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Love's Gray Area: A Qualitative Analysis of Interracial Relationships in Film, 1960s and 2000s

Jodi Lynn Rightler
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jodi Lynn Rightler entitled "Love's Gray Area: A Qualitative Analysis of Interracial Relationships in Film, 1960s and 2000s." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communication and Information.

Catherine Luther, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Naeemah Clark, Barbara Moore

Accepted for the Council:
Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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LOVE'S GRAY AREA:
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN FILM,
1960s AND 2000s

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jodi Lynn Rightler
August 2008

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the two most important people in my life,

who also happen to be my two best friends,

my dad Phil and my fiancé Will.

Thank you both for your unconditional love and support.

I could not have reached this goal without either of you.

I love you both.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which interracial relationships between African Americans ("blacks") and European Americans ("whites") came to be represented as "problematic" for mainstream audiences by conducting film analyses of the following four films; *I Passed For White, Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, Monster's Ball,* and *Save the Last Dance.* The main idea behind this "problem" is the idea of border-crossing, or going from one racial boundary to the next, in terms of understanding one's identity.

I systematically examined the portrayals of interracial relationships between "blacks" and "whites" within the US film industry. Two films from the 1960s and two films from the 2000s were analyzed. I questioned the static representations interracial relationships in mainstream films by examining how race is used to identify and characterize each individual in the interracial relationship.

Consistent with the taboo against interracial intimacies, the findings of this study suggest that interracial couples continue to be subjected to a racialized society that does not fully accept them as a couple. This study shows that racial segregation in interracial relationships is profoundly practiced in Hollywood films and has become more common rather than not in the past 50 years. These findings are important because popular films are more than entertainment vehicles; they are influential in transmitting certain philosophies from one generation to the next.

It is important now more than ever to examine the institutionalized racism that exists in US films, given that most portray subtle amounts of racism towards interracial relationships. As Beeman (2007) says, "Problematic portrayals of…interracial relationships may not be easily discernible to the average US viewing public, especially since such images are embedded in US

racist ideology," (p. 708). Findings in systematic studies of US media, and specifically films,

suggest that there is, in fact, a negative message being sent out with regard to interracial

relationships (Beeman, 2007). This negative cultural imagery is reinforced by the media and

may indirectly affect the social and economic status of African Americans (Jewell, 1993;

Collins, 2000). Challenging this negative imagery is essential if we are to achieve equality.

PREFACE

Much of the existing scholarship on interracial relationships has focused on the historical impact it has had on society. Throughout United States' history, society has seen dramatic changes in the traditional dynamics of relationships. As a result, these controversial relationships have become more prominent and widely accepted, despite the history of outward negativity and lack of acceptance for this type of relationship found in United States history. However, there is limited qualitative research in terms of interracial relationships in films.

The purpose of this study is to conduct film analyses in order to explore the ways in which interracial relationships between blacks and whites come to be represented as problematic for mainstream audiences by looking specifically at the following four films; *I Passed For White (1960), Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (1967), Monster's Ball (2001),* and *Save the Last Dance (2001).* The main idea behind this "problem" is the idea of border crossing, in terms of understanding one's identity.

In order to do this, I will systematically examine the portrayals of interracial relationships between African Americans ("blacks") and European Americans ("whites") within the US film industry, between the years 1960 to 2001. Two films from the 1960s and two films from the 2000s will be analyzed. Furthermore, two films (one from the 1960s and one from the 2000s) depict a white man with an African American woman, and two films (one from the 1960s and one from the 2000s) depict an African American man with a white woman. I will question and challenge the static representations of race and interracial relationships in mainstream films by examining how race is used to identify and characterize each individual in the interracial relationship.

This study does not attempt to prove that "whites" consciously prevent interracial intimacies. Rather, it includes an systematic and empirical investigation of institutionalized racism surrounding interracial sexuality between "blacks" and "whites" as found in US media that reinforces emotional barriers between African Americans and Caucasians.

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INTRODUCTION

"Blacks and whites continue to be the two groups with the greatest social distance, the most spatial separation, and the strongest taboos against interracial marriage."
- Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2001, p. ix

Interracial relationships have become more prominent in the United States in the past 50 years due to an increase in public acceptance. Previous research shows that society's perspectives on interracial relationships are molded by many influential factors, including: family/friend acceptance, perceptions of public acceptance, background experience (i.e. different racial family members), and various socio-demographics, such as race, age, gender, social class, place of origin, and level of education (Schiller & Koch, 2006).

Society is enriched with numerous social issues involving human behavior and those that have to do with change. Specifically in the United States, changes throughout history have had a direct effect on its citizens' social experience and current societal structure (Schiller & Koch, 2006). In American society, race in particular has been a variable in many of the changes that have occurred politically and socially.

Negative attitudes toward interracial relationships provide for difficult emotional barriers to interracial contact, and thus aid in the maintenance of a racially stratified society (Lewis & Yancey, 1994-1995). Gordon (1964) points out that widespread acceptance of interracial relationships within society is a major step in an assimilation process whereby majority and minority racial groups integrate with one another and promote "black/white"[1] relationships.

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[1] Quotation marks were used when talking about the problematic racialized categories of "black" and "white." The term African American(s) refers to a cultural group in the United States rather than a racialized group and is thus not placed inside quotation marks.

1

Popular culture, especially mainstream box-office films, has contributed to many beliefs, values, and social institutions, mainly because they rarely depict "black/white" interracial relationships. Many movies portray interracial couples as deviant. The films that do depict this type of relationship tend to reinforce the existing racial hierarchy, viewing interracial relationships as problematic. Media representations of interracial couples in films present narratives of this "problem" romance. Media representations of interracial relationships reinforce the notion that they are, at best, dysfunctional and, at worse, dangerous transgressions (Perry & Sutton, 2006). There is a prevailing trend in the U.S. to either deny that interracial relationships exist by rendering them invisible in mainstream media or when they are portrayed, to show them as problematic and unnatural border-crossings (Perry & Sutton, 2006). As bell hooks (1995) says, "True love in television and movies is almost always an occurrence between those who share the same race. When love happens across boundaries…it is doomed for no apparent reason and/or has tragic consequences," (p. 113).

Films are an important cultural form, not only because they reflect the dominant views of society, but also because of the possible influence they have on the views of the members of a society regarding race. These interracial images often function to serve the white hegemony in deviantizing interracial relationships by projecting stereotypes and racial biases as reality. The general themes of the interracial relationship generally revolve around lust, curiosity, or deception.

The purpose of this study is to conduct film analyses in order to explore the way in which interracial relationships between "blacks" and "whites" come to be represented as problematic for mainstream audiences by looking specifically at the following four films; *I Passed For White (1960), Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (1967), Monster's Ball (2001),* and *Save the Last Dance*

(2001). The main idea behind this "problem" is the idea of border crossing, or going from one racial boundary to the next, in terms of understanding ones identity.

In order to do this, I will systematically examine the portrayals of interracial relationships between African Americans ("blacks") and European Americans ("whites") within the US film industry, between the years 1960 to 2001. Two films from the 1960s and two films from the 2000s will be analyzed. Furthermore, two films (one from the 1960s and one from the 2000s) will depict a white man with an African American woman, and two films (one from the 1960s and one from the 2000s) will depict an African American man with a white woman (see table 1.1). I will question and challenge the static representations of race and interracial relationships in mainstream films by examining how race is used to identify and characterize each individual in the interracial relationship.

This study does not attempt to prove that "whites" consciously prevent interracial intimacies. Rather, it includes an empirical investigation of institutionalized racism surrounding interracial sexuality between "blacks" and "whites" as found in U.S. media (films) that reinforces emotional barriers between African Americans and Caucasians.

Table 1.1
Analyzed Films

	Black man, white woman	**White man, black woman**
1960s	*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*	*I Passed For White*
2000s	*Save the Last Dance*	*Monster's Ball*

> Nowhere in our lives, perhaps, is race trickier than when it comes to affairs of the heart, bedroom, and joint savings accounts. It is one thing to craft public policy or organize the masses – but it's quite another to get race issues sorted out in our love lives, a place that is already filled with vulnerabilities and expectations.
>
> - Daisy Hernandez, 2006, p. 25

History sets up precedence and frameworks in which society today is based on. Most people, regardless of personal ignorance of the past, are affected in many ways based on what historical events took place in their respective environments.

The United States has historically been a diverse society containing people from all around the world. American society has reacted to each new cultural addition both positively and negatively. Although there is much research that needs to be conducted in regard to racial issues in the United States, it can be concluded that all different races do manage to live together in the same geographical region (Schiller & Koch, 2006).

Racism is a belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human races determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to rule others. It also refers to the intolerance or hatred of another race. Understanding racism as a systemic, institutionalized problem in the United States is complicated because systemic racism is rarely, if ever, discussed (Beeman, 2007). American citizens tend to offer individualistic reasons for racism and are therefore inclined to dismiss the subtle nature of racism and the existence of structural barriers to equality (Kluegel, 1990). Because of this, it is vital to study subtle forms of racism in American society and to address racism surrounding interracial sexuality as a concealed and institutionalized problem (Beeman, 2007).

Analyses of popular U.S. films illustrate the problematic portrayals of interracial interactions (Beeman, 2007). For example, McPhail concludes that Spike Lee's depictions of interracial relationships are highly negative and are based solely on sex (1996). Similarly, Paulin concludes that the interracial relationship in Spike Lee's film *Jungle Fever* was negatively portrayed and that the title itself revealed Lee's intention of portraying interracial relationships between "blacks" and "whites" as a sickness (1997).

Many studies have examined the negative portrayal of interracial relationships in various forms of media (Lemon, 1977; Scott, 1984; Williams, 2001). However, few systematically compare and contrast media portrayals of intimate relationships between "black" and "white" men and women. In fact, the literature on interracial relationships in the media suggests there is a difference between the portrayals of "blacks" and "whites," which supports the need for further review of these relationships.

The institutionalization of emotions surrounding "black/white" interracial sexuality is of particular concern in this study. According to Feagin, Vera, and Batur (2001), understanding the emotions when speaking of a breakdown in empathy between "blacks" and "whites" is of extreme importance. Simply stated, it is the inability of "whites" to see "blacks" as emotional equals – as human beings capable of experiencing intimacy and expressing human feelings (Feagin, Vera, and Batur, 2001).

Social scientists have pointed out that much opposition to interracial intimacy remains, despite a decline in racist attitudes (Qian, 1997; Knox *et al.* 2000; Romano, 2003). As Beeman (2007) points out, "African Americans have been the most rejected racialized group with regard to all forms of interracial integration and intimacy," (p. 688). A study done by Bobo and Zubrinsky illustrates the exclusivity of African Americans as the most rejected minority in the

United States and the group to which "whites" convey the most ambivalence towards when speaking of interracial intimacies (1996).

Border-crossing

> Interracial marriages are unbiblical and immoral. God created different races of people and placed them amongst themselves…There is nothing for white Americans to gain by mixing their blood with blood of other peoples. There will only be irreversible damage for us.
> - written in a letter to the editor in response to a photo of black and white youths dancing together as quoted in Mathabane and Mathabane, 1992, p. 186

Historically, there has been hostility toward interracial relationships. Perry and Sutton (2006) describe this hostility as "ultimately grounded in the essentialist understanding of racial difference," (p. 889), which is evident from the quote above. According to Perry and Sutton (2006), individuals are placed in racial categories and boundaries are created around these categories. Thus, border-crossing, or going from one racial boundary to the next, is viewed as, "not only unnatural but threatening to the rigid hierarchies that have been built around these presumed differences," (Perry & Sutton, 2006).

