degrees of coercion, were also common, with New Orleans practicing a particularly elaborate system of contractual sex between White men and women with varying degrees of Black ancestry (Spickard, 1989). The multiracial family
of today is a product of love, not war, slavery and exploitation (Root, 2003, p. 4; Dalmage, 2000, p. 5), but that history still speaks.

*Essence* is a glossy consumer magazine aimed at middle class Black women. The title is evocative; does it imply that the magazine represents, or searches for, the “essence” of the African American woman? Throughout the magazine, *Essence* uses terms such as “us” and “we” and adopts the African American practice of using the familial terms “sisters” and “brothers” generically. By implication, somewhere outside are people who are not “us,” who are not part of the big family. It would require an in-depth to study to explore whether *Essence* explicitly draws borders between “us” and whoever “them,” but what this familial style permits is a personal form of address used by voices not heard in the dominant media. Almost everybody who speaks in *Essence* (and *Ebony* as well) is Black, and in *Essence*, most of them are Black women, who speak without concern that “they” might be listening.

In one *Essence* article, Blakely (1999, July) is all mockery and contempt on the subject of interracial relationships. The title, “Dating White: When Sisters Go There,” references the colloquial phrase, “don’t even go there” -- let alone stay there, Blakely makes clear. After an opening paragraph about exchanging looks with White men in the streets, Blakely (1999, July, para. 3) opines: “I’ve been raised with the idea that they are no damn good, that all a Black woman ever got from a White man was trouble,” but then she admits, “Sometimes, when they catch my eye, it’s because I was staring first.”

The sexual subtext is out in the open in this story. Blakely (1999, July, para. 4) quotes bell hooks from an interview: “‘Every White man has two women in his life’ … ‘The White woman he’s married to and the Black woman of his dreams.’” Hook
suggests that this parallel vision is “another version of that tired classic, the Madonna-
whore divide,” (Blakely, 1999, July, para. 4). Blakely continues, and it is not clear who
is speaking, hooks or the writer: “With White women locked behind the gates of virtue,
Black women, the other, became everything sexual, wild, secret. Who do voodoo like
she do? With motivations like that, it’s no wonder Black women ignored and distrusted
White men.” Ironically enough, what seems to merge in such passages is the voice of
White supremacist discourse, sexualizing Black women to justify exploitation, and Black
women’s own voicing of sexual politics. Blakely seems to agree that sex and power are
all that goes on between White men and Black women. One source (Blakely, 1999, July,
para. 14) says of an aborted sexual encounter with a White man: “‘He took his clothes
off. It was so … pink, no, red. I just couldn’t.’” Another woman accused a date of just
wanting to see the color of her nipples (Blakely, 1999, July, para. 15). Coarse sexual
language piles up: “‘… there’s going to be that guy that wants to know if you’re going
to suck his d--- [sic] differently’ … ‘I used to be an equal opportunity f---,’ … ‘I realized
they were just trying to get some Black p---’ (Blakely, 1999, July, para. 16)’” There is
truth in all this. Some White men do want sex with Black women and believe sexual
stereotypes about them, but Blakely gives only hints that any other dynamic could be at
work.

Blakely (1999, July, para. 19) does explain some of the history. Paraphrasing
bell hooks (but without naming the book to which she refers) Blakely writes of hooks’
contention that marriage between White men and black women would demolish the
power structure built on the White standard of beauty, submission of Black women, and
“the whole BS hierarchical system as we know it.” This seems a gross oversimplification
of the power structure in the U.S., but still an attempt to address power relations.

“According to hooks,” (again, without any citation) “it would be a powerful act of
defiance for Black women to choose to be with White men and vice versa.” Blakely
(1999, July, para. 19) dismisses the suggestion, asking “How can I look at my own
honey-colored skin and not see slave rape?” A Black woman lawyer, noting her law
school classmates dating White men, reads books and asks herself, “Do I hate who I
am?” (Blakely, 1999). Who exactly is speaking these words? They come from a
discourse that says interracial marriage is pathology, “the gratification of a depraved
taste,” (Ruchames 1955, p. 253), or the result of self-loathing, rebellion against parents,
revenge against the white man (in the case of black men), exhibitionism and masochism
(Brown, 2000, p. 101). In truth, anybody of any race can marry – or have sex -- for
unhealthy reasons. Blakely (1999, July) and her carefully selected sources (nobody in the
story thinks interracial relationships really work) are trapped by the racial monologue
even as they enjoy unprecedented freedom to flirt and “give White men the business,”
(Blakely, 1999, July, para. 10).

Towards the end of her article, Blakely (1999, July, para. 31) reveals one voice
that speaks to her and through her: her father. “Black people are in a state of siege, he
would say when I was growing up. You can’t love the people and the enemy too.”
Blakely (1999, July, para 31) confesses that she fears her father’s disappointment if she
loved the enemy too, but then recalls that she did for a time, in Oxford, England. That
relationship broke up over his family’s opposition, so “maybe those days in Britain are
why I flirt back with them. Maybe those days after Britain are why I never let them too
close” (Blakely, 1999, July, para. 36)
This is the language created by “the enemy”: individualized, subjective us and generalized, objective them. The problem is not loving “the enemy,” but adopting his language as though it can somehow free you. The monologic discourse of “us” and “them” pervades Blakely’s (1999, July) article, offering no solution but separation or temporary liaisons. This monologue works as long as writer and reader understand “us” and “them,” but in fact this understanding requires constant reinforcement. “A unitary language is not something that is given, but in its very essence must be posited,” Bakhtin (1981, p. 270) writes. Or, as Omi and Winant (1994) might put it, Blakely participates in a racial project, inhabiting the categories already created by “them.”

In Blakely’s confusion and pain we find proof that the racial border can be a No Man/Woman’s Land, from which some fall back wounded, rather than dancing back home glowing with hybrid vigor. In Dalmage’s (2001) polysemic terms, Blakely has “tripped over the color line,” although in her case, Blakely seems to have sought out the trip wire before taking a step. Some of the wounded eventually manage to heal and forge a new wholeness.

In an article in *Ebony*, Cook (1999, March) also speaks of an interracial relationship broken up by the racial monologue, spoken by both Whites and Blacks, but her solution is not Blakely’s self-frustrating game of flirt-and-hide. Cook (1999, March), too, speaks of the history of interracial mating, but does associate herself with slave rape. Noting recent news coverage about DNA evidence proving Thomas Jefferson had had children by Sally Hemings, Cook (1999, March) is surprised at the public shock this news produced. “I always thought interracial mixing and marriage were as old as America itself,” Cook (1999, March, para. 3) writes, in fact, “knowledge that the races mixed,
dated, married and gave birth to biracial children has been in my understanding and experience since my early childhood.”

History does not produce bitterness in everybody. Cook (1999, March, para. 4) recalls the segregation still practiced during her early childhood in the 1950’s and how her parents “lived the racism of being Southern in the ’30s and ’40s, but definitely didn’t pass it onto their children.” For Cook, there is no domineering patriarchal voice telling her she can’t love “the people” and “the enemy” too. The message from Cook’s childhood is “any problem you were faced with in life, the Lord most definitely would handle,” (Cook, 1999, para. 5). It was Cook and her White partner who “couldn’t handle it.”

