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'I'm white, she's black, so what'? Telling Stories of Gender,
Race and Interracial Romance in Australia

Thesis submitted by

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for
the degree of Masters of Philosophy
in
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Dedication

To all those lubras
who never made it past noon the next day

Lest we forget

Statement of Access

I, the undersigned, author of this work, understand that James Cook University will make this thesis available for use within the University Library and, via the Australian Digital Thesis network, for use elsewhere.

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Statement of Sources

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given. Every reasonable effort has been made to gain permission and acknowledge the owners of copyright material. I would be pleased to hear from any copyright owner who has been omitted or incorrectly acknowledged.

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Date: 23 February 2015

Statement of Contribution of Others

Nature of Assistance	Contribution Names, Titles and Affiliations of Co-Contributors
Supervision	Professor Rosita Henry Dr. Felecia Watkin-Lui
Fees	Study was supported via an Indigenous Australian Staff Scholarship Program, administered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council-Australian Government and James Cook University
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Signature:

Date: 23 February 2015

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I give my final thanks to Abba who turns my Valleys of Achor into rivers of hope. I surrender this work to you.

Abstract

Aboriginal Australian/white interracial couples are a rapidly growing segment of the population. This rise in the number of interracial relationships raises the question of why this trend is prevalent, and what impact it is having on Australian society. Although scholars and the media promote this growth in numbers of interracial relationships as a positive sign that past social and cultural divisions 'are dissipating', minimum research has given attention to the motivating forces behind these relationships, or the impact these relationships may have on the couples themselves. This study utilises individual and conjoint interviews with six interracial heterosexual couples to explore how they confront their racial identities, experience the public gaze, raise biracial children and negotiate racial, gender and class differences. Some families initially disapproved of their children marrying outside their race and their 'concerns' are traced to a history of race relations in Australia. The narratives of the research participants reveal a myriad of ways in which race shapes the interactions of partners with each other, as well as with family members, working associates and strangers. Nevertheless, despite keenly perceiving the racial attitudes of the community around them, the interracial couples interviewed tended to minimise or even discount the relevance of race in their own relationships.

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CHAPTER 1

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND APPROACH

My old man's a white old man,
and my old mother's black.
If ever I cursed my white old man,
I take my curses back.
If ever I cursed my black old mother
And wished she were in hell,
I'm sorry for that and now I wish her well.
My old man died in a big fine house,
my ma died in a shack.
I wonder where I'm gonna die,
being neither white nor black.

Langston Hughes (1925)

Situating Myself Within the Frame

I am 27 years old, excited because I have made the momentous decision to throw caution to the wind and move in with my partner of three months. I grew up in a town where racial boundaries were deeply embedded in the soul of one's existence; these, however, were not the only boundaries that governed my life. Boundaries between good and evil, right and wrong, proper and improper conduct were ingrained by my strong-willed, forward-thinking mother, who raised me to believe in equality, the benefits of education and God. Therefore, I stand, anxiously poised, with phone in hand, awaiting my Mum's response to my decision, wondering if she will object on the grounds that it would be a 'mortal sin' without marrying first. I am unprepared for her response: '*Is he black or is he white?*' 'Does it matter?' I ask. 'Sometimes it's best to stick to your own,' she responds. 'Why?' I ask. 'Because there's a messy history attached to *such* unions, Sharon ... and ... I don't want to see you hurt', she answers calmly. Such a candid discussion, yet loaded with so many layers of connotations. I am plunged into feelings of despair as I begin to realise the subtext of this conversation. My mother is afraid for me. I begin to ponder if this is connected to our family history in any way. I assure my mother that the man I have given my heart to genuinely loves me and all seems well. Nevertheless, this experience reinforced how 'race' categorisation continues to be an ambiguous, yet core and defining feature of Australian society today. This conversation about my partner's whiteness was the first and last words ever exchanged between Mum and I about this subject. Unfortunately, others had a lot more to say.