These mutually exclusive racial categories frame hostility toward couples involved in interracial relationships and assume an either/or understanding of identity, "either you are one of us or one of them," in which one is forced to choose "a side," (Perry & Sutton, 2006). Identity formation is frequently concerned with "drawing boundaries, engaging in boundedness, configuring rings around" the mutually exclusive categories of belonging (Weis, Proweller & Centrie, 1997; p. 214). Borders between these racial categories are patrolled and border-crossing is prevented because it would threaten the "natural" order (Perry & Sutton, 2006).

One of the most obvious realms of difference between the "us" and "them" mentality lies in perceptions of sexuality, especially for white Americans. Cornel West (1993) contends that white fear of black bodies is that this

fear is rooted in visceral feelings about black bodies and fueled by sexual myths of black men and women…either as threatening creatures who have the potential for sexual power over whites, or as harmless, desired underlings of a white culture (p. 119).

Under this historical legacy of "us" versus "them," it should come as no surprise that it is nearly impossible to see interracial relationships as being anything other than a threat to the natural order of society. To the extent that individuals conform in ways that fit this "norm," they uphold the boundaries that separate them from the other. On the contrary, when individuals cross these boundaries, they are perceived as failing to perform their identity in normal ways and are held to be acting inappropriately and leave themselves open to censure (Perry & Sutton, 2006).

Each "side" of the border is significant to its own members in that each is exclusive to its own race and has "rules" to keep "whites" on one side and "blacks" on the other. These borders also prohibit interracial mixing, and the media are viewed as an integral force in reinforcing these prohibitions and shaping perceptions and public responses to interracial relationships.

The media and other forms of popular culture are seen as playing a vital role in reminding "blacks" and "whites" that "thou shalt not" cross the borders of sexuality that have been in place since slavery (Perry & Sutton, 2006).

Media Influence

> Depictions of interracial couples learning lessons from mass media about racial bonding are taught that curiosity about those who are racially different can be expressed as long as boundaries are not actually crossed and no genuine intimacy emerges.
>
> <div align="right">- bell hooks, 1995; p. 113</div>

Severin and Tankard (2001) point out "mass communicators want audiences to pay attention to their messages, learn the contents of the messages, and make appropriate changes in attitudes or beliefs or produce the desired behavioral responses," (p. 73). This is especially true for most American filmmakers, who don't necessarily tell the audience what to think, rather what to think about. The process of interpreting these messages is complicated, making these goals difficult to achieve at times.

Selective perception is the inclination for people's perception to be influenced by wants, needs, attitudes, and various psychological factors (Severin and Tankard, 2001). This simply means that different people can have very different reactions to the same message. It is worth mentioning selective perception because the findings from this research are from only one perspective and may have completely different meanings for someone else.

Television and film are the media of choice for a vast majority of Americans. Films are an important cultural form, not only because they reflect the dominant views of society, but also because of the possible influence they have on the views of the members of a society. These interracial images often function to serve the white hegemony in deviantizing interracial relationships by projecting stereotypes and racial biases as reality. The general themes of the interracial relationship generally revolve around lust, curiosity, or deception. Popular films are more than entertainment vehicles; they are influential in transmitting certain philosophies from

one generation to the next. And, films provide an enduring way to look at how society has changed, if at all.

The media have a tendency to stigmatize interracial relationships. This stigmatization contributes to a culture that allows a "permission to hate," (Perry & Sutton, 2006). As Snow *et al.* (2002) argue, the media frames do more than provide entertainment, and even more than shape perceptions: They can also serve as a "guide to action," (p. 183). Often times, this action is violence.

As Nagel (2003) points out, where they appear to personify the stigmatized characterizations seen through the media, they are especially likely to evoke hostility:

> Racialized depictions of sexual purity, dangerousness, appetites, desirability, perversion are part of the performative construction of sexual respectability and disreputability, normalcy and deviance. Ethnosexual frontiers are exotic, but volatile social spaces, fertile sites for the eruption of violence. Racial, ethnic, or nationalist defense and enforcement of in-group sexual honor and purity strengthens ethnic boundaries and subjugates members enclosed inside ethnic borders…Negative images or accusations about the sexuality of ethnic Others contribute to the creation of disreputable and toxic outgroups and can be used to justify their exclusion, repression, or extermination (p. 55).

Media Representation

> True love in television and movies is almost always an occurrence between those who share the same race. When love happens across boundaries…it is doomed for no apparent reason and/or has tragic consequences.
>
> - bell hooks, 1995, p. 113

In the multifaceted web of life imitating art imitating life, the media's role in forming and reinforcing "black/white" interracial relationships is not something that can be overlooked.

Media representations of interracial relationships reinforce the notion that they are, at best, dysfunctional and, at worse, dangerous transgressions (Perry & Sutton, 2006). There is a

prevailing trend in the U.S. to either deny that interracial relationships exist by rendering them invisible in mainstream media or when they are portrayed, to show them as problematic and unnatural border-crossings (Perry & Sutton, 2006).

A University of Florida study found that "despite growing numbers of mixed couples in America, movie relationships between men and women of different races are most likely to be short-lived, oversexed and downright dangerous," (Keen, 2006). Furthermore, the study showed that white women in interracial relationships were portrayed as either morally corrupt or as victims of physical or sexual abuse, while women of color involved with a white man were shown as exotic (Keen, 2006).

The under representation of interracial relationships in U.S. films do not accurately reflect the actual rates of interracial marriages in the U.S. Such media portrayals have historically been rare and have been rendered invisible by many mandated state and federal laws. In fact, the Hollywood Production Code banned "miscegenation" in all U.S. films from the 1930s until the late 1950s (Perry & Sutton, 2006). In order to understand the logic behind this, it is important to clarify the difference between interracial romance, which involves desire and sex, and miscegenation, blood lines and procreation. Hollywood did not entirely refuse to portray interracial relationships; it was hesitant to depict interracial breeding (Hershfield, 1998).

The code was abolished in the 1950s and as Courtney (2005) points out, with the eradication of the code, it was not surprising that

> Interracial tropes examined in earlier periods return with a vengeance in attempts to fortify increasingly beleaguered white male subjects facing increasing demands for racial justice and a host of gender pressures. And when old methods repeatedly fail, new and sometimes drastic measures are taken to restore white male privilege and vision (p. 16).

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Each film in this study represents interracial relationships; however, each articulates the subject differently. I will closely examine each of the four films to reveal how each rearticulates and incorporates dominant notions of "black/white" interracial relationships and desire based on the type of relationship each film depicts (white man with a black woman and black man with a white woman) and which time period the film is made (1960s or 2000s).

Filmmaking

> Filmmaking is a craft, and it can be learned like anything else; of course, it takes talent, but forget about it being something magical and mystical…Film is a powerful medium; it can influence how millions of people think, walk, talk, even live, plus you can make an enormous sum of money. The idea is to keep the industry confined, let a small group of people have the control and make all the money. This is why one of my goals has been the demystification of film.
>
> - Spike Lee, *The Films of Spike Lee*

Over the past 50 years, Hollywood has come out with several films depicting interracial relationships between "blacks" and "whites." The tendency of these films is to put the relationship on display, but to never address the underlying issues of racism or intolerance. Furthermore, most films do nothing to persuade the mainstream white audience to significantly reflect on their own feelings toward interracial relationships.

Discussions of race in the US often focus on the differences between "blacks" and "whites." Those who do not conform to dominant standards and interracially mix with an "other," it disrupts the distinct border and "illegally" crosses it (Paulin, 1997). By directly challenging these mainstream categories, acts of border-crossing become criminalized (Paulin, 1997). This disruption is one of the most controversial forms of border-crossing and is rarely shown in US films. Although there may be a greater number of interracial relationships depicted

in the media, and especially in film, there continues to be a lack of scenes in films that show interracial couples sharing emotional and intimate moments that go beyond sex (Beeman, 2007).

Media representations of interracial couples in films present narratives of the "problem" romance. A close examination of *I Passed For White, Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, Monster's Ball*, and *Save the Last Dance* reveals how these films rearticulate and incorporate dominant beliefs in society regarding "black/white" interracial relationships. As Paulin points out, the process of examining various representations of interracial relationships in relation to one another creates more astute and revealing analyses of each of them (1997). By looking at more than one film and examining it in relation to the other films, a more inclusive and complex view of the phenomenon are offered.

RESEARCH

<u>*Research Questions*</u>

      The purpose of this study is to conduct film analyses in order to explore the ways in which interracial relationships between blacks and whites come to be represented as problematic for mainstream audiences. This study does not attempt to prove that "whites" consciously prevent interracial intimacies. Rather, it includes an empirical investigation of institutionalized racism surrounding interracial sexuality between "blacks" and "whites" as found in US media that reinforces emotional barriers between African Americans and Caucasians. In short, I am examining how each film represents "black/white" interracial relationships as problematic and to explore the progression, or lack thereof, of society's acceptance levels to such relationships in U.S. film.

      Using a qualitative content analysis of four U.S films (*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *I Passed For White*, *Monster's Ball*, and *Save the Last Dance*) portraying interracial relationships, the following five research questions will be asked in order to answer the overarching question of how each film represents "black/white" interracial relationships as problematic and to explore the progression, or lack thereof, of society's acceptance levels to such relationships in U.S. film:

1. How successful[2] was each interracial relationship in their respective film? Relationships were defined as successful if they had reached some degree of intimacy that was still present at the end of the film.

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[2] Success was noted only for the main interracial relationship in the film.

2. How do the films, in their depictions of interracial relationships, differ from each other given the decade each was produced?

Each film's depiction of the level of physical and emotional intimacy between each character in the interracial relationship was especially examined.

3. How do race and class intersect, particularly in terms of "black/white" identities and relationships?

The racial make-up of the couple, job status, and living conditions were all examined. Furthermore, signs of domination, submissiveness, and aggression were also noted.

4. How do each of the film's representations of "black/white" distinctions function as examples of border-crossing?

The conversations, reactions, and body language of "outsiders" to the interracial relationship were examined.

5. How do interracial relationships in these films oppose or reinforce distinct racial identities and boundaries? How do they open borders and help to broaden racial definitions?

The general story line and ending were examined here (happy-ever-after ending vs. tragic ending). Furthermore, the underlying message in each film was noted.

    These research questions were developed based on information gathered during the literature review and also from prior studies of the topic. They were individually created in order to comprehensively answer the overarching question of how each film represents "black/white" interracial relationships as problematic and to explore the progression, or lack thereof, of society's acceptance levels to such relationships in U.S. film.

Methodology

To systematically examine the film content of interracial relationships, qualitative content analyses of four US films was conducted. The films contained interracial relationships between African Americans and Caucasians. The films chosen were: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), *I Passed For White* (1960), *Monster's Ball* (2001), and *Save the Last Dance* (2001). The analytical approach used was based on previous studies and research done by Beeman (2007), Atwater and Anokwa (1991), and Paulin (1997).

Criteria

Each film was selected from an "Interracial Romance in the Movies" website, jeffntina.com. The website contained a total of 468 interracial relationship film titles[3]. Of these 468, four films were selected based on the following criteria:

1. A central theme to the film must deal specifically and substantively with a relationship between a black person and a white person.

2. The film must involve both black and white principals and portray specific instances of interaction between the black and white principals.