The couple, both working the music business, developed their relationship during the 1960’s and 1970’s, a period of musical and social experimentation in which Blacks and Whites worked and played together (Cook, 1999, para. 7). This kind of cultural and social mixing was itself a result of the Civil Rights movement; the breakdown of formal barriers between the races broke down social and sexual barriers as well, but not completely. Cook’s partner, whom she met in the 1970’s (they did not marry until the 1990s), is from a, “White, upper-class, politically and socially prominent family,” (the “enemy”) for whom marriage to a Black person is “a fate worse than death,” (Cook, 1999, March, para. 4). When his family found out he was cohabitating with a Black woman, their reaction, “sent shock waves of stress and fear through our relationship.” Her partner heard from Black friends that Black women “couldn’t be trusted and were bossy and aggressive by nature,” (Cook, 1999, March, para. 9). Her comment: “And to think we’re worried about what White folks say. This kind of
undermining of our own race I feel has been passed on through the years from slavery,”

(Cook, 1999, March, para. 9). Cook’s engagement with history recognizes that “the
enemy” can be Black or White. Cook’s own family “expressed the feeling that it would
always be easier to marry one of your own.” Such beliefs are monologic, never
questioning the premises behind the meaning of “one of your own.” From the parents,
“politically and socially prominent,” – and knowing that it takes to remain so – comes an
authoritative discourse masquerading as parental concern. The meaning of “one of your
own,” was produced by the racial project of whites seeking to perpetuate inequalities in
their favor. The racial monologue triumphed, temporarily, and Cook and her unnamed
partner broke up.

For Cook and her eventual husband, the story has a happy ending. In their
years apart, both had relationships with “one of your own,” but none of those relationship
produced permanent happiness (Cook, 1999, March, para. 11). Cook comments, “Our
choosing mates from our own race didn’t ensure that our relationships would last. And
they didn’t.” The marriage that has lasted is the one between Cook and her White
partner, who got back together in the more dialogic 1990’s, “a world where we are much
more exposed to each other’s cultures, etc.,” (Cook, 1999, March, para. 12). From
international food and music to TV, the Internet and work and play, the Cooks live in
heteroglossia. There is no enemy here. “We share history, a love for music, religious
and spiritual beliefs and strong family ties. I believe that these are the ingredients for a
sound and solid bond between man and wife, whatever race they may happen to be,”
(Cook, 1999, March, para. 13, italics added). Without the last clause, this quote could be
from someone in a monoracial marriage. The racial monologue perpetuates the myth that
shared history, music, religion and family ties are only possible within races and not between them. Cook places her evaluative accent on what otherwise is a cliché of same-race marriage, turning into a prescription for racial harmony, at least at the one-on-one level of relationships.

Cook’s (1999, March) wounds were inflicted by the same sources as Blakely’s (1999, July): family and friends in the throes of the racial monologue, but after 20 years, Cook has healed (love finds a way), while Blakely is left playing a game of sexual hide and seek, jumping between hiding and seeking, the better not to let “them” get too close – but not too far away, either. The authoritative discourse of racial separation permits no play around its edges: both Blakely and Cook were cut by the edges. Cook (1999, March) has turned inward to an internally persuasive discourse, only after two decades of regret. Today, Cook and her partner live part of each year in a multiethnic community. Cook leaves the reader with a sweet taste: “I have to say that I’ve chosen the mate I have because we, as a couple, represent our surroundings. Our world is a rainbow of color as God intended.”

We do not often hear the voice of God in these stories. The advantage in studying articles in magazines such as *Ebony* and *Essence* is that the voices of the people actually tripping over the color line sound more fully, placing themselves into narratives that differ from the standardized forms of newspapers, and bringing in other voices of their own choosing. Dominant journalism sees conflict everywhere, or, at best, failed resolutions of conflicts. Cook (1999, March) finds herself in line with what she believes are God’s intentions, and has the freedom to sound a voice blended with those intentions. An earthier voice might just tell people disturbed by interracial marriage to “get over it.”
This is what Pierre-Pierre (1998) does in *Essence*. “My wife is white. Get over it,” he declares in his first sentence (Pierre-Pierre, 1998, July, para. 1). *Essence*’s editors, alert to Pierre-Pierre’s tone, gave the story the headline “The White Wife,” and the deck: “Got a problem with interracial couples? This happily married brother says keep it to yourself.” A reader unfamiliar with the sexual politics behind this text will miss the weight of the three words “the White wife.” Adams (1994/1996, p. 217), in an essay that pondered why Black women seemed to have so little sympathy for the suffering of Nicole Brown Simpson, comes to realize “She embodies a little discussed wound in the heart of many African-Americans: the white wife.” While disavowing those concerns for herself, as the O.J. Simpson story unfolded, she “began to see the twisted, pivotal role racism seems to play in interracial affairs;” (Adams, 1994/1996, p. 217).

Pierre-Pierre’s attitude is that people should go twist themselves. Pierre-Pierre (1998, July, para. 2) tells a close friend of his intent to marry Donna, “a petite woman of English, German and Irish ancestry from Indiana,” and the reaction from his friend: “her jaw dropped as if she’d been hit with a Mike Tyson hook.” Pierre-Pierre (1998, July, para. 3) describes a pattern of such reactions, and writes, “if a Black friend could have such a visceral reaction, then you know strangers could be far worse. And they have been. You know who you are,” (italics added). Pierre-Pierre may be addressing the authors of previous *Essence* articles and readers, as well as strangers. “Most often, we get the Why is he with her? stare, the rolled eyes, the sucked teeth,” Pierre-Pierre (1998, July, para. 4) recalls. “Every once in a while, a brave soul gets cocky, like the sister in the parking lot one day who muttered, ‘Jungle fever,’ as we passed by. We paid her no mind.”
But Pierre-Pierre (1998, July) is paying that sister some mind; addressing “cocky” souls like her whom he is aware read *Essence*. This particular style of address won’t get into the pages of *Time* or *Newsweek*; the “us” or “we” Pierre-Pierre addresses are constructed in the meeting of this Black male writer with his predominantly Black female reader in the pages of a magazine entitled *Essence* – but his argument is that “essence” considers his marriage to a White woman from Indiana (an agricultural state once politically dominated by the Ku Klux Klan) a political affront. Pierre-Pierre (1998, July, para. 7) confesses, “I was one of those people who once led the arguments against intermarriage. Because racism remains a source of pain for so many of us in this country, many Blacks and Whites still view interracial couples as unnatural as horses mating with cows. We’re treated as if we’re traitors in somebody’s grand scheme of things,” but he doesn’t buy it. “I’m nobody’s traitor; *I simply followed my heart,*” (italics added).

A major thrust in the discourse of multiracialism aims directly at this “grand scheme of things,” this authoritative discourse that declares interracial intimacy as some genetically impossible breeding between species, or “race suicide.” Following one’s heart is not permitted within this discourse; “we” own your heart, and it should follow “us.” Pierre-Pierre (1998, July, para. 8) reorganizes the discourse of “we,” making himself and his White wife, Donna, the “we,” by recalling how they met, ironically, in the West African nation of Togo as Peace Corps volunteers. He sets off a dialogic play between Donna’s “Midwestern naïveté and easy smile” and his “northeast edge and tempo,” but “even with our differences, we were so much alike.” They are alike in their idealistic mission of making a difference in a struggling nation, which Pierre-Pierre explicitly contrasts with the 1980’s Reagan era of materialistic pursuits. As their
relationship deepens, the future husband and wife begin to wonder what awaits them back in America. “The anxiety was as real as the sweltering nights,” Pierre-Pierre (1998, July, para. 11) recalls. The anxiety almost gets the better of Pierre-Pierre, who worries how this relationship will fare in America, and admits the fear is that his beloved is White. He thinks of ending the relationship, until he puts himself in Donna’s shoes, that is, “sees himself through the eyes of another,” and wonders “how I would feel if she came and told me that she loves me dearly and I would make her a perfect husband, but there was a small problem: I’m Black,” (Pierre-Pierre, 1998, July, para. 12)