Interracial relationships are of particular interest to me because I was born into a family of 'mixed' racial heritage. I thought nothing abnormal about the colour of my skin, or the

varied skin tones of other family members until I went to university and was asked on numerous occasions by different peers, 'what part Aboriginal are you?' Needless to say, unlike Langston Hughes, I could not tell which 'old man' or 'old woman' beyond my grandparent's generation was white or black. All I knew was that both my parents identified as Aboriginal, as did their parents, despite the fact that we were not what those legislators of old had labelled 'full bloods' (de Plevitz and Croft, 2003). Whilst my father proudly boasted of his Irish ancestry on those rare occasions when 'he had a few', that was as far as it went. Nothing else was said about the 'other' side of our family history. It was like 'the other side of the moon'. I knew it was there, but I also knew that to inquire would be breaching the boundaries of proper conduct and would incur the wrath of not only my father, but also my grandmother on my mother's side. Like Sally Morgan's grandmother, our particular heritage was like a deep, dark secret that was forever 'locked up' (Morgan, 1988). Yet, I grew up in a town where life was very black and white in every sense of the phrase; where racial boundaries were clearly defined, despite the hybridised existence of those 'in between' two worlds. Although my skin is light brown, I have always identified myself as Black. Even when I was challenged by my own mob for 'moving up' and 'shacking up' with a *Gubba*, I never forgot who I was or disowned my Aboriginal heritage. Nothing can shake my confidence or belief in *who* I am. Still, there's a part of me that yearns to know about the 'other' side of my identity. More notably, why is it that those 'in between' remain such a contested and polarising social issue in Australian society? Why is it that my own family chooses to identify with the Aboriginal side of the family ancestry and not the other? Is it because, as my Mother so sadly pointed out, there is a painful and messy history attached to such unions? Or, is it simply the fact that the idea of 'race' continues to evoke strong negative reactions, despite well-meaning efforts to promote the rapidly increasing rates of interracial relationships as a gain for diversity and tolerance in Australia.

Rationale for and Aims of the Research

The purpose of this study, based in Townsville North Queensland, is to determine how Aboriginal women with white husbands/partners and/or Aboriginal men with white hus-

bands/partners perceive experiences of their racial and cultural identity formation in relation to their selection of a partner from a race other than their own. Not only am I interested in the ways in which the dynamics of race, gender and class have shaped their lives and their identities, but I am also particularly interested in finding out if such relationships continue to occupy an uncertain, troubled position within the nation today. In the past, the formation of sexual relationships between black and white partners, commonly referred to as *miscegenation*, was a source of unequalled censure and controversy (Roberts, 2001, p. 69). So controversial were they that Rivett (1962) claimed that the Federation, attempting to keep such activities to a minimum, circulated, 'disquieting tales about the supposed "contamination" arising from the "admixture of other races"' (pp. 89, 91, cited in Singh, 2004). For those who dared to 'cross the colour line' (Reddy, 1994), many negative images and phrases were bestowed upon them: nigger lover, mongrels, gin jockey, gin-rooter, combo, and black velvet, to name a few (see Roberts, 2001, p. 74; Cowlshaw, 2004, p. 118-119; and Huggins, 1998). This negativity has manifested as discrimination against the children of such relationships since Federation. While many 'good citizens' claim they do not discriminate, as the following quotation demonstrates, they vehemently reject any notion of their white child marrying someone of Aboriginal heritage: 'I would rather have my daughter dead in her coffin than kissing a black man on the mouth or nursing a little coffee-coloured brat that she was mother to' (Broome, 1982, p. 93). These words and phrases, among many others, represent some of the language applied in Australia to shape the public consciousness of black-white relationships and their offspring. Painful, complicated and branded shameful and unnatural, these relationships have often stood in direct opposition to Australia's vision of a 'pure nation'. As the *Bulletin*, Australia's most nationalistic magazine, stated in 1901:

If Australia is to be fit for our children and their children to live, we must KEEP THE BREED PURE. The Half-caste usually inherits the vices of both races and the virtues of neither. Do you want Australia to become a community of mongrels? (Broome, 1982, p. 93)

The irony is that, although interracial relationships and the people involved in them have existed in the margins and never attained numerical significance, an enormous enlistment of resources—time and energy—was nevertheless spent to prevent them taking place. From the colonial period through the latter twentieth century, legislators passed

restrictive laws designed to discourage the cohabitation and existence of white-black couples (Broome, 1994; Chesterman & Galligan, 1997). In the state of Queensland, legislation made it an offence for any white person to have sexual relations with an Aboriginal person. Consequently, those wanting to marry had to seek permission in writing from the Director of Native Affairs (Rowley, 1970, pp. 21, 25; Wearne, 1980). Despite the enforcing of such racist rulings, interracial relationships continue to thrive and prosper within Australian society today. Yet, research grounded in the narratives and experiences of interracial couples themselves remains an unexplored area of inquiry, particularly for those residing in the state of Queensland. This gap therefore evidences the necessity and timeliness of this study.