3. The film must portray race relations in a broad social context[4].

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[3] This website did not list every film made in the United States from 1960 to 2001, nor does it include every film depicting an interracial relationship; hence, it may not be representative of, or generalizable to all US films. However, it was one of the most comprehensive works of its kind, and one of the easiest I could gain access to. It included a wide range of films, from blockbuster hits to little-known rarities.

[4] The films used in this study portray black/white interracial relationships that must either transcend race, therefore making them acceptable, or fail because of the inherent oppositions between black and white people.

4. The film must relate the perspectives of both black and white principals in portraying cross-racial interactions.

5. Two films must depict a white man/black woman couple and two films must depict a white woman/black man couple.

6. Two of the films must have been released in the 1960s and two films must have been released in the 2000s.

Research Question Evaluation

In order to answer the first research question (how successful was each interracial relationship in their respective film?), what it meant for a relationship to be successful was defined. Relationships were defined as successful if they had reached some degree of intimacy that was still present at the end of the film. For example, the relationship would be deemed successful if the interracial couple shared the same feelings for one another, or stronger feelings of love, at the beginning of the courtship as they did by the end of the film. In order to do this, I determined if the couple was married, engaged, dating, or none of the above at the beginning of the film compared to the end of the film. I looked at the success of each relationship to determine if the racial make-up of the couple (black man with a white woman or white man with a black woman) or the decade (1960s or 2000s) played a role in determining the success of the relationship.

To answer the second research question (how do the films, in their depictions of interracial relationships, differ from each other given the decade each was produced?), I looked at each film's level of intimacy between each character in the interracial relationship. Intimacy was defined as a close, familiar, and affectionate or loving personal relationship with another

person, in this case, another person of a different race. Intimacy was looked at in two different

ways: I noted how frequently each interracial couple embraced and how frequently each

interracial couple kissed[5].

Embraces were identified as "formal", "warm", or "sexual."

"Formal" embraces were business-like touches, i.e. a handshake or a pat on the back.

 "Warm" embraces involved stronger body contact, i.e. a hug.

"Sexual" embraces were the heaviest form of embrace, i.e. intercourse.

Kisses were identified as "cheek", "lips-peck", or "lips-full."

"Cheek" kisses were those on the cheeks.

"Lips-peck" kisses were simple, short pecks on the lips.

"Lips-full" kisses were more intimate, longer kisses on the lips.

Intimacy was looked at in terms of physical interaction between the two characters in the

interracial relationship. I felt it was important to incorporate this type of interaction in the study

to explore the progression, or lack thereof, of society's acceptance level to such relationships. I

was interested in finding out how romantic depictions of interracial couples were shown in films

from the 1960s in comparison to films from the 2000s (i.e. what types of embraces and kisses

were shown and what was the frequency of such interactions?).

The third research question (how do race and class intersect, particularly in terms of

black/white identities and relationships?) was answered by looking at the racial make-up of the

couple (a black man with a white woman or a white man with a black woman), the job status of

the man (specifically, were black men in interracial relationships portrayed as less career-

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[5] The interactions of embracing and kissing were only examined when they took place between
the couple in the interracial relationship.

oriented than the white men in the interracial relationship?), and the living conditions of each partner (prior to the interracial relationship and after becoming involved in an interracial relationship). Furthermore, signs of domination, submissiveness, and aggression were also noted.

I looked at these criteria to determine if there was a change in the way black characters were portrayed in comparison to their white counterparts. For example, one would expect to see characters that are representative of the general public if the films are meant to be actual representations of society. However, if the characters are portrayed in a fantastic fashion, why were they done so and what does that say about society's whimsical views of people in interracial relationships?

In order to answer the fourth research question (how do each of the film's representations of black/white distinctions function as examples of border-crossing?) in terms of border-crossing, I examined the conversations and reactions of those not involved in the interracial relationship to the interracial relationship. I noted specific things that were said and also the body language (i.e. eye-rolling, shaking of the head, etc.). Going one step further, I also noted the race of the "outsider" to see what role, if any, that may play in his/her tolerance or acceptance level of the interracial couple.

Border-crossing was an ideal concept to examine the progression, or lack thereof, of society's acceptance of interracial couples. The best way to determine this was by looking at the characters that were not involved in the interracial relationship and noting their reactions (verbal and nonverbal) to the interracial relationship. I noted characters that personally knew at least one member of the interracial couple, and more interestingly, characters that had no personal attachment whatsoever to either member of the interracial couple (i.e. a complete stranger).

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The fifth and final research question (how do interracial relationships in these films oppose or reinforce distinct racial identities and boundaries? How do they open borders and help to broaden racial definitions?) was answered by examining the general story line and ending of each film. For example, did the film send a general message of acceptance of the interracial relationship, or did it send a message that the interracial relationship was "wrong" by societal standards and caused a problem not only for the couple involved in the interracial relationship, but also for those around them. Along with the general message, I looked to see what, if any, was the underlying message of each film. I also noted whether the film had a happily ever after ending, or a tragic ending.

These messages were examined to determine what effect, if any, these specific films had on persuading society's acceptance levels of interracial couples. Although this study did not specifically examine society's reaction to each film, nor did it examine the general views of society at the time regarding interracial relationships, it could be used to draw references between filmmaking at the time and what society's views were at the time. This study could be used to show how each film either was an accurate depiction of society at the time, or a fantasy film that explored the way society should react to such relationships.

Film Synopses

> A man and a woman of different races in the movies have a greater statistical probability of dying than of getting married or dating seriously.
> - Nadia Ramoutar as quoted in Keen, 2006, p. 1

The theme of interracial relationships has been problematic for Hollywood. One of the first and perhaps most prominent films to treat this theme seriously is arguably Stanley Kramer's

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner. This film is considered to be a milestone among Hollywood films and has earned a reputation as a champion against an intolerant America by condemning many of the prejudices surrounding interracial relationships.

Mainstream Hollywood films that deal with the problems of interracial romance are very scarce, as the genre has not proven to be very popular and thus remains unprofitable. Whether such films are a box-office success or not is of less consequence than the fact that there is a new awareness of younger audiences who desire more mature and fair treatment of interracial relationships in film. This new trend of better-educated young people watching films with more realistic interracial relationships is evident by the success of the latter films. Still, each of the following four films are appealing in their own way and all reflect the times in which they were made – a country which seems to be more tolerant of love between races than it used to be.

I Passed For White (1960)

"I look white…I married white…Now I must live with a secret that can destroy us both!"

Those are the words printed on the front cover of the film, *I Passed For White.* The film tells the story of a beautiful young mixed woman, Bernice Lee or Lila Brownell (played by Sonya Wilde), who runs away from home to start a new life as a white woman[6]. She falls in love and marries the man of her dreams, Frederick "Rick" Leyton (played by James Franciscus) – a rich, white man from a well-to-do family. The entire movie is based on her living her lie and trying to keep it a secret from everyone around.

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[6] It should be noted that at the time, Hollywood would cast white actors in the roles of "half-breeds," which was the case in this film. Prior to the 1960s, this was a very common practice especially when paired romantically or sexually with a white character. However, as a rule, actors who were "nonwhite" were not allowed to portray "white" characters.

The film begins with Bernice, a light-skinned black student, sitting in a Los Angeles nightclub watching her brother Chuck, who is dark-skinned, perform with his jazz group. Chuck gets into an altercation with a white man who thought Bernice was a white girl dating a black man. Bernice later confides in her grandmother about what happened, and tells her that she has been harassed by both blacks and whites at school (Bernice is half black and half white). Bernice, tired of her current living situation, slips out into the night to begin a new life in New York as a white woman.

Bernice makes friends with her co-worker Sally Roberts (played by Pay Michon), and falls in love with a man she originally met on the plane to New York, Rick Leyton. Bernice confides her true identity to Sally, who warns her to never tell Rick the truth because his wealthy family would not allow them to be married.

Bernice creates a multitude of lies about her family, including telling Rick's parents that her own parents cannot make it to their wedding because they are going out of the country. Mrs. Leyton, Rick's mother (played by Elizabeth Council), has her suspicions about Bernice, but allows the two to get married.

The main conflict of the film is when Bernice realizes she is pregnant and is petrified that the child will come out black. After a night of dancing, Rick berates Bernice for acting like a "cheap dance hall dame," and she decides to leave him and raise the child on her own. However, before she has the opportunity to leave, she is admitted to the hospital, where she delivers the baby.

The climax of the film is when Bernice, in a semi-conscious state, asks the nurse if the baby is black, unaware that Rick is in the room. She then finds out that the baby died during delivery, and came out white. Bernice tries to explain that she had a nightmare the baby came

out looking black due to choking, but Rick did not believe her. He accused her of cheating with a black musician from the dance club.

At home, things were not much better when Bertha, the black maid of the house (played by Isabelle Cooley), tells Bernice that Mrs. Leyton found out that she was lying about a picture she claimed was her mother and that Mrs. Leyton found Bernice's books on intermarriage. Bertha, however, told Bernice that she told Mrs. Leyton that the books were hers. The damage, however, had already been done.

After a heated argument, Rick tells Bernice he must leave for the night to think about their situation. While he is gone, Bernice packs her things and is taken to the airport by her loyal friend Sally, who reasons it is just as well that the Leytons never know the truth about her. Bernice goes back to Los Angeles, never to speak to or hear from Rick Leyton or his family ever again.

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (1967)

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner is regarded as one of the most memorable and lasting films with anti-miscegenation themes, this groundbreaking film directly confronts the American psyche head-on with the issue of interracial marriage (Perry & Sutton, 2006). The film deals with the controversial subject of interracial marriage, which had historically been illegal in most of the United States up to that point.

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner depicts a young, innocent white woman, Joanna (Joey) Drayton, (played by Katharine Houghton) who shocks her well-to-do but liberal parents by

bringing home unannounced the man she has met, fallen in love with, and plans to marry, Dr.

John Prentice (played by Sidney Poitier[7]), an African-American.

The film explores the tension, and often humorous, confrontations of the woman's

parents, Matt and Christina Drayton, (played by Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn) with

their own hypocritical reservations about the prospect of their only daughter marrying a black

man. They have raised Joey to think for herself and not blindly conform to the predictable norms

of society. The film seems to directly pose the question contained in the hypocritical line: "I've

got nothing at all against black people, but would you want your daughter to marry one?" To

make matters worse, the Drayton's disapproving black maid (played by Isabel Sanford) and

Christina's bigoted associate (played by Virginia Christine) make their disapprovals known.

To complicate matters, Dr. Prentice has secretly met with Joey's parents and informed

them that if they do not give their unqualified approval and blessing of the union, he will not

marry their daughter. And, they only have this one day to make up their minds, as he is due to

leave for Geneva Switzerland for a job. However, unknowing of what John has said to her

parents, Joey is determined to marry John no matter what her parents, or anyone else, thinks.

The main conflict of the film is the Draytons decision to decide if their daughter's happiness

should outweigh the inevitable hardships she will face in an interracial relationship.

Throughout the film, the Draytons get council from their best friend, Monsignor Ryan

(played by Cecil Kellaway), who provides them with guidance and seems to be the voice of

reason throughout the film. Tensions soon rise again when John's parents (played by Roy Glenn

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[7] At the 2002 Academy Awards, Sidney Poitier was honored for his lifelong work as an
accomplished actor.

Sr. and Beah Richards) show up for dinner at the Drayton household and have trouble accepting the pair as a couple and are strongly against their intentions to marry.

During the plot of the film, the mothers of the two seem to come to terms with the fact that their children truly love one another. Although neither of them is thrilled when first learning of the two, each accepts the fact that her child is in love and would not be happy had the other not been in his/her life. The same cannot be said for the fathers, though.