The couple overcome their sweltering anxiety and return home to find that their families supportive (Pierre-Pierre, 1998, paras. 13-15). They face more direct obstacles: a blood clot in Donna’s brain and two miscarriages, all of which they get through. Pierre-Pierre writes that other couples have dealt with less serious challenges, “but if they’re like us, once they decide to get serious, they quickly close ranks against those who would keep with ‘their own kind,’” (Pierre-Pierre, 1998, July, para. 18) Again, the “us” here is the couple, “closing ranks” into their “us-ness,” but not, as “they” would insist, setting themselves apart. The couple’s two children are surrounded by African and Haitian art, and Black music. This cultural nurturing doesn’t mean the Pierre-Pierre children won’t “confront the age-old existential question: Who am I?” but their father points out that everybody faces that question regardless of race. Pierre-Pierre’s son Cameron seems to have it figured out at age 4: “To him, Daddy is Black, Mommy is pink and he is brown,” (Pierre-Pierre, 1998, July, para. 21). When somebody at a party asks who this Garry is that Cameron talks about, he answers, “You know, Black Garry, my dad,” (Pierre-Pierre, 1998, July, para. 22). Out of the mouths of babes comes wisdom. Bakhtin (1981a, p.
suggests that children do not separate authoritative discourse from internally persuasive discourse until late in development, but Pierre-Pierre’s (1998, July) four-year-old either is already doing so, or his ideological development is being shaped by a different discourse. Whatever the case, Cameron could serve as a role model for journalists, or some of the people on the front lines of the heated, sometimes overheated, “Battle of Census 2000.”

**Categorical War: Census 2000 and the “Multiracial” Box**

Periodic battles over the U.S. Census are dialogic proxy wars in which multiple voices and discourses jockey for position. The stakeholders in the Census battle include the bureaucrats and demographers, who need crisp, clean categories and smooth procedures to guarantee the validity of their data and the research based on that data; and various racial and ethnic groups who see the Census as an opportunity to make their voices known, both through the debate and through the Census itself. Yanow (2003, p. 46) writes that Census categories are “a constructed text, reflecting contemporary American discourse, rather than an authored text.” An authored text has a byline and a final version; a constructed text has many authors and is never finished. The many authors of the text that became the racial categories of Census 2000 turned to the press, who saw the contest through such standard questions as, “What’s at stake?” “Whose position is threatened?” “Who wins and who loses if such and such happens?” These are valid questions, and the various parties in the Census 2000 battle certainly carried on a war of position, but such a frame tends to shove aside alternative, “everybody wins” scenarios.
The rumors of war were already sounding in 1993 when Thomas (1993, July) made a personal statement in *Essence.* “Sometimes I check the box marked ‘other’ just to mess with people,” she begins. Thomas points out that she is the daughter of a German-American mother and Jamaican father, born in 1966, which makes her “technically ‘illegal,’” (1966 was one year before *Loving.*) Because of the “false concept of racial purity” and the continuing Black/White racial paradigm, “mixed-race Americans are still not officially represented on demographic information surveys. Put more simply, we have no box to check.” Having no box to check echoes Dalmage’s (2001, p. 20) contention that members of Black-White interracial families “lack a language to talk about themselves for themselves,” and Yanow’s (2003, p. 193) concern that “without a label, without a vocabulary, their stories are untellable and they themselves are unnarratable.” Thomas (1993, July) cites the Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans (probably the most prominent advocacy group for multiracial people and families) as encouraging “individuals of mixed race to claim their whole identities.” Not everybody in the Census fight was ready to accept that claim unconditionally.

Articles on the Census fight often began with portraits of individuals and their ontological crisis. Sirica (1995, Jan. 16, para. 1) begins with a description of Charles Byrd, with “olive-colored” skin, and dark hair and mustache, suggesting that a reader might mistake Byrd for Hispanic or Italian. “But you’d be wrong,” Sirica (1995, Jan. 16, para. 2) declares. For that matter, “even Byrd isn’t sure what to call himself on census forms.” Sharp (1995, Sep. 5, para. 1) introduces Jordan Massey, whose parents have refused to identify him on school forms with the available categories of white, black, Asian, Native American or Hispanic. “‘They won’t even let us call our son who he is,’
says Meyer. ‘That’s insulting to us and him,’” (Sharp, 1995, Sep. 5, para. 5). In a rare case of a Page 1 interracial story, Mathews (1996, July 6, para. 1) introduces readers to Edward Cooper (Black) and his wife Barbara McIntyre (White), and their son, Ethan McCooper “who is harder to classify.” Note that the boy’s surname is a blending of his parents’ surnames. Ethan’s parents also have trouble with filling out boxes on school forms, (Mathews, 1996, July 6). “What they would like to call the light-skinned, dark-eyed boy with reddish-brown hair is ‘multiracial,’” (Mathews, 1996, July 6, para. 3).

Not so happy with the proposed multiracial category is “the nation’s corps of professional counters,” (Sirica, 1995, Jan. 16, para. 15) who are “holding on hard to the discrete categories which give the nation’s 30-year-old body of civil rights law its statistical underpinnings.” In Sharp (1995, Sep. 5, para. 11), a Princeton University researcher says of the possibility of changes to racial categories, “‘politically, it’s a nightmare.’” The head of Census Bureau’s racial statistics office laments: “‘The people who rely on Census statistics have been very concerned to know before this is done how the changes will affect the quality of the data.’” (Sharp, 1995, p. 5, para. 12). The picture at this point is that of people versus bureaucrats, but the versus is not clear-cut.

Mathews (1996, July 6, para. 55), offers this assessment from Mary Waters, a Harvard sociologist: "Of course, when I talk to people who are multiracial, I realize that telling the census who they are isn't a technocratic problem but an affirmation of their identity, a civic event that's important. The way we count people reinforces the feeling that that's who you are." The problem, according to Spencer (2003) is “telling the census who they are” doesn’t actually change the classification of an individual. Spencer argues that much of the political rhetoric around the proposed multiracial Census category was
founded on this misunderstanding. Spencer points out that Census data or any other racial and ethnic data gathered on government or employment forms, is inert until a researcher compiles the data and tabulates it. How any one individual gets counted racially depends on the researcher’s purpose; the same person could be counted as Black or White in separate projects, Spencer writes. The federal government does not classify or re-classify individuals based on what boxes they check on the Census, Spencer writes.

If we accept Yanow’s (2003) description of the Census as a constructed text, then how it technically works is somewhat irrelevant. What the Census represents, or rather, what the press determines the Census to represent, is to a great degree what the Census becomes. The print media were alert to the symbolic dimensions of the Census’s racial categories. Thomas Sawyer, the Ohio congressman who held hearings as head of the House census subcommittee, aptly describes the “meaning” of the census: “The census boxes define ‘who we think we are and are becoming, and therein lies the compelling force behind an awful lot of peoples’ desire for something other than the crisp, hard definitions that exist right now,’” (Sirica, 1995, Jan. 16, para. 20). Sawyer continues “‘The way they are counting now doesn’t represent accuracy’ … ‘It represents and illusion of precision,’” (Sirica, 1995, Jan. 16, para. 21).

Just what “precision” meant in this debate depended on who was defining it, and what results they wanted. Susan Graham, head of a group called Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), turned up as a source in many papers. For Project RACE, “precision” meant a “multiracial” category on the Census. Her son, Graham says in one story (Mathews, 1996, July 6, para. 15), has been called "‘white by the census, black at school and biracial at home," a multiplicity Graham refused to accept. “‘Calling
him and his sister multiracial is really the most accurate way to go,” Graham told the New York Times (Mathews 1996, July 6, para. 16).

Yet the simplicity of this “multiracial” category, and Project RACE’s agenda, turned out to be questionable. Spencer (2003) points out that Graham and her organization embraced the support of conservative congressman Newt Gingrich, a relationship that eventually led to Project RACE’s estrangement from other multiracial groups such as AMEA. Charles Byrd, quoted above (Sirica, 1995, Jan. 16, paras. 1-4) began giving editorial space in his Interracial Voice newsletter and website to Ward Connerly, who made a name for himself by successfully campaigning to eliminate affirmative action in admissions to California’s state universities (Spencer, 2003).