This study begins with the argument that racialised images and discourses on interracial intimacy have been constructed within the limits of local and national representations of hegemonic, hierarchical constructs. Utilising an autoethnographic framework through the use of personal narratives and a reflexive orientation, this study explores how couples, including myself as *researcher* and *subject*, negotiate racial history, identity and everyday experiences as we interact with, resist or accommodate popular Australian representations of race, gender, culture and class. Consequently, the purpose of this study is fourfold: 1) use autoethnography as a tool to interpret my own experiences in the hope that it will illuminate the social phenomenon of interest and help uncover the complex nature of racial identity negotiation; 2) utilise personal narratives as a viable and powerful way to explore interracial couples' construction of lived experiences of racialising practices and discourses; 3) utilise self-reflexivity as a means to create an evocative, heartfelt text that can intimately examine the complexity of racial negotiation processes through the application of interracial and racial identity scholarship; and finally, 4) offer a text that 'transforms the conditions of knowledge production' (Clough, 2000, pp. 172-173) by focusing on the negotiation of 'dialogical multivocal narratives' (Ellis, 1997, p. 120).

This study provides a valuable contribution to the body of intercultural scholarship in Australia, as few cultural studies scholars, particularly Indigenous Australian scholars, have provided a self-reflexive autoethnographic investigation of identity negotiation within interracial pairings. Although the issue of interracial intimacy has featured before in Aus-

tralian literary scholarship, no comprehensive study has yet examined black-white representations of black-white interracial intimacy in response to the hegemonic racial constructs of contemporary Australia. I conduct this examination by sharing portions of my own life experiences as a racialised 'Other'. In doing so, I obfuscate the familiar, socially constructed racial stereotypes by questioning the limited understandings of gendered and racialised identities that are prevalent today. Therefore, this study seeks to explore how I negotiate complicated and conflicting aspects of my own racial identity development, alongside those of my participants. Consistent with a grounded theory method, which aligns with a social constructionist (interpretive) foundation, I rely on open-ended interviews to address two main questions:

- What do the experiences detailed in this autoethnographic inquiry reveal about intimate negotiation of gendered racial and cultural differences?
- How do these narratives reconstruct interracial identity in relation to each other, to immediate and extended family, and to the community at large?

In negotiating racial and cultural differences, I consider both the political significance of interracial intimacy as a social construction as well as the political importance of the narrative of the ways these couples make sense of themselves. I suggest that as these couples negotiate racial and cultural differences, they are exposing racial identity formation as a contested site; a site in which there is ongoing struggle over what stands as legitimate definitions of the social and political order. This struggle for identity formation within black-white couples therefore demonstrates the powerful forces at work within society that make their relationships particularly challenging and contradictory in nature. The way couples relate to each other and the outside world is a tricky situation for interracial couples. Nevertheless, for those couples able to negotiate their racial and cultural differences, a transforming process of 're-storying' and thereby disempowering old stereotypes was communicated during the course of the interviews.

Organisation of the Thesis

I begin the study by presenting my motivation for employing a grounded theory approach, which is guided by an autoethnographic investigation; as a mode of narrative inquiry,

autoethnography broadly entails the intersection of personal experience methods and traditional academic discourse. In chapter one, I provide a review and critique of autoethnography, as well as explain its importance and relevance as a research method. I then proceed to outline and explicate the reasons for adopting the overall strategy. In the second chapter, I review and synthesise literature examining the interracial family and cultural and racial identity formation among black-white couples within a sociopolitical context, including Aboriginal Australian autobiographies. I include prominent autobiographies from this group because they enhance the richness and complexity of this analysis. The third chapter includes an analysis and description of the personal and combined narratives of the participants and an examination of them through the lens of racial identity literature. In the final chapter, I explore the conclusions and possibilities for the future of this research. Dispersed throughout this study are autoethnographic vignettes of my own personal experiences, which are not to be confused with the narratives of my participants. These vignettes, written in a different font, represent a different exploration and expression; denote a different tone and convey a different approach in my writing.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following section presents the data-gathering methods, as well as an interpretation of the underlying epistemological assumptions, which gave rise to these particular methodological choices.