John meets with his father and tells him that he respects him and loves him as his father, but that he cannot possibly understand John's situation because he is 30 years older than he is and that he and his "whole lousy generation believes the way it was for [them] is the way it's got to be." He also delivers the memorable and effective line that his father sees himself "as a colored man," while John just thinks of himself "as a man."

Furthermore, it was not until the end of the film that Matt Drayton delivered the most memorable scene of the film, where he finally gives his approval of the two's union. He gives a passionate speech to John and Joey about the struggles they will face on a day-to-day basis, but that if they truly love each other, they will make it.

The film stands in between the old racial "code of behavior" in terms of segregation, represented by all the forces united against the young couple, and the social demands of integration, a foreshadow of a new "code of behavior."

Monster's Ball (2001)

The title for this film comes from a 17th century custom in medieval England, where prisoners awaiting execution were called monsters. The night before their execution, their jailers

would hold a feast, a final farewell, known as a monster's ball. The title is important as to the representation in the film.

Set in Georgia, this film presents the unlikely relationship between two of the most fully realized characters to show up in American film in recent years. Hank Grotowski (played by Billy Bob Thorton), a white corrections officer, and Leticia Musgrove (played by Halle Berry[8]), a struggling black mother, form a relationship based on their shared sense of loneliness and loss.

Hank and his son, Sonny (played by Heath Ledger), are employed as correctional officers and live with Hank's father, Buck (played by Peter Boyle), a classic racist whose wife had committed suicide. Buck's prejudices and hateful attitude has influenced Hank to not only hate his father, but also his son and seemingly everyone else. Hank and Sonny have a confrontation in the family's living room, where Sonny asks his father, "You hate me, don't you?" Hank replies, "Yes, I hate you. Always have." Sonny then replies, "Well I've always loved you," and shoots and kills himself. Hank subsequently must bury his son in the backyard, next to his mother and his wife, who appear to have the same tragic ending Sonny did. Hank also quits his job at the corrections center.

Leticia's husband and father to her son, Lawrence Musgrove (played by Sean Combs), is a convicted murderer and is executed, with Hank's assistance, during the film. She has been struggling while raising their son, which leads to her frequent drinking. She is unable to pay her bills and becomes employed as a waitress at a coffee shop frequented by Hank. This is where they first meet. At first, Hank pays no attention to her and barely tips her for her services.

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[8] At the 2002 Academy Awards, Halle Berry became the first African American woman to receive the Oscar for best female actress for this role.

One night, Leticia and her son Tyrell (played by Coronji Calhoun) were walking home when a car struck him. Leticia is left helpless on the side of the road, cradling her dying son, screaming for someone to help her. Hank happens to drive by, and his conscience demands that he pull over to help the two. They have no idea of their connection, but Hank recognizes his own grief in her plight and reaches out. He drives them to the hospital, where Tyrell is pronounced dead. Hank reluctantly takes Leticia home, where the two form a surprising connection in their shared grief.

They initially have an affair based on sex and of easing each other's pains. However, through the movie, a deeper emotional connection forms between the two. Hank begins to transition away from his racist father's ideology and moves toward an open-minded mentality living a life with Leticia. Hank also finds out that Leticia is Lawrence's widow, but he does not reveal to her that he participated in her husband's execution.

After Buck insults Leticia, Hank puts him in a nursing home and focuses his life on loving and supporting Leticia. While Hank goes out on an errand run, Leticia uncovers a portrait drawn by her husband of Hank. She is shocked to learn of Hank's part in her husband's execution. However, given all that they have gone through, she decides to not tell Hank she has found out the truth. The film closes with the two of them on the porch, eating ice cream, and Hank reassuring Leticia that they are "going to be all right."

As mentioned before, a "monster's ball" is that moment in an inmate's life where he celebrates one last time before being put to death. In this film, Hank realizes that every person is on the verge of dying, just like everyone is a prisoner of his/her past. But, Hank chooses to take his life a different direction for his own life by fully coming out of his racist past and charging into the beauty of the present with the love of his life, who just happens to be African-American.

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This film depicts the story of Sarah Johnson (played by Julia Stiles), a talented young white dancer vying to study at Juilliard, and Derek Reynolds (played by Sean Patrick Thomas), a promising African-American student aspiring to attend Georgetown Medical School.

The film opens with Sarah auditioning for Juilliard and her mother dying in a car crash on her way to the audition. Sarah, who has devoted her life to dance, is unable to live with her grief and decides to give up ballet completely.

Sarah moves to Chicago to live with her estranged father, Roy (played by Terry Kinney), who lives in a predominantly black neighborhood. Sarah is one of the only white girls in her new high school, but is quickly befriended by Chenille Reynolds (played by Kerry Washington) and her brother, Derek.

Chenille invites Sarah to join her and a group of friends at Steppes, a hip hop dance club. Once there, Sarah ends up dancing with Derek, to the disgust of Derek's ex-girlfriend, Nikki (played by Bianca Lawson). Derek is impressed with Sarah's dancing ability, but offers to help her with her hip hop moves. Their mutual love of dance leads to their friendship, which evolves into something much deeper.

As Derek and Sarah practice dancing, they learn more about each other. Derek learns of Sarah's mother and her love for ballet, and she learns of his wary relationships with friends and his dream of becoming a doctor. Derek begins to train Sarah for another Juilliard audition. They also begin to like each other as more than friends, but since they are different races, it is much more complicated for them to have a normal relationship.

Through the course of the film, the couple is faced with numerous conflicts stemming from their relationship - Nikki initiates a fight with Sarah, Roy blames Derek for the fight,

Chenille confronts Sarah, and Derek's best friend Malakai (played by Fredro Starr), a troublemaker whom Derek is trying to avoid, questions their friendship. Also, the couple thinks each could threaten the other's chances of having a better life. All of this proves too much for the couple, as Sarah breaks up with Derek.

Meanwhile, Malakai wants Derek to join him for a drive-by shooting, which just so happens to fall on the same day as Sarah's Juilliard audition. Before leaving to meet Malakai, Chenille tells Derek what she said to Sarah, and he is faced with a choice of what he should do – should he repay his friend for his past loyalty at the risk of his own college plans or should he go to Sarah's audition and be there when she needs him the most? Luckily, he runs to the audition and barely makes it there in time to see her perform.

Sarah's performance, a mixture of ballet and hip hop, was flawless. She gets accepted into Juilliard and makes up with Derek. Meanwhile, Malakai gets one of his friends shot and ends up going to prison.

The film ends with a celebration at Steppes. Everyone seems to finally accept the couple for who they are and respects their decision to be with one another. And, the couple learns that the only person who needs to accept you is you.

> There are no complex sociological reasons for the taboo still attached to interracial romance in movies. It's racism, pure and simple. Perhaps these attitudes are sometimes connected to an executive's fear that audiences will be turned off by the sight of black and white together, but a decision that bows to racism must bear the mark of racism itself.
> - Charles Taylor, 2000, p. 1

Scholars have asserted popular culture, especially mainstream box-office films, have contributed to many beliefs, values, and social institutions, mainly because they rarely depict black/white interracial relationships. They say many movies portray interracial couples as deviant and the films that do depict this type of relationship tend to reinforce the existing racial hierarchy, viewing interracial relationships as problematic.

In order to answer the first research question (how successful was each interracial relationship in their respective film?), relationships were defined as successful if they had reached some degree of intimacy that was still present at the end of the film. The relationship was deemed successful if the interracial couple shared the same feelings for one another, or stronger feelings of love, at the beginning of the courtship as they did by the end of the film.

Three of the four films studied affirmatively answered the first research question (how successful was each interracial relationship in their respective film?). *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, Monster's Ball,* and *Save the Last Dance* were deemed successful, with *I Passed For White* being the only film determined to be unsuccessful.

John and Joey (*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*) reaffirmed their relationship throughout the film. The film began with them as an engaged couple, but their engagement was questioned by both sets of parents. However, at the end of the film, their engagement was reaffirmed and stronger than ever. Both sets of parents (with the exception of John's father) gave their verbal

approval of the marriage. The love between John and Joey was never stronger than it was at the

end of the film when they were assured that their parents approved. As Joey said, "It never

occurred to me that I would fall in love with a Negro, but I have, and nothing's going to change

that." John and Joey's relationship was deemed successful because they shared stronger feelings

of love for each other at the end of the film than was present at the beginning of the film.

Although the entire film shows them getting along, there is a stronger sense of love between

them at the end of the film.

Hank and Leticia (*Monster's Ball*) developed a loving, poignant bond throughout the

film. Each depended upon the other for emotional stability and each became a better person

because of the other one. They met through a cordial meeting; however, as the film progressed,

it was obvious each had developed strong, affectionate feelings for the other that were not

present at the beginning of their relationship. Although they met as strangers, by the end of the

film, they were living together and taking care of one another. Their relationship was deemed

successful because they shared strong feelings of love for each other at the end of the film that

was absent at the beginning of the film. Although Leticia may have some reservations after

discovering the truth about Hank's participation in her husband's execution, there is still a love

between the two that is present at the end of the film. In fact, the film ends with Hank telling

Leticia that he "think[s] we're gonna be all right."

Derek and Sarah's (*Save the Last Dance*) relationship was tested throughout the film, as

is evident when she asks him, "When is it okay for us to be together?" They began the film as

acquaintances, then developed a close friendship, and eventually fell in love with one another.

The film ended with the two enjoying each other's company in the same place where they had

their first "dance." The relationship between Derek and Sarah was deemed successful because at

the end of the film, they shared stronger feelings of love for each other than what was present at the beginning of the courtship. By the end of the film, they came to accept each other as he/she was, and in return, their love for one another grew.

Rick and Bernice (*I Passed For White*) were the only couple found to have an unsuccessful relationship. However, given that their entire relationship was based on lies, it should come as no surprise that their relationship did not work. The film ended with Bernice leaving town, never to speak to Rick or his family again. Their relationship was deemed unsuccessful because each felt stronger negative feelings for the other at the end of the film. Rick was fed up with Bernice's lies (although he never found out her "big" lie), and Bernice was tired of how Rick was not emotionally supportive of her.

The interracial relationship in *I Passed For White* bravely exposed the contradictions inherent in "black/white" relationships. The film ultimately found its "black/white" lovers returning to their own kinds, diluting the influence of the central theme of interracial relationships and hostility.

To answer the first question in short, a majority (three of four) of the films portrayed their respective interracial relationship as successful because they had reached some degree of intimacy that was stronger at the end of the film than at the beginning of the film.

To answer the second research question (how do the films, in their depictions of interracial relationships, differ from each other given the decade each was produced?), each film's level of intimacy between each character in the interracial relationship was observed. Intimacy was defined as a close, familiar, and affectionate or loving personal relationship with another person, in this case, another person of a different race. Intimacy was looked at in two

different ways: the frequently each interracial couple embraced and how frequently each interracial couple kissed was noted.

Embraces were identified as "formal", "warm", or "sexual." "Formal" embraces were business-like touches (for example, a pat on the back), "warm" embraces involved stronger body contact (i.e. a hug), "sexual" embraces were the heaviest form of embrace (intercourse). Kisses were identified as "cheek", "lips-peck", or "lips-full." "Cheek" kisses were those on the cheeks, "lips-peck" kisses were simple, short pecks on the lips, and "lips-full" kisses were more intimate, longer kisses on the lips.