Spencer (2003) also points out that Byrd had written in Interracial Voice that multiracial people should protest the Census’s categories by checking all boxes, a suggestion that would have frustrated the federal government’s efforts to monitor and enforce anti-discrimination laws, if widely followed. Graham’s and Byrd’s embrace of reactionary politicians demonstrates that not only progressives can embrace the rhetoric of multiracialism. The media’s highlighting of their personalities and comments suggest the risks of multiracial activists courting the media, and the risks of the media courting multiracial activists, as Barker-Plummer (1995, Sep.) discovered in examining media strategies of various feminist groups. Reporters seemed to respect the input of Byrd and Graham because they appeared to have some kind of organization behind them – although the size and coherence of these “organizations” was difficult to pin down – granting the two official status, in the absence of many voices among multiracialists who met journalists’ need for official spokespersons; but the result of reporter’s search for
“official multiracialism” created a misleading picture of a multiracial “movement,” that seemed unconcerned with the legitimate political concerns of African Americans and other communities with a stake in maintaining clear-cut Census categories. That perceived insensitivity (true only of some multiracialists) helped raise the alarm for Black readers.

An NAACP director explained his group’s position to USA Today (Sharp, 1995, Sep. 5): “‘We believe every individual should have the right to assert their ethnic identity.’ … ‘The question I raise is whether the Census is the appropriate place to make a change that has legal and political implications.’” An Urban League official told Sirica (1995, Jan. 16, para. 30): “‘Put bluntly, African-Americans are at risk of losing, or at least of having their interests undermined, if it turns out such a modification in the way we classify people results in a reduction in the count of the African-American population.’”

In the New York Times (Mathews, 1996, July 6), Candace Mills, herself an interracial “official” as a publisher of interracial magazines, cast doubt on the contentions of some multiracial activists that a “multiracial” census category would influence children’s self-esteem: "‘It's the parents of many multiracial children who have the identity problem, not the children themselves.’ … ‘Many of these multiracial activists, both black and white, want to minimize their child's African heritage.’” Further down in the same article under the sub-head “Fearing a Loss of Political Power,” an official with the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law puts the matter vividly “This multiracial hocus-pocus pleases only a relatively few individuals, and for everyone else, it’s dangerous (Mathews, 1996, July 6, para. 35). It contributes to the pigmentocracy that
already exists in America, that says it’s better to be light-skinned than dark-skinned,’” (Mathews, 1996, July 6, para. 35).

Much of the breath spent on debating the perceived threats to various constituencies turned out to have been wasted, or at least over blown, since the Office of Management and Budget, which has the final say on federal racial and ethnic categories, chose in 1991 the Mark All That Apply (MATA) solution, which allowed respondents to mark as many racial categories as they wished; but MATA also stipulated that the data collected from the revised forms had to be aggregated back to the existing categories of White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, Native American and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (Spencer, 2003). This decision preserved the federal government’s ability to use racial statistics for regulation and enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and monitoring of Civil Rights programs (Spencer, 2003).

The voices of everyday interracial families were lost in the war of words reported in the papers over several years. Although many stories followed the common practice of beginning stories with anecdotes about such families, their voices quickly faded, dominated by the voices of official representatives of the constituencies identified by the press as stakeholders. Even some of the seemingly everyday people interviewed, such as Charles Byrd and Susan Graham, turned out to be people with agendas that other multiracialists distrusted, although this friction was not discussed much in the papers. (For more on the debate among multiracialists on the Census and the general direction of multiracialism, see DaCosta, 2003; Root, 2003; Spencer, 2003, Spickard 2003; and Texeira, 2003; all in Winters & DeBose, Eds., 2003.) By highlighting a small group of activists who aggressively sought the media spotlight, reporters wound up supporting the
contentions of established civil rights groups that the multiracial movement was interested in individual identity and unconcerned with, or even hostile to, the interests of the Black community. This concern is legitimate (see the articles cited above), but not the whole picture. In print media stories, multiracial identity appeared as a renunciation of Blackness, as a continuation of the “pigmentocracy” (Mathews, 1996, July 6, para. 35) long operating in America. The possibility of a fluid multiracial identity, acknowledging diverse heritage while maintaining commitment to the fight against racism, did not arise in the papers.

**Love Story, American Style?**

Richer, non-dichotomous narratives of interracial families and multiracial identity can emerge in the print media. These more dialogic narratives infiltrate newspapers through coverage of other media, such as reviews and stories about television, movies and books. A cultural product that inspired extensive coverage in print media was the 1999 PBS documentary *An American Love Story*, an innovative documentary by filmmaker Jennifer Fox that followed an interracial family through their daily lives. The 10-hour documentary was compiled from over 1,000 hours of film shot over 18 months, in which the camera follows the family of Bill Sims, Karen Wilson and their daughters around their home and daily routines. Follow-up interviews, editing, and fund-raising took five more years. The effusions from constitutionally cynical TV critics were signs that something unusual had spread across the airwaves. The *Christian Science Monitor* (Mason, 1999, Sep. 1, para. 1) praised *An American Love story* for “enlarging the borders of human understanding.” Could this be television? The key to this border enlarging is the intense focus on a single interracial family. Arts coverage has license to allow the
voices of individuals to sound fully. We learn more about the Wilson-Sims family in a few stories than we learn about dozens of similar families scattered across years of news stories, and in their portrait, internally persuasive discourses have free reign.

Dominguez (1999, Sep. 7) shows from his lead that he is aware that this family, and this documentary confront dominant discourses: “It’s a love story that wasn’t supposed to have a happy ending.” Dominguez recounts Sims’ and Wilson’s troubles with strangers, neighbors and the police in the small Ohio town where they met, but they still, they “managed to build a strong marriage and a tight-knit family.” Filmmaker Jennifer Fox explains An American Love Story’s relationship to the 1973 PBS documentary “An American Family,” in which the dysfunctional, upper-crust White Loud family unravels on screen. “‘The Loud series was very much about the failure of the American Dream – it took the idealized, perfect American affluent family and showed how rotten it is at the core,’” (Dominguez, 1999, Sep. 7). Love Story, on the other hand, “‘takes what America says is a negative, an interracial couple, and shows you how whole it is at its core. This is a couple that shouldn’t be together in terms of American history, and here they are creating a vibrant, wonderful family.’” Sims and Wilson express their awareness that “family” is a loaded term. Sims recalls that as filming began in 1992, “‘there was a political movement in the country [based on] ‘family values.’” But if you read between the lines, it seemed like you had to be a certain color to have family values.” Karen Wilson adds, “‘We somehow felt they weren’t’ talking about us.’ … ‘They didn’t say it outright, but you knew they weren’t.” The couple tells the Houston Chronicle (Hodges, 1999, Sep. 17, para. 1), “‘We’re not Ozzie and Harriet,’” referring to
the quintessential suburban White couple of 1950’s TV, to which Hodges replies, “And indeed they’re not.”

Or are they? Sims tells the *Daily News* (Dominguez, 1999, Sep. 7, para. 7): “‘We do the same things that people from the same race who are married do. We’re just a normal family trying to make a better America, too, by raising good kids.’” The Wilson-Sims family confronts the authoritative discourse of the family. Dalmage (2000, pp. 2-3) recalls that after hearing the question “What about the children” so often, she began to investigate the experiences of multiracial people and interracial families and discovered that “family has been a primary means through which a racially divided and racist society has been maintained.” Dalmage (2000, p. 3) points out that “family” in the U.S. is traditionally based on the image of a Christian, White, patriarchal family with “a chaste and virtuous housewife, and obedient children,” a discourse that means a family that looks different is not a proper family. Sims and Wilson acknowledge that they’re not Ozzie and Harriet, but at the same wish they were.