The philosophical assumptions underlying this research have roots in the interpretive tradition, which implies a subjective, confessional epistemology and the ontological idea that reality is socially constructed. This philosophical premise was adopted because I anticipated an interactive process that would naturally produce personalised, revealing knowledge that can only be drawn from empathetic understanding and delicate reflection on sensitive matters. Rather than this study seeming as if it were written 'from nowhere, by nobody', I wanted to use methodologies that not only enabled me to ground my experiences alongside those of my participants, but also reflected my desire to engage readers in their own reflexive analysis of their own interpretations, as well as my interpretations as the principal investigator of the participants' stories (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 734).

In light of this desire, I thought that a reflexive practice rooted within the interpretive-qualitative tradition, combined with autobiographical experiences of the researcher in the method of autoethnography (where experimental alternatives to traditional writing feature strongly), was the most appropriate fit. Drawing heavily from the work of Reed-Danahay (1997), Denzin (1997), and Ellis and Bochner (2000), I adopt autoethnography as a vehicle to craft an evocative text by writing not only from the head, but from the heart as well. I do this in the hope that it will elicit an emotional response from the reader, thereby producing a multilayered verisimilitude reflective of the interpretive genre championed.

What, then, do I envisage my research as having the potential to engender? Or, as Rushdie (1988) asks: 'How does newness come into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made? How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is?' (p. 8). To translate the 'newness' I believe this research has the capacity to provide, I find it necessary first to attend to another all-encompassing epistemological question posed by Christians, (2000) who asks, how do I know the world of interracial intimacy? Reflecting on my own experiences of being involved with a *Gubba* (Whitefella) I know it is fraught with many 'conjoining' and confusing emotions, fusing potent feelings ranging from memories of the first deliriously intoxicating kiss to detached discomfort when you are questioned by your own mob as to why you have chosen a white man over a black man. Further experiences and anecdotes range from unwavering defensiveness when relatives considered it their right to offer tips on how to raise your children and unflinchingly inform you not to mention culture; to outright indignation when the best friend of your partner labels you a 'black slut' simply because you have chosen to commit yourself to his 'mate'. These feelings will never leave me. They cut deep into my soul and will remain forever seared into my memory, not because I view myself as an emotionally crippled victim, but rather a survivor, trying to make sense of humanity and the sometimes extreme and dangerous condition of people's perceptions. As such, I approach the world of interracial intimacy embossed with an array of feelings that serve as a double-edged sword. Firstly, whilst these experiences exemplify the sensitive nature of this research, which deals with emotional issues of intense personal significance, they also represent complex phenomena that cannot be oversimplified. Yet, despite the 'thick description' of lived experiences my stories have the potential to generate (Geertz, 1973), I am also

aware that they embody 'cultural baggage' that challenges me to repeatedly rethink where I stand as the researcher, responsible for the interpretive act of representing not only my own story but the stories of other participants. Therefore, how do I include my voice so that it does not overshadow those of the participants? More importantly, how do I guard against the substitution of my views for those of my participants?