After careful observation of emotional and physical intimacy in each film, I concluded that the films produced in the 1960s were much more conservative in their depictions of intimacy than those films produced in the 2000s. By conservative, I mean the films produced in the 1960s were much more subtle in (intimate) nature and paid closer attention to not offending the audience than the films produced in the 2000s.

The two films from the 1960s shared the commonality of embracing only on "formal" or "warm" levels. Neither film portrayed any "sexual" embraces, although in one film sexual relations was asked about and in the other the woman ends up pregnant. However, neither film actually depicted "sexual" embraces.

I Passed For White was extremely cautious in its portrayal of an interracial relationship. There was very limited contact between Rick and Bernice. Their main from of embrace was in the form of Rick's hand on Bernice's back (a "formal" embrace). There were also small hugs (a "warm" embrace) between the two, but not many. There was no type of sexual embrace throughout the entire film. In fact, the two main characters, although married, slept in different bedrooms. And, Bernice became pregnant, but the viewers were never shown that level of

intimacy between the two. The two did share some kisses. Most were "cheek" or "lips-peck."

However, there were two instances of the couple engaging in fuller, more intimate kisses

(identified as "lips-full). Moreover, when Bernice needed Rick's emotional support and physical

embrace the most (when she lost their baby), Rick was completely unsupportive and turned his

back on his wife.

The filmmakers in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* portrayed the couple's relationship as

consistently non-threatening. At no time in the film did John and Joey contemplate living in an

area where interracial romance and marriage were likely to evoke strong public resistance.

Furthermore, Joey's parents lived in the Bay area of San Francisco, perhaps the most liberal

metropolitan area in America at the time (Harris & Toplin, 2007).

The couple's timidity was evident in their portrayal of physical intimacy, or lack of, even

though they were allegedly deeply in love. John and Joey's main type of embrace included

limited hand-holding (a "formal" embrace) and a few short hugs ("warm" embraces). Joey's

mother asked about the couple's sexual intimacy, to which Joey replied that they have not slept

together, although she wanted to, because John wanted to wait until they are married. This reply

alone has raised eyebrows as to the promiscuity of a female. At the time (and still today), such

assertiveness by a woman was (is) viewed as negative.

Also, Joey and John shared only one kiss (identified as a "lips-peck" kiss) throughout the

entire film. The kiss was seen through the rear-view mirror of taxicab during the opening

montage of the film. This humorous representation of intimacy has been one of the most broadly

criticized characterizations in the entire film (Morganstern, 1967; Greeley, 1968). However,

reviewers at the time described it as the first interracial kiss in a major Hollywood picture, thus

proving the film delivered more than just entertainment (Harris & Toplin, 2007). As Harris and

Toplin suggested, it was, in many ways, an important ''social problem'' film (2007).

The two films produced in the 2000s were, by far, more sexual in nature. Both films

depicted "sexual" embraces and shared multiple "lips-full" kisses between the interracial couple.

Save the Last Dance's Derek and Sarah was a little more difficult to interpret given that

the couple danced together quite frequently. Therefore, I did not interpret any form of embrace

while the couple was involved in dancing (their dancing style was sexual in nature, though). At

the beginning of the film, the couple shared "formal" embraces – i.e. Derek shaking Sarah's hand

and him putting his arm around her. As the movie progressed, so did the type of embraces. The

couple began sharing "warm" embraces, such as hugs and leaning on one another. The film did

depict the two having a "sexual" embrace, although it was not graphic and filmed in a mature

manner. Nonetheless, the film did actually show the two engaging in sexual intercourse, which

was something neither film from the 1960s came close to depicting.

In addition, Derek and Sarah displayed every type of kiss identified. Sarah gave Derek a

kiss on the cheek ("cheek" kiss) on the train (hamming it up for a disgusted-looking white

woman staring at them, which I will discuss later). The majority of kisses in the film, though,

were either "lips-peck" or "lips-full."

The interracial couple in *Monster's Ball* displayed every type of embrace. The movie

was peppered with "formal" embraces (Hank putting his arm around Leticia) and "warm"

embraces (Hank and Leticia cuddling in bed). However, the "sexual" embraces depicted in

Monster's Ball have been some of the most discussed scenes from the entire film. There were

several explicit sex scenes involving the interracial couple in *Monster's Ball*. Lust was a primary

factor in these scenes, as each character reached out physically to the other one in their

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individual anguish. Additionally, there is a crude sexual reference about interracial sex in the film when Buck tells Hank, "You ain't no man 'til you split dark oak." Hank and Leticia also engaged in several "lips-peck" and "lips-full" kisses during the second half of the film.

The two films from the 1960s were much more conservative and cautious not to offend audiences when depicting intimacy levels between interracial couples, as is evident by what was observed in each film. The two films from the 2000s depicted much more intimacy, "warm" and "sexual," than either film from the 1960s. Also, the types of kisses exchanged between the interracial couple was not only more passionate and intimate in the films produced in the 2000s, but the frequency of such exchanges was much higher as well.

The two interracial couples depicted in the films from the 2000s were also less cautious in how they approached their relationship in public than the two films from the 1960s. For example, most of the plot for the two films from the 1960s occurred in a "safe" private setting, i.e. the couple's home or the home of one's parents, whereas the setting for the two films produced in the 2000s occurred in more public places, i.e. a public school, a dance club, a diner, etc.

It should be noted, however, that the two films from the 1960s, especially *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner,* were revolutionary for their time and reflective of their era. In 1967, America was moving rapidly toward the removal of the most fundamental forms of racial restriction—bans against interracial marriages (Harris & Toplin, 2007). The United States Supreme Court was enacting laws that pulled down these bans, and American lovers were beginning to tear it down in their private romances and wedding plans as well (Harris & Toplin, 2007). Subsequently, the American people's opinions on the subject began to change as well, and Hollywood films, like *Monster's Ball* and *Save the Last Dance*, reflected those

transformations to some degree (Harris & Toplin, 2007).

The third research question (how do race and class intersect, particularly in terms of "black/white" identities and relationships?) was answered by looking at the racial make-up of the couple (a black man with a white woman or a white man with a black woman), the job status of the man (specifically, were black men in interracial relationships portrayed as less career-oriented than the white men in the interracial relationship?), and living conditions of each partner (prior to the interracial relationship and after becoming involved in an interracial relationship). Furthermore, signs of domination, submissiveness, and aggression were also noted.

The findings of this study showed that the intersection of race and class was very influential in determining individual identities, as well as identities in interracial relationships. Furthermore, it was concluded that black men in interracial relationships were portrayed as very career-oriented, arguably even more so than their white counterparts.

I Passed For White depicted an interracial relationship between a white man, Rick, and a mixed (half black, half white) woman, Bernice. It should be noted, however, that throughout the film (as was reflected in society at the time, too), Bernice was considered to be "black." Rick is a successful businessman who comes from a wealthy, well-known New England family. Bernice is confused about her own racial identity, as is evident when she speaks with her grandma at the beginning of the film. She is not sure whether she is white or black, and gets teased from both groups at school. Bernice cannot find a job in New York unless she poses as a white woman, further confusing her own racial identity. The only reason she met Rick in the first place is because she lied about who she was. She struggled on her own, but found comfort and stability once she and Rick got married and she moved into his mansion. She was very dependent on Rick for not only financial stability, but also for emotional support. She did not communicate

with her family or her friends from back home. In fact, she completely cut off all communication with anyone who would recognize her as Bernice, the "black" girl.

Rick seemed to have a social life outside the home, while her social life was only when he allowed her to go out with him. He was often out with some friends, smoking a cigar and drinking with friends, but Bernice was never out in public without Rick by her side. Even when she tried dancing with another man (in which Rick was not only there but gave his "approval"), he became furious that she was having such a good time and garnering attention. Bernice came across as being very submissive and passive, and Rick seemed to take advantage of this fact by having dominant tendencies (i.e. controlling the conversation, deciding what the couple did, accusing her of cheating, yelling at her, etc.). Furthermore, Rick used physical force to grab Bernice's arm on more than one occasion and threw her on the bed during an argument at the end of the film, which ultimately led to Bernice leaving New York.

It could be argued that no character's race and class intersection were more influential in determining his/her individual and interracial identity than that of Dr. John Prentice, an African American, in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* He was a world-class physician who had won many honors and awards. Not only did he have an education, he was also handsome, honest, affectionate, affluent, and considerate. There was absolutely no objection for him being a potential husband for the daughter of a wealthy and well-known family, except on the basis of his race (Harris & Toplin, 2007). It should also be noted that Joey did not appear to bring anything to the relationship. She was a young, naïve girl who seemed to have a fictitious view of the world. It can be wondered why such a successful, educated doctor of the world would want someone as inexperienced to the world as she was.

According to director Stanley Kramer, he intentionally challenged ethnic stereotypes by making John's character unpretentiously perfect so that the only probable objection to his marrying Joanna would be his race – he had graduated from a top medical program, begun innovative medical initiatives around the world, refused to have premarital sex (which was initiated by his fiancée), and left money on his future father-in-law's desk as payment for a long distance phone call he made.

Obviously, John was not the typical representative of the American black man in the 1960s. In 1967, very few "blacks" were fortunate enough to have reached the level of economic and professional success portrayed by John in the film. In fact, most "blacks" were struggling because of a lack of opportunity to obtain a basic college education (Harris & Toplin, 2007). Furthermore, in those days, many black males exhibited a much more nuanced attitude toward bigotry than John revealed in the film (Harris & Toplin, 2007).

John's fiancée, Joey, a naïve white woman, seemed to be oblivious to the fact that society frowned on the two as a couple. Throughout the entire film, she never made the fact that they were an interracial couple have any sort of negative stigma attached to it. In fact, she seemed to be thrilled and excited at the fact that they were "different." She had an upbeat, often immature, attitude regarding their relationship. There were no signs of domination, submissiveness, or aggression from either partner toward the other noted in this film.

Save the Last Dance depicted a black man, Derek, falling in love with a white woman, Sarah. Derek was a very talented student who aspired to go to Georgetown Medical School. He was a very handsome, charismatic, likeable character. In fact, his sister reminded him that he should be proud of what he is accomplishing in school, "You're just trying to make something of yourself. Ain't no shame or blame in doing that." His home life, however, proved that he

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struggled to get where he was at in life, and particularly, in school. His grandmother raised him

and his sister (and her baby) in a poor, unsafe neighborhood. The film seemed to represent the

stereotype of a black man coming from an unstable home. Even though he was very successful

in school and extremely likeable, there had to be something "wrong" or unpleasant about his life

to cast a shadow of doubt about the two's relationship (besides the obvious).

Sarah, on the other hand, was raised by her mother in an upscale, privileged environment.

However, after her mother's death, Sarah was forced to move in with her estranged father, who

lived in a one-bedroom apartment in a poor Chicago neighborhood. Sarah appeared to be naive

to the fact that there was something viewed as "wrong" with her relationship with Derek. She

did not see why other people became involved or cared about her relationship with Derek, as is

evident by her saying, "It's about me and him. Not us and other people."

Both have an active social life and seem to want to spend any free time with the other.

Derek and Sarah did not display any signs of domination or submissiveness to the other

throughout the film. There was an instance of aggression while they were having an argument,

but neither actually was physically aggressive to the other.

It has been argued that relationships between black men and white women are alleged to be

based on what the other can get from the relationship, whether it is sex, status, money, or

services (Childs, 2005). However, these two films are two very good arguments against this

statement. Both films analyzed depicted successful black men who had no ulterior motive for

falling in love with their white partners. Both men were educated, goal-oriented, and extremely

likeable. In contrast, the two white men portrayed in these films came across as being less

desirable because of their general attitude and demeanors. Rick was shown to be a manipulative,

hurtful man who used physical force against Bernice, and Hank was shown to be a bigoted (at

the beginning of the film), arrogant man who eventually lost his job.