The family’s image injects a note of confusion into the opening of James’s (1999, Sep. 5, p. 25) essay in the Sunday *New York Times*: “At first glance, to the camera’s casual eye, the most conspicuous aspect of the Wilson-Sims family is that the mother looks like an interloper.” Her Whiteness and slight build contrast with her daughters, “not only because they’re skin is dark,” but because Cicily and Chaney are built like their father, tall, with strong jaw lines. “The physical differences are part of what makes the family’s obvious affection so touching,” James (1999, Sep. 5, p. 25) continues. This is an oddly monologic beginning to an article with the headline “In a Family Portrait, The Future.” Would the mother in a monoracial family look like an “interloper” if her build
contrasted with that of her husband and children? James (1999, Sep. 5, p. 25) recovers a few paragraphs later, noting that the film is more than a romance: “Beneath the consumer-friendly romance of its title, though, the series is more genuinely about a new kind of family and about America’s multiracial future.”

This is not a multiracial future viewed through rainbow-colored glasses. Hodges (1999, Sep. 17, para. 12) discusses daughter Cicily’s experience at Colgate University. “ ‘They all hated me. Black kids don’t like mixed marriages. I was really upset about that, and trying to become of the African-American students made it worse.’” Cicily joins an all-White sorority. “ ‘It made my life better. I had friends. But the African-American students thought I was a sellout, and wrote me off.’” (Hodges, 1999, Sep. 17, para. 13). In one episode, Cicily travels to Nigeria with a mixed-race group from Colgate, and finds herself in the middle of racial battle. “ ‘It’s total culture shock. The black students want to be with the black students and not the white students …. It’s hard to appreciate white here, because you see what Europeans did to them here. I felt very black,’” (Hodges, 1999, Sep. 17, para. 16). A black student on the trip says: “ ‘Half-black and half-white, I can’t imagine,’” … ‘It must be very difficult. She’s both, how do you reconcile both?’” (Hodges, 1999, Sep. 17, para. 17).

After summarizing the Nigeria episode, James (1999, Sep. 5, p. 27) alertly comments that Cicily’s experience is illuminating for a television audience “accustomed to seeing race, when they see it at all, in stark terms of black and white. With its more complex, biracial view, ‘An American Love Story’ sends a sobering message: there will be no idyllic, color-blind society any time soon.” This sort of sophisticated thinking is something New York Times writers have the luxury of indulging in, especially outside of
the hard news sections, and James shows how far a newspaper writer can go if given the time, column inches, and such invigorating material as An American Love Story. This opportunity allows James (1999, Sep. 5, p. 27) to make sophisticated parallels, such as, “In the ordinary course of things, it counts as progress when race goes unnoticed in a television romance,” followed by the next paragraph: “When race goes unnoticed in ‘An American Love Story,’ it is to make a larger point,” which is “what is universal to any family and what is particular to this interracial one.”

An American Love Story’s dialogic account of family – like every “American family” and not like every “American family” at the same time – sounds clearly in filmmaker Fox’s comment on what she hoped viewers would experience (James, 1999, Sep. 5, p. 27): “‘First, they’re going to see an interracial family. Eventually, at moments, they’ll forget about race. And in that forgetting and remembering, there will be a moment of epiphany: they’ll recognize their own racism, and their own perceptions of family.’”

A Different Jewish Mother Story

James McBride’s The Color of Water: A Black Man’s Tribute to His White Mother (1996) is a book that in part tells of a rare reversal of the passing narrative. Racial passing is usually an act of performing a White identity in order to gain privilege and escape the stigma of Blackness (see the review of Squires & Brouwer in Chapter 2), but McBride’s mother reversed the process, not exactly passing for Black, but renouncing her Orthodox Jewish identity, marrying a Black man and founding a Baptist Church in a Brooklyn housing project (Budhos, 1996, Apr. 22, para. 4). Marina Budhos, reviewing Color of Water for the Nation, engages with McBride and his text from her own
experience as the daughter of a Jewish-agnostic mother and a Guyanese father. “I understand perfectly the ethos his parents forged to enable their kids to make it,” Budhos (1996, Apr. 22, para. 5) writes, then quotes McBride: “‘She and my father brought a curious blend of Jewish-European and African-American distrust and paranoia into our house.’” Budhos (1996, Apr. 22, para. 5) writes: “His family’s alloy of cultural influences, the mistrust of and respect for Jewishness, is painfully familiar,” (Budhos, 1996, Apr. 22, para. 6) but McBride’s mother, unlike Budhos’s agnostic mother, “transformed her stringent Orthodox background into a Christian fervor that ruled the house. McBride’s was a black childhood inflected with both a soaring faith in the church and his own Jewishness, however unnamed: ‘My view of the world is not merely that of a black man but that of a black man with something of a Jewish soul.”

McBride’s dialogic soul contrasts with Zack’s (1996) negative assessment of living a Black-Jewish identity. Zack, a philosophy professor of mixed Black and Jewish parentage, finds the possibility of a blended identity blocked by the current antagonistic state of relations between Black and Jews, and racial discourses that bifurcate Jewishness and Blackness. Jewishness is inherited through the mother, Zack explains, so having a Jewish mother makes a person Jewish, and, by most definitions, also White; but having a Black parent, according to the “one drop rule,” makes the same person Black, and therefore “her Jewishness is obliterated,” (Zack, 1996, p. 144). Zack further argues that with the current state of distrust between Blacks and Jews (who have been allies at times) the only satisfactory solution – if it can be a “solution” – is an identity that is neither. McBride does not end up in the bitter-tasting limbo in which Zack places herself. Entering adulthood, he finds himself temporarily adrift, as Budhos (1996, Apr. 22, para.
9) summarizes: “For those of us in mixed homes, the moment when we step into the world brings painful but fruitful self-reckoning. We’re finally giving voice to our hybridity … McBride realizes that his own split is the black and white divide he has not been able to fuse within himself,” but as adulthood progresses, McBride discovers “how his ‘own humanity was awakened’ by discovering the Jewish half of his identity.”

Budhos (1996, Apr. 22, para. 11) notes the recent trend of black and ethnic writers to both “tell the journey of the assimilated self, and to pay homage to one’s roots.” McBride, she continues, “offers a moving example of how the self is formed by a subtle combination of these influences.” Budhos is a rare case of a reviewer equally attuned to such combinations of influences. There are hints, if only hints, that in the past few years some reporters are tuning in as well.

**Rumors of Peace?**

Two recent articles sound a theme of less troubled times for interracial families, although it is too early to say either that acceptance really is growing for mixed families, or even that newspapers in general think this is happening. If Black/White multiracial families, as well as other multiracial families, speak out often enough, it is possible that reporters will hear them and be willing to tell different stories, and tell them more often. Old “premises of any conversation at all” die hard, however.

We seem to be hearing the old conversation when Cabrera (2002, Nov. 29) offers this lead: “When Charles Milner told his mother about his new white girlfriend, the older woman reacted with horror.” In a similar vein, Paulson (2003, Jan. 15) begins her story: “When Kathy Powell told her father she had married, he hung up on her …. Her parents’ problem: Kathy's husband, Howard, is black.” After reading so many stories with such
leads, I began to wonder if journalism schools have a lesson about writing interracial marriage stories, with instructions to frame all such marriages as alienating relatives. But the stories turn out to be playing the old bait-and-switch game. In Cabrera (2002, Nov. 29), a few paragraphs down: “Charles Milner … and his wife, Tami … enjoy a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. They say their racial differences are irrelevant. ‘Race doesn’t factor into anything we do’ … ‘It’s just never been an issue.’” Paulson’s (2003, Jan. 15) follow-up: “If Kathy’s struggle with her family highlights the determined resistance some families still have to interracial marriage, her story also shows how attitudes can change, one family at a time. Today, 11 years later, her parents know and love Howard and spend time with their two grandchildren.”