In exploring issues of power and voice in the context of the interface between the participants and the researcher, I draw from the wisdom of Richardson (1990), who had this to say about ethnographic studies: 'Every ethnographer works with biases, some self-imposed, others unconsciously. I am confident I have plenty of both. The ethnographic trick is not to factor out the biases, for that would factor out the ethnographer; rather the best strategy is not only to be aware of the biases but to utilize them in the research' (p. 222). Denis Altman (2002) further reinforces this point when he affirms that whilst it is 'safer...to avoid the personal... [it is] in the end, I would suggest, less honest. If we are to engage with the social, we have an obligation to our readers, our colleagues and ourselves to be clear why we are researching and writing about a particular topic, and to provide sufficient personal explanation to allow a reader to understand why certain biases ...seem to emerge from the text' (p. 321). In taking these statements of obligation into consideration, including the directive to make transparent my own biases and motivations for writing the study, I find it impossible to take on the role of objective observer as in the epistemological stance of conventional research methods. Instead, I situate my study within what Denzin and Lincoln (1994) have identified as the fifth moment of qualitative research, which draws upon autoethnography as part of a new methodological attempt to challenge not only the distinction between researcher and subject in the field, but also between 'subjectivity and objectivity, passion and intellect and autobiography and culture' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 761). Specifically, it enables me, as the researcher, to critically analyse the culture of interracial intimacy while taking into account the 'thickness' and specificity of my own interracial experiences. Such intimate disclosures, after all, are where 'newness' can enter the world.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography, depending on an author's typically domain-specific definition, includes a variety of meanings and applications. It has been featured as a methodology (Ellis and Bochner, 1996; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), a form of writing (McCann, 2002; Goodall, 2000), a text (Denzin, 1989; Reed-Danahay, 1997), a term of textual analysis (Neumann, 1996) and a concept (Hayano, 1979). Though autoethnography has been adopted by various disciplines, including anthropology (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Strathern, 1987), psychology (Barresi and Juckes, 1997), literary criticism (Deck, 1990, Pratt, 1992; 1994), sociology (Ellis and Bochner, 1997), and feminism (Reinharz, 1992), the approach has received little consideration from scholars of intercultural studies in Australia.

According to Denzin (1997), the autoethnographic method involves turning 'the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography, looking at the larger context where self-experiences occur' (p. 227). In this sense, then, autoethnography is a blend of ethnography and autobiographical writing that incorporates elements of one's own life experiences when writing about others, a 'form of self-narrative that "place[s] the self within a social context"' (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9). The essential difference between traditional ethnography and autoethnography, as explained by Duncan (2004), is that the researcher is 'not trying to become an insider in the research setting' (p. 3); rather, the researcher, 'who might typically have been the exotic subject of more traditional ethnographies,' is the insider (p. 3). Like Duncan (2004), literary critic Mary Louise Pratt (1992; 1994), along with Dorst (1997) and Hayano (1979), also attributes status to the 'insider' position, relating autoethnography to 'native ethnography', which is the study of one's own group. 'If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others', asserts Pratt (1992, p. 7), then, 'autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations' (p. 7). However, anthropologist Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997) asserts otherwise. Unlike Pratt (1992, 1994), Dorst (1997) and Hayano (1979), Reed-Danahay (1997) raises doubt about any one method for obtaining knowledge about the social world, asserting 'double identity and [or] in-

sider/outsider are constructs too simplistic for an adequate understanding of the processes of representation and power'. Alice Deck (1990), on the other hand, identifies autoethnographers as 'indigenous anthropologist[s] ... concerned with examining themselves as "natives" as they are with interpreting their cultures for a non-native audience' (pp. 246-247). Whatever the specific focus, a general consensus is that through self-reflective responses, authors use their own experiences in a culture to look more deeply at self-other interactions (Holt, 2003, p. 2).

Reed-Danahay (1997) further strengthens this point. According to her, autoethnography requires one to transcend selfhood and social life. Therefore, no matter how autoethnography is defined, an autoethnographer, claims Reed-Danahay, is a 'figure not completely "at home"', since s/he is a border crosser with 'multiple, shifting identities' (p. 3). Ellis and Bochner (2000) uphold this type of autoethnography as a personal narrative in which '... social scientists take on dual identities of academic and personal selves to tell autobiographical stories about some experience in daily life' (p. x). Neumann (1996) describes the method as an attempt to 'democratize the representational sphere of culture by locating the particular experiences of individuals in tension with dominant expressions of discursive power' (p. 189). Contrary to some understandings, autoethnography is not merely a carefully situated personal narrative, but also a political discourse, a form of resistance writing; a counter-narrative to meta-narratives that disempower and effectively silence those voices that fall outside of the predominant mainstream culture (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Agger, 1991). Consequently, meta-narratives can have adversarial implications for collective and self-identity. Autoethnography, with its promise of "'democratizing" uneven social spaces' (Neumann, 1996, p. 189), counteracts power inequalities by enabling interracial individuals to recover 'a sense of self and of voice that was momentarily taken' (Jackson, 1998, p. 23). Therefore, the autoethnographic method is particularly appropriate for this study because it not only opens a space for the re-articulation of new narratives, new stories that offer subversive possibilities, but also because it enables interracial couples to more clearly and accurately articulate the budding racial and cultural landscape reflective of interracial intimacy in North Queensland today.