In *Monster's Ball*, Hank was a white man and Leticia was a black woman. Hank was a second-generation corrections officer with the state of Georgia. However, midway through the film, he quit his job and remained unemployed (he later purchases a gas station, though). Hank lived with his bigot father in a rural area and had little social activity outside the home, except for his occasionally rendezvous with the town hooker or his late-night ice cream stop at the diner.

Leticia was a poor, struggling single mother whose estranged husband, a black man, had been on death row for 11 years and was executed toward the beginning of the film. Her son, who ended up getting killed in the film, was morbidly obese. He ate to compensate for the pain of not having a father. Leticia, however, did not realize this and constantly screamed at him to stop eating. She lived in a small, run-down home, until she could no longer afford the rent and was evicted. She only had one choice – to move in with Hank.

Hank and Leticia formed a very strong connection during their time together. Both relied on the other for emotional and physical support. Furthermore, Hank's financial support also made their relationship work. Hank bought her things she could not afford herself. This kept her happy and allowed Hank to have a sense of accomplishment and need. What began as an affair based on lust and physical need developed into a beautiful, loving, and caring commitment to each other. Leticia did show signs of submissiveness throughout the film; however, Hank did not exploit them and never seemed to take advantage of the fact that she was in such a fragile condition.

It should be noted that racial gender role expectations have different connotations for women of color. Especially in Western culture, black women are viewed as having unattractive

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qualities when compared to their fairer counterparts. I mention this because after this film was released, many critics pointed out that Halle Berry had very "white" qualities, including light skin, straight hair, and a slender frame. All of this made her more attractive not only to Hank, but to a white mainstream audience. Furthermore, media representations of black women are often very sexual and viewed as unfit mothers, which was the case in this film.

One of the first sociologists to investigate interracial sexuality was Charles C. Stember. His book, *Sexual Racism: The Emotional Barrier to an Integrated Society* (1976), argued that most of the theories concerning emotions or sexuality were micro-level psychological theories that did not promote a sociological understanding of sexuality and racism. His review of sociological theory revealed that much of it pointed to fear or "white" aversion to the physical features of "blacks" as the motivating factor behind racial hostility (Stember, 1976). Since this revelation, fear has become one of the main focuses in sociological work (Feagin, Vera, and Batur, 2001). Stember, however, pioneered that sexuality (i.e., sexual jealousy) was the cause of racial hostility (1976). Accordingly, a "white" woman is a sexual conquest for African American men – a sexual conquest "white" men could never experience, based on the fact that they did not experience the same subordinate history as "black" men (Stember, 1976). Stember argued that even if a "white" man engaged in sexual relations with a "white" woman, his sexual excitement would not equal that which the "black" man would experience (1976). According to Stember, this antagonism is why "white" men attempted to prevent interracial intimacies between "black" men and "white" women (1976). It should be noted that Stember did not sufficiently address what the structural factors were that might have motivated the sexual jealousy behind the racial hostility.

In order to answer the fourth research question (how do each of the film's representations

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of "black/white" distinctions function as examples of border-crossing?) in terms of border-crossing, the conversations and reactions of those not involved in the interracial relationship to the interracial relationship were examined. Verbal and non-verbal cues were noted. The race of the "outsider" was also identified, in order to see what role, if any, that may play in his/her tolerance or acceptance level of the interracial couple.

Films that depicted an interracial relationship tended to present it as a "problematic" romance. The socially significant dilemma in each film was race. Every film studied had at least one "outsider" who viewed the interracial relationship as "wrong" or deviant. This person made their opinions known by verbal and non-verbal cues. Although not every single incident in every film was recorded, I did pick out what I thought to be some of the more obvious, and in some cases, more offensive, reactions.

I Passed For White was a film that had more racism reflected when Bernice was with her own family than when she was with her own husband. This film was interpreted differently than the other films because one of the people in the interracial relationship was lying about what race she was. Therefore, most outsiders were not directly racist against the couple because they thought they were the same race. There were still instances of racism in the film, however.

The opening scene, for example, showed Bernice at a club with a black man. When he goes to talk to Bernice's brother, a random white man in the crowd began to flirt with her. When her date returned, the man said to him, "What are you doing here? You colorblind? She's white." He then proceeded to get into a fight with her date. That, unfortunately, was a reoccurring situation in Bernice's life, so she decided to move away and start a new life as a white woman in New York.

Bernice's lie was working, until she met Rick's black maid, Bertha. From the first time

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she saw Bernice and glared into her eyes, she gave the sense that she knew something was going on, as if she knew the truth about Bernice all along, and that she did not agree with what was going on (in terms of being romantically involved with someone of a different race). Although she never verbally confirmed her suspicions, her actions spoke louder than any words could have. She left the audience with the impression that she would blow Bernice's cover; we just did not know when. However, by the end of the film, Bertha does not rat out Bernice and actually covers for her. This illustrates how "one kind" looks out for its own, just as Rick's mother was looking out for him. His mother did not seem to have his best interest at heart, but rather, her own family's reputation.

One thing noticed in the film was that whenever there were black and white people together in one place, they were always separated. For example, in the opening scene of the film, at the bar, all the white couples sat at tables together and all the black couples sat at tables together. The two races never sat at the same table and interacted together. Furthermore, during scenes when the couple was in public, the majority of people sharing the experience (i.e. eating dinner, dancing, etc.) were white people, while the majority of those serving and/or entertaining were black people (i.e. the servers at the restaurant, the members of the band, etc.).

In *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, aside from the parents, the main opposition came from Christina's white business associate, Hilary, and the Draytons African-American maid, Tillie. Hilary did not verbally express her feelings, but she stared and rolled her eyes at John the first time she met him. Furthermore, at the Drayton home, she was trying to cause a rift and stir up emotions by gossiping about the couple to Christina. Christina, although not happy about the situation herself, was not going to let someone come in and disrespect her daughter. She handled the situation by delivering a classic speech to rid herself (and her family) of Hilary's meddling

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ways:

> Now, I have some instructions for you. I want you to go straight back to the gallery –
> start your motor – when you get to the gallery tell Jennifer that she will be looking after
> things temporarily, she's to give me a ring if there's anything she can't deal with herself.
> Then go into the office, and make out a check, for cash, for the sum of $5,000. Then
> carefully, but carefully Hilary, remove absolutely everything that might subsequently
> remind me that you had even been there, including that yellow thing with the blue bulbs
> which you have such an affection for. Then take the check, for $5,000, which I feel you
> deserve, and get permanently lost.

No one was more visibly or verbally disapproving of the interracial mixing than the

family's black maid, Tillie. The first time she met John, she just stared at him and did not say a

word to him. In fact, she completely ignored the fact that he was there. This demeanor did not

change throughout the entire film. She voiced her opinion only when she and John were in a

room together alone. For example, when she was delivering clean sheets to his room, she told

him that he "may think [he's] fooling Miss Joey and her folks, but [he] ain't fooling me for a

minute. You think I don't see what you are? You one of those smooth talking, smart-ass n…

with your black power and all that other trouble-making nonsense." He assured her he was not

trying to pull anything, but she made sure he knew that she had "her eye on him."

Tillie also touched on what was happening outside the house when she remarked that "civil

rights is one thing, this here is something else." She tied in what was actually happening in

society at the time to give the film a more realistic appeal. It was also reflective of the general

attitudes in society, at the time, with regards to interracial relationships.

As mentioned before, Tillie was a black woman. Her views on John and Joey's

relationship had to do with her own feelings of subordination. She remarked that she "don't care

to see a member of my own race getting above himself." By saying this, she reaffirmed the fact

that she did not see herself, or other black people for that matter, being equivalent with white

people.

It is worth mentioning the gender differences of the parents to the couple's intentions to marry. At the end of the film, the mothers, and Joey, were far more accepting of the interracial relationship than are the fathers, most likely due to their romantic views of marriage. The men, including John, were concerned with the practical difficulties the couple would face on a day-to-day basis.

Monster's Ball was a brilliant film in the fact that it did not solely center on the couple's racial differences to define it nor did it dwell on the fact that he was white and she was black. The only real bigotry came from Hank's father, Buck. This could be due, in part, because the couple did not venture into public together much during the film. In a scene at the beginning of the film, Buck made the comment, "What the hell those n… doing out there?" in reference to his neighbors who were coming over to see Sonny. Sonny, the only good-hearted and unbiased person living in the house, was constantly criticized for his open-mindedness and acceptance of other races. This also helped to contribute to his death.

Buck also made comments like, "Damn porch monkeys! Your mother, she hated them n… too." He was constantly fueling the racist fire in the household. He also made rude comments about Leticia to Hank, "You ain't no man 'til you split dark oak." This ultimately led to Hank putting Buck in a nursing home (where, ironically, he shared a room with a black man).

Save the Last Dance provided the most clear-cut and verbal abuse to the interracial couple. Most of Sarah's abuse came from Derek's black ex-girlfriend, Nikki. An altercation happened in gym class when Nikki attacked Sarah, which led to the following dialogue:

>Nikki: It ain't over bitch.
>Sarah: I don't even know why it started bitch.
>Nikki: Cause you always in my way.

Sarah: I'm only in your way when it comes to Derek. That's what this is about.
Nikki: No, it's about you. White girls like you. Creeping up, taking our men. The world ain't enough you gotta conquer ours too. Coming up in here and taking our men.
Sarah: You know what Nikki, Derek and I like each other, and if that bothers you, then screw you.

After the altercation, Derek's sister Chenille and Sarah have a conversation:

Chenille: You and Derek act like it don't bother people, like it don't hurt people to see.
Sarah: What is the big damn deal? It's me and him, not us and other people.
Chenille: Black people Sarah, black women. Derek is about something. He's smart, he's motivated, he's for real. He's not just gonna go make some babies and not take care of them or run the streets messing up his life. He's gonna make something of himself and here you come white so you gotta be right and you take one of the few decent men we have left after jail, drugs, and drive-by. That is what Nikki meant about you up in our world.
Sarah: There's only one world Chenille.
Chenille: That is what they teach you, we know different.
Sarah: I don't understand. I thought we were friends.
Chenille: You want to be a friend? Then don't just be here to be here. Open up your pretty brown eyes and look the hell around.

This conversation reinforced society's expectations that black men cannot be successful in America. It also reinforced the perception that white women "take" all the good black men away from black women.

Malakai, Derek's best friend, who was black, also lets Derek know his disapproval:

I hear you driving in a new service. What's up with that? You tappin' that white girl? That's why you have no time for your boys no more? Too busy frontin'? Too busy snowflakin' and if that your case you best be watchin' your back cause white women ain't bring nothing but trouble..you act like you don't know who you are no more Derek. What's up out there for nobody who ain't you. I'm still from this neighborhood but you, I guess that's what happens when a white girl goes to your head.

These statements, too, reinforced the notion that one loses his/her identity when in a relationship with someone of another race. Malakai was also saying that Derek was forgetting where he has come from, even though Derek was just trying to make a better life and future for himself.

Malakai was too caught up in society's expectations of him as a black man that he could not see himself any other way, and was angry that Derek could.