Here the imprimatur of the newspaper’s own voice declares that the times they are a changin’. Paulson’s (2003, Jan. 15) observation is a straightforward expression of the transformation Root (2003, p. 17) sees developing in successive generations after *Loving v. Virginia*. In the language of family systems theory, Root (2003, p. 17) writes: “succeeding generations tend to be kinder and more open minded; the family system is characterized by less rigidity.” Race is less and less “the most special commodity in a family,” (Root, 2003, p. 17). “This revolutionary transformation is fueled as much by love as by politics. Love is seldom acknowledged as a source of this transformation of race,” (Root, 2003, p. 17).

reactions to Frederick Douglass’s 1884 mixed marriage. That “overt ostracism” is rare today,” but the wife of one mixed couple recalls Black colleagues in Providence R.I. muttering about “nigger-honky marriages,” (Paulson, 2003, Jan. 15).

If muttering is the worst of it, then progress is indeed being made. Cabrera (2002, Nov. 29) suggests it is. After recalling the past difficulties of interracial couples, Cabrera writes, “But experts - and the couples - say that has changed,” including Kimberly Hohman, a Black interrally married woman and author of The Colors of Love: The Black Person's Guide to Interracial Relationships – authorship confers expert status – who says: “‘The culture in American society is changing; we're seeing the effects of more education about racism and discrimination, and people are becoming more tolerant of other races being together.’” One husband in an interracial marriage tells Cabrera, “‘When I'm with my wife, I don't think, ‘She's a black woman,’ she's the woman I love,’ … ‘Race just isn't a big deal.’”

Paulson (2003, Jan. 15) continues the historical theme of generational sea changes: “If the fault lines dividing races remain, however, the bridge to cross them builds one generation at a time,” she writes. One mother of multiracial children says they “are remarkably unfazed by their mixed-race heritage and rarely bring up the topic. "I've learned how much baggage I carry, because they don't carry any.” Kathy Powell, an interrally married woman once alienated from her parents, recounts how the illness of a child and the need for family medical history allowed Kathy to speak to her mother for first time in four years. A year later, Grandma paid a visit. “‘She came in wearing dark sunglasses, because I knew she'd cried the whole way up from New Jersey, but they came
bearing gifts,’’ and her parents are now regular visitors. “Her parents have never mentioned the years of estrangement,” Paulson writes.

It is certainly too early to announce an end to years of collective estrangement between White and Black people, and interracial marriages by themselves won’t solve the complex problems of race in America, but Paulson (2003, Jan. 15), concludes with a hopeful vision. One couple, Patti and Matt Keenan, gleefully announce that on the 2000 Census, “‘We check all the boxes!’ … ‘It makes you wonder, do we really need to count that way anyway?’” While wincing at another case of multiracial naiveté, I can still dream along with the Keenans, who “say they look forward to a time when marriages like theirs aren't ‘counted’ at all. A time when TV shows or advertisements show interracial couples as a matter of course - not to make a point. A time when race isn't the first thing people remark on in their marriage. When articles like this one, for instance, are no longer written.”

Summary

In this chapter, I explored 19 articles from print media stories about Black/White interracial families. The earliest articles were published in 1991 and the latest one in 2003. I found a dominant tendency for print media reporters to place interracial families in standardized narratives of conflict, which I argued resulted from dominant discourses of racial essentialism and racial conflict. I also found many instances in which both reporters and members of interracial families contested or questioned these dominant narratives and categories. I found evidence of an emerging multiracial identity project speaking through these stories, although journalists’ consciousness of this project appears to be dim in most cases.
In articles in Black-oriented magazines, I found more personal narratives that revealed the sexual subtext beneath interracial relationships, as well as a complex and contradictory sexual politics that challenges African-Americans inside and outside such relationships. I found evidence in two articles of a religious motivation to interracial marriage that offers an alternative discourse to both dominant and resistance discourses about such marriages.

In coverage of the debate about changing racial categories in Census 2000, I found that the voices of everyday people were largely pushed aside in favor of official spokespersons for established political groups, and by multiracial activists, some of whose agendas helped create a distorted picture of multiracialism.

Moving towards more powerfully dialogic and heteroglossic texts, I found that articles and reviews of a television documentary, *An American Love Story*, and a book, *The Color of Water*, presented in-depth challenges to the dominant discourses around interracial marriages. I found tentative evidence in two recent articles that newspapers may be viewing interracial relationships in a more optimistic light and that this development may indicate growing public acceptance of Black/White interracial relationships.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of this thesis, I asked three research questions. The first question was: “What is the role of print media in the multiracial identity project?” In Chapter 3, I outlined Omi and Winant’s (1994, pp. 55-56) account of racial formation as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed,” through “a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized.” Omi & Winant (1994, p. 56) further state that racial projects do the “ideological ‘work’” of linking structure and representation. “Racial projects connect what race means in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon that meaning,” Omi and Winant (1994, p. 56) write.

In Chapter 3, I followed the discussion of Omi & Winant with Daniel’s (2002) extension of their work into an articulation of the Multiracial Identity Project. Omi and Winant (1994, p. 55) declare, “we should think of race as an element of social structure rather than an irregularity within it; we should see race as a dimension of human representation rather than an illusion.” Daniel (2002, p. 179) subtly alters Omi and Winant’s wording thus: “[A] multiracial identity may be thought of not only as an element of social structure but also as a dimension of human cultural representation and signification – rather than an illusion.” Daniel (2002, p. 179) presents a “constructive postcolonial discourse,” that does not dismiss the concept of race. “It does, however,
interrogate essentialist and racialist notions of race and decenters racial categories by pointing out the ambiguity and multiplicity of identities that exist with each of us. This makes it possible to acknowledge the way in which those categories are altered by lived experience,” (Daniel, 2002, p. 179).

The role that print media play in the Multiracial Identity Project is to announce that it is taking place, although journalists have not to my knowledge used Daniel’s terms. We see Watts (1991, Dec. 1) reporting the growing number of multiracial people questioning centuries-old racial categories. The presence of this questioning in a news story in a widely read regional daily paper exposes readers to this questioning. At the very least the lived experience reported in stories about interracial/multiracial families can resonate with other people living similar experiences. Members of multiracial families are beginning to speak, and in their own (sometimes borrowed, sometimes new) words, although they generally must share the column inches with unfriendly or unsupportive discourses. The work by Bost (2003) and Streeter (1996, 2003), and the questionable company that self-appointed multiracialist spokespersons kept during the Census 2000 debate (see Chapter 4), inspire caution when seeing news of interracial families. The mixed blessings of media treatment of interracial families cry out for multiracialists to both develop and carry out sophisticated media strategies and to develop their own theoretically grounded analyses of media texts. I have attempted to demonstrate how and why dialogism could be one source of that theoretical grounding.

My second research question is: “What contributions can dialogism make to deeper understanding of the complex relationships between interracial/multiracial families, their identity project(s) and print media?” I return for a moment to Omi and
Winant. They do not use the vocabulary of dialogism, but I argue that their insistence on the inextricable links between structure and representation makes possible a dialogical interpretation of racial formation. In dialogue, all categories are constantly “created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed.” The dominant monologic discourses of race strive for hegemony, but are met by the “abrupt counter-languages” that “scorch with their contrary logic,” (Yaeger, 1991, p. 241, see Chapter 1). Racial formation as described by Omi and Winant is not the process of Whites dominating Blacks, but a contested process in which the resistant discourses of Blacks and their White supporters shape dominant racial discourses, which must evolve along with the resistance. Here we see that monologue has a dirty secret: it cannot be as monologic as it pretends to be. “Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word,” Bakhtin (1984, p. 293) writes, but knows it cannot really be the ultimate word; while avoiding the acknowledgement of “the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities,” the American racial monologue must listen enough to that other consciousness to maintain the dominant racial order.