Locating Myself: Hopes, Desires and Epiphanic Confessions

Whilst I do not pretend to be a 'native expert', my use of autoethnography is a direct consequence of my insider position (Deck, 1990). I am an Indigenous researcher who recognises the value of using myself as an ethnographic exemplar, while simultaneously examining the larger social and historical connections I share with my participants (Gergen and Gergen, 2002, p.14). Like many autoethnographers before me (Ellis, 1997; Ronai, 1996), I offer my personal narrative in the hope that through voice, candour and self-reflexivity, we can all better understand the world of interracial intimacy from those who experience it firsthand. If autoethnography is premised on a confessional epistemology of epiphanic moments where researchers choose to make explicit their own subjective and cultural experiences alongside those of their participants, then it places my autobiographical narrative in context (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Russell, 1999; Denzin, 1997).

According to Ellis (2004), a 'narrative refers to the stories people tell – the way they organise their experiences into temporally meaningful episodes' (p. 195). Narrativists, therefore, accept that through stories we weave life's events together and make them into a recognisable whole; be it written in the form of poems, stories, novels or plays (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Denzin, 1997). In this study, I have written intervallic stories in the form of short, conversational, autobiographical vignettes. I have chosen to include vignettes of my subjective experiences as a racialised woman in Australia because these not only offer additional information about the interplay between culture, society and politics (Pinar, 1997, p. 86), but also assist me to write about a variety of experiences and emotions. In their reflexivity, these vignettes offer an illumination of the relationships under study and help uncover the complex nature of interracial life.

Self-disclosure

According to Behar (2003), self-disclosure is 'neither easy nor pretty' (p. 9). Whilst I am aware that the self-disclosure that accompanies the reflexive approach is not uncomplicated and requires risk of exposure to both myself and my family, I have decided 'not to remove the thorns' (p. 9) from my autobiographical vignettes. I do so not because I am 'self-indulgent' and want to 'hijack' or move 'the emphasis away from my participants'

(Foster et al., 2006, p. 48), as is often the charge levied against those scholars who practice the autoethnographic method, but rather because I am genuinely interested in the condition of interracial relations in Australia (Ellis and Bochner, 1996; Coffey, 1999).

Yes, as Aboriginal poet Hyllus Maris (1934-86) so gracefully writes, 'I am a child of the dreamtime people, part of this land like the gnarled gum tree' (in Gilbert, p. 60), but I never forget that I am also part of an extended inter-family network composed of Irish, Fijian and New Zealander heritages and an even wider-ranging multiracial, multiethnic democracy. Yet whilst I am part of a multiracial family, I am also very conscious of the powerful effects of crossing the invisible borders that are meant to keep people neatly classified and therefore divided into rigid, hierarchical categories. My racial identity is something I continually negotiate on a daily basis. I am, after all, the first in my family to venture beyond the dry, desolate levee banks of rural Australia to receive a university degree. I am the first in my family to step outside the overly protective, ever-watchful and sometimes stifling confines of a small-town community into the Eurocentric world of academia. I am also the first, who I know of, in my immediate family to lovingly and consensually commit myself to a white man and experience the pain and joy of producing two beautiful multiracial children. It has not been an 'easy or pretty' journey. In fact, my journey has at times set family against family and caused great despair and distrust, even within me. Yet out of this mess comes a belief in healing and restoration that will liberate me, my people and this country from the cavernous scars caused by racism. My heart's desire is to see the yokes of the past broken, the deep levels of distrust caused by racialisation practices lifted and people open to engage in difficult conversations that deal with perspectives different from their own.