I would like to make a note that the majority of conflict to the relationship came from African Americans, like Malakai's comment to Sarah that she will "never look as good as [Nikki] does with him. They're oil. You're milk. Ain't no point in trying to mix." There were some instances of white prejudice, though. For instance, when Sarah's father did not want Derek around her because he thought Derek was to blame for the fight Sarah had with Nikki. Or, when the white woman on the train was staring at the couple and rolling her eyes in disgust as the two sat together. The majority of the prejudice, however, came from the black community.

All the conflict in the film led Sarah to tell Derek "no one wants us to be together…we spend more time defending our relationship than actually having one." However, by the end of the film, the two had overlooked their differences and had finally accepted one another as he/she was.

All of these examples illustrate that those involved in "black/white" interracial relationships face prejudices and discrimination from both races. It was not limited to one or the other. Nor was it limited to one gender. Unfortunately, men and women of both races exhibited racism. The race of the "outsider" did not seem to significantly play a role in his/her tolerance or acceptance level of the interracial couple because there was intolerance displayed across the board.

Social scientists have often argued that opposition to interracial intimacy remains, despite a decline in racist attitudes (Qian, 1997; Romano, 2003). Historically speaking, with regard to all forms of interracial integration and intimacy, African Americans have been the most rejected racialized group (Beeman, 2007). Studies on residential integration reveal that African

Americans are substantially more isolated from "whites" than from any other racial groups, including Asians and Hispanics (Farley and Frey, 1994.) Bobo and Zubrinsky (1996) performed a study on 1,869 respondents from the Los Angeles County Social Survey and found that there was a definite rank order of race preferences in terms of integration. Their study revealed that African Americans occupied the bottom of the hierarchy as the least desired neighbors. They discovered that "white" objection to residential integration with African Americans was 12 percent higher than their objection to integration with Asians (Bobo and Zubrinsky, 1996). Furthermore, they revealed that African Americans were also the most rejected group by Asians and Hispanics (Bobo and Zubrinsky, 1996). Their study illustrated how African Americans are the most rejected racialized minority in the United States, with which "whites" expressed the most ambivalence in terms of interracial intimacy.

The final research question (how do interracial relationships in these films oppose or reinforce distinct racial identities and boundaries? How do they open borders and help to broaden racial definitions?) was answered by examining the general story line and ending of each film. For example, did the film send a general message of acceptance of the interracial relationship, or did it send a message that the interracial relationship was "wrong" by societal standards and caused a problem not only for the couple involved in the interracial relationship, but also for those around them. The film's ending, whether a happily-ever-after or a tragic ending, was also examined.

I Passed For White was the only film that seemed to reinforce distinct racial boundaries. The film boldly exposed the contradictions inherent in "black/white" sexual attraction, yet in the end, found its "black/white" lovers returning to their own kinds. This retreat diluted the influence of the central theme of interracial relationships and hostility. In the tragic end, the

differences between Rick and Bernice proved to be too much for them to handle. Not only was their marriage suffering, but Rick's parents were also wearing thin on their patience as Rick's mother was on the verge of exposing Bernice for who she really was. The film ultimately did not send a general message of acceptance of the interracial relationship. In fact, it reinforced the notion that one should "stick to it's own kind."

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner was a benchmark between the old racial code of behavior of segregation and the new code involving the social demands of integration. The old code was evident by all the negativity surrounding the couple. However, the new code was made apparent by the extraordinary politeness and likeable personality of John's character. Perhaps the best example of the changing rules of deference was the speech John delivered to Joey's parents. He informed them that unless they approved of the marriage, he would not go through with the wedding. His reasoning for this was because he realized they will face numerous obstacles, and he did not want to take on any new problems. John allowed her parents to have the final word on their marriage. However, if they disapproved, they would crush their daughter's heart and perhaps ruin their relationship with her. It is important for viewers to recognize that although John loves Joey, the respect of her parents meant more to him than their marriage.

Kramer's production of a romance between a black man and a white woman in 1960s America served as a ground-breaking form of art, because it confronted the problem of prejudice at its most basic level (Harris & Toplin, 2007). Furthermore, Harris & Toplin suggest that students of conflict observe that resistance to marriage between individuals from distinctive cultural, racial, ethnic, national, and religious groups is a pernicious form of bigotry that is nearly impossible to destroy (2007).

The film offered up the hypothetical yet important question, "What if your daughter wanted to marry a black man?" As Romano (2003) points out, it more significantly

> represented a very public refutation of the long-accepted white position on interracial marriage. It not only argued that interracial relationships could be healthy, but also suggested that social opprobrium should not prevent couples for marrying and placed whites who opposed interracial relationships as wrong (p. 204).

Yet, it portrayed this "wrong" in a safe way by not showing intimation of sexuality and by showing the interracial relationship as chaste, with minimal intimate moments between the couple in the interracial relationship (Romano, 2003).

An underlying message of the film that still applies today is that all people, even those in interracial relationships, should be treated with the same amount of respect, and that this should apply universally and should triumph over any specific, longstanding "rule" of society. This is not an easy task, as summed up by John when speaking to his father:

> You are 30 years older than I am. You and your whole lousy generation believes the way it was for you is the way it's got to be. And not until your whole generation has lain down and died will the dead weight of you be off our backs!...You think of yourself as a colored man. I think of myself as a man.

This film, by most accounts, has a happily-ever-after ending. Joey's father, Matt Drayton, delivered the last lines of the film, which could still be uttered by parents to their children today. He reassured John and Joey, and audiences, that all would be well with the couple. It was also further evidence that this film was (is) a timeless classic.

> Now Mr. Prentice, clearly a most reasonable man, says he has no wish to offend me but wants to know if I'm some kind of a "nut." And Mrs. Prentice says that like her husband, I'm a burned-out old shell of a man who cannot even remember what it's like to love a woman the way her son loves my daughter. And strange as it seems, that's the first statement made to me all day with which I am prepared to take issue…cause I think you're wrong, you're as wrong as you can be. I admit that I hadn't considered it, hadn't even thought about it, but I know exactly how he feels about her and there is nothing, absolutely nothing that your son feels for my daughter that I didn't feel for Christina. Old –yes. Burned-out – certainly, but I can tell you the memories are still there – clear,

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intact, indestructible, and they'll be there if I live to be 110. Where John made his mistake I think was in attaching so much importance to what her mother and I might think…because in the final analysis it doesn't matter a damn what we think. The only thing that matters is what they feel, and how much they feel, for each other. And if it's half of what we felt – that's everything. As for you two and the problems you're going to have, they seem almost unimaginable, but you'll have no problem with me, and I think when Christina and I and your mother have some time to work on him, you'll have no problem with your father, John. But you do know, I'm sure you know, what you're up against. There'll be 100 million people right here in this country who will be shocked and offended and appalled and the two of you will just have to ride that out, maybe every day for the rest of your lives. You could try to ignore those people, or you could feel sorry for them and for their prejudice and their bigotry and their blind hatred and stupid fears, but where necessary you'll just have to cling tight to each other and say, "screw all those people." Anybody could make a case, a hell of a good case, against your getting married. The arguments are so obvious that nobody has to make them. But you're two wonderful people who happened to fall in love and happened to have a pigmentation problem, and I think that now, no matter what kind of a case some bastard could make against your getting married, there would be only one thing worse, and that would be if – knowing what you two are and knowing what you two have and knowing what you two feel – you didn't get married.

In the film, the parents overcame their objections and gave their blessings for the wedding. A general message of acceptance of the interracial relationship prevailed in the end. Love, symbolized in this film as the freedom to choose a spouse without boundaries imposed by tradition and prejudice, ultimately conquered all (Harris & Toplin, 2007).

Monster's Ball ultimately opened up borders across races and helped to broaden racial definitions, although it did so by leaving much to the viewer to determine. Hank overcame his racist and prejudicial ways by falling in love with a black woman and by turning his back on his father's bigotry ways. There was never a message sent out that the relationship was "wrong" by societal standards because of their race, but a general message of acceptance was never really sent out either. This was because the couple rarely ventured out in public together. However, it did appear to be more accepting than not due to the lack of forces against the couple.

In the end, I would say the film had a happily-ever-after ending. It ended with Hank

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reassuring Leticia, and the audience, that everything was going to be all right. The film was

about healing and finding the compassion to forgive. It showed that everyone has destruction

and drama in their lives, but that there is always a light at the end of the tunnel.

Save the Last Dance did one of the better jobs of portraying what an interracial couple

today might face on a day-to-day basis. It opposed racial boundaries and ultimately helped to

broaden racial definitions. As the couple discussed, it was not an easy relationship to have:

> Derek: Are you saying you don't want to be with me?
> Sarah: I don't know. It's just so hard.
> Derek: The story of my life, everything is hard Sarah, but I thought we were in this
> together.

The film showed multiple oppositions to the relationship from a multitude of people, i.e.

his sister, her father, his friends, her friends. But, the film never sent out a message that their

relationship was "wrong." It actually revealed how ignorant people can be when they are against

a couple simply due to their racial composition. Overall, it sent out an accepting message of the

interracial couple that led to a happily-ever-after ending.

Chenille reinforced the underlying message in the film when she told Derek:

> You can't help who you love, Derek, you're not supposed to. When you love someone,
> you love them. Look at me…at least you found someone that loves you back.

Consistent with the taboo against interracial intimacies, the findings of this study suggest

that African Americans, and their white partners, continue to be subjected to a racialized society

that does not fully accept them as a couple. This study shows that racial segregation in interracial

relationships is profoundly practiced in Hollywood films and has become more common rather

than not in the past half century. In other words, instead of films today depicting an interracial

couple who does not face objection to the relationship solely based on the racial make-up of the

couple, the films tend to more heavily depict opposition to such a couple from those in society.

These findings are important because popular films are more than entertainment

vehicles; they are influential in transmitting certain philosophies from one generation to the next.

After an extensive literature analysis reviewing the historical role of interracial

relationships in the United States, it is clear that these relationships play an important role in our

society. As a society, it is important to remember the racial struggles that we have endured.

With this in mind, it is important to see how our society has overcome racial barriers.

Much of the existing scholarship on interracial relationships has focused on the historical

impact it has had on society. Throughout United States history, society has seen dramatic

changes in the traditional dynamics of relationships. It is especially important to examine

interracial relationships in the framework of social acceptance through different theories that

provide a greater understanding of the existing literature on the topic. By analyzing research

from different stages of American history, I have a more complete representation of what I am

researching. It is important to note that no one theory can explain all aspects of interracial

relationships, nor are my suggestions a complete listing of theories that could be used. The

following can summarize the subject in a way that will highlight previous research as well as

reinforce the groundwork for my own research.

It is important to look at the historical implications race and marriage/family has had in

American history. We can see how race relations have impacted the way American society has

developed by looking at the very beginning of American history with the first contact between

European settlers and Native Americans. However, for purposes of consistency and relevancy to

the topic, I will start with the history of slavery of Africans. From this point, patterns of

occurrence and reasons behind racial intermixing can be seen.

Until 1840, African slavery largely consisted of black males and white female indentured

slaves, thus increasing the frequency of sexual relations between the two (Yoo & Stables, 2000).

These relationships often led to marriage, increasing the interracial marriage rate to levels that concerned the rest of society and the government (Yoo & Stables, 2000). Moreover, there were relations between white male slave owners and their black female slaves when they took sexual liberties with them. This idea was illustrated in the film *Monster's Ball* when Buck says "You ain't no man 'til you split dark oak." Ultimately, this pattern of interracial sexual activity was the result of a power relationship that developed between blacks and whites (Spickard, 1989).