The heteroglossia of news keeps challenging the dominant racial order. “The premise of any conversation at all,” is not fixed. We have seen in Chapter 4 instances in which the reporter seems to have taken the premise his or her sources. The Dallas Morning News story about interracial Baha’is (Wicker, 1998, June 10, para. 1) found itself beginning with a typical “she’s White, he’s Black” lead, only to (possibly) play on the reader’s expectation of “Ay, there’s the rub,” with “God is particularly pleased with such interracial unions,” (Wicker, 1998, June 10, para. 2). Not just pleased, but particularly pleased. This is news, indeed. Given the officially secular stance of
most newspapers, the headline is not “God To People: Marry Intercrossly!” but the more modest “For Baha’is, Interracial Marriage is a Way to Chip Away at Prejudice.” To borrow from Dalmage, we might say, “Interracial Marriage is a Way to Chip Away at the Color Line.”

The story about Baha’is and interracial marriage stands out by its rarity. One story by itself can only “chip away,” as a small application of centrifugal force, which can only counteract the centripetal force of print media’s entrenched ideologies, discourses, news values and practices with the help of centrifugal forces in other stories. It is important to remember that journalists, the articles they write, the publications and institutions for which they work, their real and imagined readers, and their sources – all are dialogically constituted. Reporters live within their own intersubjective identities, which are also the site of conflict between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Each newspaper or magazine, each article, each section, each issue, is also tense with dialogized ideological struggle. The intensity of this struggle is particularly acute in print media, dedicated as they are to gathering diverse voices (which I readily agree could be even more diverse), each one of which is permeated with many other voices. Readers, journalists and scholars could, I argue, deepen their reading, writing and research by realizing the extent to which their imaginations are dialogic.

My third research question is: “How might this deeper understanding offer possibilities for dismantling the dominant racial order and constructing a new, democratic and non-hierarchical racial order?” This is admittedly a speculative question, but the reasons for dismantling and replacing the dominant racial order are clear. At the beginning of this thesis, I placed this quote from Bakhtin (1984, p. 287): “To be means to
communicate. Absolute death (nonbeing) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered …” The dominant racial order threatens absolute death to people claiming a multiracial identity. Recall Dalmage’s (2000, p. 20) description of their plight: “A difficulty they face is the lack of language available to address their experiences.” Here again is Yanow’s (2003, p. 193) complimentary description of people claiming a multiracial identity: “without a label, without a vocabulary, their stories are untellable and they themselves are unnarratable.” In other words, members of interracial families struggle with being “unheard, unrecognized, unremembered.” They have managed in recent years to gain at least occasional hearing, recognition and remembrance. There is no justification for any individual or group to deny communication to any other individual or group, and any social/cultural/political order that attempts to do so deserves replacement. A fully dialogic understanding of print media stories about Black/White interracial families would be one step in the process of replacing the dominant racial monologue with a racial dialogue that allows Black, White and every shade in between an equal voice.

**Limits of the Current Study and Suggestions for Future Research**

My search for this project was limited to newspapers, news magazines and a few other magazines, from 1990 to the present. Since most of the articles were downloaded from electronic databases, I studied only the verbal components of the articles and not the photographs and layouts. Further studying incorporating these missing elements would doubtless enrich the analysis. From the articles that met my search criteria (see Chapter 4), I then chose 19 articles I felt were representative of the themes I saw in the sample. Would reading a much broader sample of articles yield different or more complex
results? Are there variations in how interracial marriages are treated in newspapers in
different regions? Questions also remain as to what my findings would have been if I had
expanded my search to include more consumer magazines, as well as magazines more
focused on arts, literature, culture and politics. I mentioned in Chapter 4 that a search of
Ethnic News Watch yielded no articles in African American newspapers that seemed
useful for this investigation. Research into the treatment of interracial and multiracial
issues in all African American media are not simply desirable but necessary. In order to
give everyone a voice, it is also necessary to listen to those voices.

With more time and resources, it would be interesting to investigate print media
coverage of interracial marriage further back in time. Fowler’s 40-year-old project
(1963/1987) and Ruchames’ (1955) even older study of the newspaper debate over an
interracial marriage bill in antebellum Massachusetts need to be supplemented by studies
using contemporary theoretical and technological resources. The treatment of interracial
marriage in print media in other countries is another line of inquiry worth pursuing.

Gender and sexuality questions. I also did not closely examine the dimension of
gender and sexuality in media coverage of interracial marriage. Bost (2003) and Streeter
(1996, 2003) have done recent work on the representation of mixed-race women in
literature and media, and they have explored why images of women tend to carry the
ideological weight of discourses around interracial sexuality and relationships. Ferber
(1998) investigated White supremacist literature against interracial marriage and found
virtually all of it focused on White women’s sexuality and its role in preserving or
threatening racial purity. In investigating media coverage of interracial families, we need
to investigate the meaning of White men, White women, Black men and Black women in
these stories, and how these various race/gender pairings are represented in the news. As to the question of interracial sexuality in print media, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, mainstream contemporary print media rarely address the subject explicitly, but Bost (2003) and Streeter (2003) studied the eroticized simulacra and sexual anxiety of *Time’s* special issue. Further inquiries into the sexual subtext of print media stories about interracial families would give clues as to how much and what kind of progress has been made in the acceptance of interracial families and multiracial identity. Various aspects of gender and sexuality in the context of multiracial identity are explored in the gender and sexuality sections of volumes edited by Root (1996) and Winters and Winters and DeBose (2003). Kich (1996) explored the matrix of bisexual and biracial identity, while Allman (1996) investigated biracial lesbian questions. Kich (1996, p. 264) offers “an exploratory presentation and discussion of the intersection of biraciality and bisexuality.”

Further, possibly dialogically guided explorations of this intersection seem possible and desirable.

This thesis conducted a dialogic investigation into print media news stories about Black/White interracial families. The potential for using dialogic methodology for critical analysis of all mass media texts was suggested by Newcomb (1984), but as previously mentioned, little work along these lines has been carried out. The lack of models from which to work meant that my own methodology was somewhat improvised, and I suggest this effort be evaluated as a pioneering effort.

I examined the varying levels of dialogue operating *within* print media texts, but since dialogue is not about texts alone, but the complex interactions between writers, readers and other texts, other aspects of interracial marriage in print media texts require
There does not appear to be any research at all on how people in interracial/multiracial families read, respond to and use media texts about issues of concern to them. This project grew from my own perception, as the husband in an interracial relationship and a practicing journalist, that stories about families like mine were inadequate. The question remains open as to how multiracial people who are not journalists and scholars encounter any cultural products about themselves. Audience research on such questions, based on dialogism or any other applicable theory, would be a welcome.

This thesis has offered some suggestions about the intersection of interracial/multiracial identity, dialogism and print media texts. I invite multiracialists, critical media scholars and any journalists who may read this (unlikely as that may be) to take the dialogic plunge as described by Bakhtin (1984, p. 293):

The single adequate form for \textit{verbally expressing} authentic human life is the \textit{open-ended dialogue}. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium.
EPILOGUE

A Spiritual vision of A Multiracial Planet


In a Postmodern world distrustful of grand narratives, totalizing universalist systems, dominating institutions and authoritative discourses, what narrative, system, institutions or discourses could reintegrate humanity “with the life history of the universal and collective self?” What “universal and collective self” is available that thrives on the diversity and particularity that seemingly contradict the universal and the collective?

For thousands of years, religion has presented at least a vision that answers these questions, though in practice, religion and religious institutions have contributed to disunity, hatred and bloodshed, and continue to do so. Nonetheless, the vision has been with us, at least since Isaiah prophesied that “the lion shall lie down with the lamb,” and once warring parties would “beat their swords into plowshares.” Isaiah’s prophecy is a vision of predatory and oppressive human groups, the lion, learning to live in harmony
with the dominated and oppressed groups, the lamb. In lying down with the lamb, the lion is not merely ceasing its old predatory habits and leaving the lamb alone; the lion is actually intimately associating with the lamb. It would be easy to cynically ridicule the notion that the “lying down” might include interracial, interethnic and interfaith marriage, but we are talking about humans, not animals. When men and women lie down together, we make babies.

In Chapter 4, I discussed Wicker’s (1998, June 10) story about interracial couples who are members of the Baha’i Faith. I noted how the couple’s experiences and the reporter’s narrative differed noticeably from all the other stories in this study. I am a Baha’i who is interracially married. Although I might well have found a Black partner if I wasn’t a Baha’i, the teachings of the Faith encouraged me to widen my vision of who my mate might be. My vision widened enough to leave the familiar confines of New York City and move to Georgia – not even Atlanta, but the central Georgia city of Warner Robins, which does not have public transportation and until recently had no gourmet coffee houses. Warner Robins is home to a large Air Force base, and thus also boasts a visible contingent of multiracial couples, including Black/White, Black/Asian, and White/Asian. While the Baha’is are not the only community with interracial couples, the Baha’i community is a particularly welcoming environment for them because the Faith has specific principles and teachings that value and encourage interracial marriage.

Abdu’l-Baha, son of Baha’u’llah, the prophet/founder of the Baha’i faith, wrote many letters to American believers, including some on interracial marriage, which demonstrate the role it plays in the Baha’i vision of the world. One letter (Power of Unity, 1986, p. 55) says: “Thou must endeavor that they intermarry. There is no greater
means to bring about affection between the white and the black than the influence of the Word of God. Likewise marriage between these two races will wholly destroy and eradicate the root of enmity.” In another letter addressed to an interracial couple (which would have been written sometime early in the 20th Century, since Abdu’l-Baha died in 1921) he wrote (Power of Unity, 1986, p. 55): “This union will unquestionably promote love and affection between black and white, and will affect and encourage others. These two races will unite and merge together, and there will appear and take root a new generation sound in health and beauteous in countenance.” In a third letter, Abdu’l-Baha (Power of Unity, 1986, p. 55) offers an almost biological notion of diversity: “In marriage the more distant the blood-relationship the better, for such distance in family ties between husband and wife provides the basis for the well-being of humanity and is conducive to fellowship among mankind.”

The Baha’i principle that diversity, and even seeming contradiction, is valuable and must be sought after, can be considered Postmodern (although in the Baha’i view, man-made ideas and epistemologies must be evaluated for the compatibility with Baha’i teachings, not the other way around). “Its watchword is unity in diversity,” writes Shoghi Effendi (1974, p. 41), grandson of Abdu’l-Baha and great grandson of Baha’u’llah, prophet/founder of the Baha’i Faith. We can argue dialogically that unity means something only in the context of diversity; only different elements need uniting, otherwise, what passes for unity is actually uniformity. Abdu’l-Baha (quoted in Effendi, 1974, p. 42) turns to flowers as a metaphor for unity in diversity:

Consider the flowers of a garden … How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants … were all of the same shape and color! Diversity of hues, form and shape enriches and adorns the garden, and heighten the effect thereof. In like manner, when diverse shades of thought, temperament and character, are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will
be revealed and made manifest. Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which rules and transcends the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas and convictions of the children of men.

It is safe to generalize that Postmodernism is suspicious of and even hostile to the claim that “the power and influence of one central agency” is needed to bring about “reintegrating humans with the life history of the universal and collective self.” (Daniel, 2002, p. 183). Yet Daniel (2002, p. 185) himself mentions the Baha’i Faith in a discussion of contemporary “hybrid religious perspectives [that] borrow from multiple religious meta-narratives.” The Baha’i Faith, for instance “is anchored in a transcultural validation and incorporation of various metaphysical systems …. The universal tenets underlying all systems of religious thought and ritual are viewed by the Baha’i as compatible,” (Daniel, 2002, p. 185).

I acknowledge that is difficult for many in the academic community to listen to a religious discourse without automatically opposing it. Considering the sordid history of religion in supporting and often initiating every sort of hatred, oppression, cruelty and mass murder, there are many valid reasons to be suspicious of yet another meta-narrative claiming authority. I suggest considering the difference between Marxism as a movement, which has also perpetrated its share of atrocities, and Marx the man and Marxism as an epistemology or set of critical tools. Many astute people can separate Marx from the blood spilled in his name and have no problem dissociating themselves from the totalitarian systems of the former Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. Likewise, we cannot fairly blame Jesus for the crimes of the churches that invoke his name. Flawed human beings corrupted the teachings of Jesus, the Buddha, the Prophet Muhammad – peace be upon him – and yes, Karl Marx. As to how the Baha’i
community can avoid a similar fate, I will have to leave interested readers to investigate further on their own. A good starting point is the website www.usbahai.org.

This epilogue is an exercise in the qualitative research practice called “bracketing your subjectivity.” I have bracketed my subjectivity, but hope that some of my subjectivity has escaped these brackets and is evident throughout this thesis, supported by Bakhtin and the various others cited in this manuscript. I am a Baha’i, interracially married, and concerned with providing my son with the broadest possibilities for developing his own identity and subjectivity. Likewise, I have the same wish for everyone, Baha’i or otherwise, multiracial, monoracial or none/all of the above. Let everyone speak, in a language that addresses their experience, so all can tell their stories and narrate their selves. Let everyone be, and through communication, be heard, recognized and remembered.
REFERENCES


http://proquest.umi.com


Wicker, C. (1998, June 10). For Baha’is, interracial marriage is a way to chip away at prejudice. Dallas Morning News. Downloaded from EBSCOhost.


NOTES

1. Babb (2001) offers a mind-opening reading of Melville’s *Moby Dick* in her book *Whiteness Visible: The meaning of whiteness in American literature and culture*. Babb reads Melville’s long (and often lamented) passages on whale science, and meditations on Moby Dick’s whiteness, as interrogations of the ideology of whiteness. Although Babb does not make this suggestion, it seems plausible to ask whether Melville meant to prophesy that America’s racial ideology would sink the nation, as Moby Dick sank the whaling ship *Pequod*.

2. Frederick Douglass, however, did cross the color line late in life, marrying his white secretary, Helen Pitts, an act that damaged his relationships with Black activists (Spickard, 1989). Kennedy (2003) notes that young White and Black civil rights activists in the South in the 1960s undoubtedly did have sexual affairs, and that such activities, or more often rumors to that effect, were seized upon by Whites resisting desegregation.

3. Kennedy (2003, 296n) quotes the following passage in one of Rhinelander’s letters to Alice, from a Harvard student’s senior thesis: “Do you remember, honeybunch, how I used to put my head between your legs and how I used to caress you with my lips and tongue?” It is not clear from my sources whether this is the same letter that led the newspaper to reference anti-sodomy laws.

4. Alaska and Hawaii were, however, the two states with the highest percentages of people reporting multiple races on the 2000 U.S. Census, while California, third in percentage, has the highest number of self-reported multiracial people, with most of the
diversity in those states coming from combinations among White, Native American, Hispanic, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (Farley, 2002).

5. Daniel (2002, 195n) notes the generally accepted etymology of *mulatto* as deriving from the Portuguese word for mule, which suggests degeneracy and low fertility, since the mule is the sterile hybrid of horse and donkey, but Daniel points to evidence the word may have derived from the Arabic *muwallad*, for a person of mixed Arab and African descent, and evolved into *mulatto* during the Arab occupation of the Iberian peninsula. In line with Bakhtin’s insights, it seems quite possible that the word absorbed the ‘taste’ of mules during its history.

APPENDIX A: NEWSPAPER AND MAGAZINE STORIES


Wicker, C. (1998, June 10). For Baha’is, interracial marriage is a way to chip away at prejudice. *Dallas Morning News*. Downloaded from EBSCOhost.