Societal concerns led to government intervention and laws were passed to prohibit interracial marriage to "preserve the purity of the race," (Yoo & Stables, 2000). In 1664, Maryland became the first state to enact the anti-miscegenation law. Soon after, many states followed suit. More and more segregation laws continued to prevent different races to mix, especially blacks and whites. This separation continued to define America for hundreds of years and continues to subtly exist today, even though the laws have changed.

Barriers between ethnic groups have fallen since the twentieth century due to the acceptance of different class, status, and social structure, showing how strongly culture can shape our behavior (Spickard, 1989). Milton Barron, a sociologist from the 1950s, published an article that made several claims about the issue of interracial marriage, his main one being that intermarriage is a "problem" in society (Barron, 1951). He used several theories to support evidence of his claims. Some of these theories included ideas of social problems relating to culture conflict. He saw the "problem" of interracial marriage as a result of lack of institutional control in church and state (Barron, 1951). His conclusions demonstrate the belief that social and cultural conditions influence more than the general public and cause constant change and reconstruction of views.

Between 1960 and 1990, interracial marriage increased by four times. This was due in large part to the desegregation of public schools, the work force, and various other social sectors (Yoo, 2000). Through the 1970s and 1990s, integration increased in all different parts of the social world, causing racial relations to increase, especially with the more accepting new generations (Yoo, 2000). However, it should be noted that the film industry was not representative of the growing number of these types of relationships (i.e. the number of films depicting interracial relationships did not increase by four times).

A short review of American history on interracial relationships clearly shows that societal acceptance has had a very large impact on how people interact with one another. Clearly, when society prohibited interracial relationships, the numbers were fewer; and with gradual acceptance the numbers have increased. However, Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach described that these relations really did fluctuate based on societal acceptance, or that people were less willing to report their actual relationships when they were suppose to be segregated (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004).

Implications for Future

There have been very few analyses of media treatment of people in interracial relationships and even fewer on the media treatment of the dynamics of those relationships. Not only does research need to be done on these two topics, but more research needs to be done to determine to what extent (if any) the media have in influencing individuals' perceptions about interracial relationships.

As Beeman (2007) explains, through continued systematic study, racism towards interracial couples "may be exposed as a hidden, yet persistently viable social ill that permeates institutions, such as the media," (p. 707). However, until we first recognize and dismantle the problem, we will never find a solution.

Understanding racism as a systemic, institutionalized problem in the United States is difficult because systemic racism is seldom, if ever, discussed. American citizens tend to offer individualistic explanations for racism and are therefore inclined to dismiss the subtle nature of racism and the existence of structural barriers to equality (Kluegel, 1990). Because of this, it is vital to study subtle forms of racism in American society and to address racism surrounding interracial sexuality as a concealed and institutionalized problem.

Although there may be a greater number of interracial relationships in the media in the post-Civil Rights era, there is a lack of scenes in films where these groups share emotional and intimate moments (Beeman, 2007). In order to overcome these emotional barriers and the subtle forms of institutionalized racism that built them, these barriers must first be recognized and dismantled. This will require greater systematic examination of the institutions, such as the media industry, that perpetuate racism (Beeman, 2007).

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Much of the research done in this study coincided with other existing research, yet there were still inconsistencies that exist. It would be helpful to look at the manner in which certain researchers have conducted their studies, allowing an improvement for my own research. For example, a wider range of socioeconomic statuses needs to be examined to have a better picture of interracial marriage.

There continues to be uneasiness when showing interracial relationships in film. The reluctance to show such relationships is a refusal to recognize a central reality of a world where the sight of such a couple is more common than ever.

Limitations

  As is the case with most content analyses, validity was a common problem. This was especially so because as Bernard points out, a single researcher developed and analyzed the variables (1995). Furthermore, content validity could have been a problem because the variables used did not cover all the dimensions of each film's relationship.

  As previously stated, this study was based on selective perception, or the inclination for people's perception to be influenced by wants, needs, attitudes, and various psychological factors (Severin and Tankard, 2001). Basically, this means that different people can have very different reactions to the same message. It is important to understand selective perception because the findings from this research are from only one perspective and may have completely different meanings for someone else.

  As mentioned in the notes, the website used to select the films did not list every film made in the United States from 1960 to 2001, nor does it include every film depicting an interracial relationship; hence, it may not be representative of, or generalizable to all U.S. films. Going one step further, had two different films been selected from either time period, the findings could have been completely the opposite, truly making this study not generalizable to the entire U.S. film industry.

  Furthermore, there are few systematic studies of U.S. films that assess emotional segregation and show how U.S. media reinforce emotional barriers between "blacks" and "whites" in interracial relationships. Therefore, there is no way to verify that portrayals of such relationships are a valid measure of such a phenomenon (Beeman, 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

Many studies have examined the negative portrayal of interracial relationships in various forms of media (Lemon, 1977; Scott, 1984; Williams, 2001). However, few systematically compare and contrast media portrayals of intimate relationships between "black" and "white" men and women. In fact, the literature on interracial relationships in the media suggests there is a difference between the portrayals of "blacks" and "whites," which supports the need for further review of these relationships.

Each of the four films studied were appealing in its own way and all reflect the times in which they were made – a country which seems to be more tolerant of love between races than it used to be[9]. Even in a progressive 21st century, interracial relationships, whether in film or in real-life, continues to be a topic that is examined under a public microscope. Compared with the earlier films, the more recent films provide more evidence that the more things change, the more they remain the same. The films are powerful examples of the prejudices that existed in America in the 1960s, and reminds viewers of the prejudices that, sadly, continue to exist today. As Harris & Toplin suggest, students of conflict observe that resistance to marriage between individuals from distinctive cultural, racial, ethnic, national, and religious groups is a pernicious form of bigotry that is nearly impossible to destroy (2007).

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[9] According to a Gallup Poll conducted for the American Association of Retired Persons, a majority of Americans view the current state of race relations in the country as either "somewhat" or "very" good. Results showed that Americans are significantly more accepting of interracial marriages today than they were in the early 1980s. In 1968, only 20 percent of Americans approved of marriage between "whites and nonwhites." By 1983, 43 percent said they approved of such a marriage, and by 2004, 73 percent of Americans expressed approval toward a black/white marriage.

Consistent with the taboo against interracial intimacies documented throughout history (Stember, 1976; Bobo and Zubrinsky, 1996; Romano, 2003), the findings of this study suggest that African Americans, and their white partners, remain a highly rejected racialized group in the US film industry. Such cultural images perpetuated by the media not only stigmatize interracial relationships, but also dehumanize relationships involving African Americans. It is because of these conditions that "whites" and "blacks" cannot see each other as emotional equals.

Furthermore, the findings of this study also suggest that individuals in interracial relationships, whether African American or white, continue to be subjected to a racialized society that does not fully accept them as a couple. This study shows that racial segregation in interracial relationships is profoundly practiced in Hollywood films and has become more common rather than not in the past half century. Basically, instead of films today depicting an interracial couple that does not face objection to the relationship solely based on the racial make-up of the couple, the films tend to more heavily depict opposition to such a couple from those in society. Perhaps this is due to the fact that society is not as sensitive to the issue as it used to be. Or, more accurately, perhaps this is reflective of what actually occurs in society today. It reinforces the idea that once something is viewed as a "problematic" issue in society, it will have that negative stigma for a long time, sometimes permanently.

Auletta and Hammerback developed a relational model for interracial interactions on television, known as the IDI model, as a means of analyzing relationships found between the lead characters of eight television shows on three major networks (1985). The three aspects of relationships used in the IDI model include independence, dependence, and interdependence (Auletta and Hammerback, 1985). The results of the first IDI model revealed that the type of interracial communication found in the sample of eight shows inhibited close friendships

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forming between "black" and "white" characters (Auletta and Hammerback, 1985). Similar conclusions can be drawn from content analyses of other forms of media, such as film.

From their findings, relationships involving African American men tend to be portrayed as sexually rather than emotionally intimate and as less successful. The findings in this study disagree with the findings in their study. African American men portrayed in these films were highly educated, successful, and very likeable characters. They were less sexual than their white counterparts. In addition, Auletta and Hammerback found that an emotional barrier seems to exist between African Americans and "whites" because of the low emotional intimacy in relationships that was found – interracial relationships were presented as pathological (1985). My findings supported this claim - there was low intimacy levels displayed in the films, especially those from the 1960s.

Analyses of popular US films point to problematic portrayals of interracial interactions and communication (Beeman, 2007). For example, in another study, McPhail concludes that Spike Lee's depictions of interracial relationships are highly negative and are based merely on sex (1996). Similarly, Paulin concludes that the interracial relationship in Spike Lee's film *Jungle Fever* was negatively portrayed and that the title itself revealed Lee's intention of portraying interracial relationships between "blacks" and "whites" as a sickness (1997). This was not the case in this study – although the interracial relationships were portrayed as negative, only one film, *Monster's Ball*, was centered on a sexual relationship. And, even at the end of that film, the characters had developed a much deeper, emotional connection.

Films are an important cultural form, not only because they reflect the dominant views of society, but also because of the possible influence they have on the views of the members of a society regarding race. These interracial images often function to serve the white hegemony in

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deviantizing interracial relationships by projecting stereotypes and racial biases as reality. The general themes of the interracial relationship generally revolve around lust, curiosity, or deception. These findings are important because popular films are more than entertainment vehicles; they are influential in transmitting certain philosophies from one generation to the next. And, films provide an enduring way to look at how society has changed, if at all.

It is imperative now more than ever to examine the institutionalized racism that exists in US films, given that most portray subtle amounts of racism towards interracial relationships. As Beeman (2007) says, "Problematic portrayals of…interracial relationships may not be easily discernible to the average US viewing public, especially since such images are embedded in US racist ideology," (p. 708). However, findings in systematic studies of US media, and especially of US films such as this one, suggest that there is, in fact, a negative message being sent out with regard to interracial relationships (Beeman, 2007). This negative cultural imagery is reinforced by the media and may indirectly affect the social and economic status of African Americans (Jewell, 1993; Collins, 2000). Challenging this negative imagery is crucial if we are all to achieve equality.

Racism is an ideology embedded in American society, and emotional segregation operates within institutions, such as the media and the film industry, to reinforce racist attitudes towards African Americans. Contemporary portrayals of interracial couples may be sending racist messages in a subtle way. It is this subtlety of racism that poses a threat to equality, because it prevents the public from acknowledging that racism still exists. Through continued systematic study, racism may be exposed as a hidden, yet persistently viable social ill that permeates institutions, such as the media; hence, maintaining the "privilege and purity" of whiteness (Romano, 2003).

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Although there may be a greater number of interracial relationships in the media in the post-Civil Rights era, there is a lack of scenes in films where these groups share emotional and intimate moments (Beeman, 2007). In order to overcome these emotional barriers and the subtle forms of institutionalized racism that built them, these barriers must first be recognized and dismantled. This will require greater systematic examination of the institutions, such as the media industry, that perpetuate racism (Beeman, 2007).

Problematic portrayals of interracial relationships may not be easily discernible to the average American viewing audience, especially since such images are embedded in American racist ideology (Beeman, 2007). However, findings (such as the ones in this study) suggest that a negative message is being sent about interracial relationships. Challenging these images is necessary if society is to achieve equality.

Interracial mixing is one of the great themes of world history, especially in the United States. This nation's history has played an important role in the development of these relationships within society. Interracial marriages in the United States have long been neglected, but are becoming more widely accepted today. However, prejudices will always exist. Overall research on interracial relationships shows how far the United States has come, and yet how much more improvement is needed.

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