Therefore, I offer vignettes of my autobiographical memories as a way of bringing to power more modern stories of the challenges faced when one 'crosses the borders'. Like Tenni, Smyth and Boucher (2003), I choose to write 'what we really prefer not to write about', because I believe my memories offer compelling narratives of the meeting, meshing and muddling of two strong, yet stubbornly opposing cultures. They, like the narratives of my participants, are political texts that connect the personal self to the broader social and cultural world of interracial intimacy, which in turn connect my experi-

ences with those I study (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Ellis, 1995a). Therefore, my simultaneous presence within this study as both researcher and subject is a reflexive one, each informing the other, and never separate from one another. It aligns faultlessly with the social constructionist (interpretive) paradigm guiding this analysis, which allows access to multiple interracial perspectives and positions (Pinar, 1997; Ellis and Bochner, 2000).

Framing the Framework: Reflexivity, Subjectivity and Narrative Truth

I write 'in between' autobiography and ethnography because, like Ruth Behar (1996), 'I am a woman of the border', existing not only 'in between' identities and cultures, but also between 'longings and illusions, [with] one foot in the academy and one foot out' (p. 162). Therefore, because of my dual identity as both *researcher* and *subject*, I utilise reflexivity as a means to create an evocative, heartfelt text that 'transforms the conditions of knowledge production' by unifying the often disparate stances of object and subject (Clough, 2000, pp. 172-173; Denzin, 1997; Russell, 1999). I do this by embracing an experiential alternative to traditional writing that integrates my 'personal expertise' with 'presentational expertise' (Denzin, 1997; Foss and Foss, 1994, p. 41). This permits me, as the author, to craft a creative 'dialogic multivocal narrative' that refocuses the method of ethnographic inquiry from a unidirectional gaze outward at others, to a multidirectional gaze into self and others' simultaneously (Denzin, 1997:210; Ellis, 1997:120). The closing of the gap between self and others creates an intimate space where one can 'document one's experiences of cultural diversity [and interracial intimacy] without commodifying or objectifying ... without othering' (Russell, 1999, para. 66). Doing so offers an intimate act of knowing in which the other is not betrayed but rather transformed through generative reciprocal exchanges (Jones, 2002, p. 52). Therefore, by reflexively flipping the gaze back on myself, my narratives put me in conversation with myself as well as those whom I interact with in the field. These narratives and personal vignettes not only allow me to make transparent the complexities and ambiguities of my own emotional participation in this study, but, in doing so, advance the development of a more open and honest dialogical exchange with my participants (Berger, 2001; Frankenberg, 1993, p. 30).

By merging my subjective accounts of experiences and perspectives with those I am studying, I create a textual intimacy between ‘the story of the self who has the stake, asks the questions and does the interpreting, and the stories of others who help [me] to find or create meanings’ (Goodall, 2003, p. 60). In telling autoethnography entirely from a subjective position, the pretense of objective dispassionate researcher is also removed, and replaced with an emotionality that aims to touch ‘a world beyond the self of the writer’ (Bochner and Ellis, 1996, p. 24). Like Ellis, my goal is to create a text where the emotional response of the reader becomes a measure of the text’s validity. I want it to ‘...be powerful enough that readers would put themselves into the experience’ (Ellis, 1995b, p. 315). Following Ellis’s (2004) lead, I therefore start with my personal life and ‘pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts and emotions...to try and understand an experience I’ve lived through. Then I write my experience as a story [referred to in this study as a vignette]’ (p. vii). By reflexively mapping the multiple discourses that occur in a given social space, I make transparent a multivocal text where a rich tapestry of viewpoints and voices via personal stories and narratives richly interact, contrast and swirl with each other (Denzin, 1997, p. 225). Through the workings of ‘narrative truth’ or the ‘writing of a good story’ (Ellis, 1995b, pp. 316-317; Richardson, 1994, p. 9), I make the strange familiar by inviting the reader into ‘a believable emotional world in which past, present, and future merge into a single but complex interpretive experience’ (Denzin, 1997, p. 210). In doing so, I re-create a social world ‘as a site at which identities and local cultures are negotiated and given meaning’ (pp. 210-211, 225); a site grounded in the worlds of embodied experience and organised by an interpretive theory. Like Messinger (2001), I ‘don’t provide any adjudication (intercession, negotiation, mediation) as to which opinion or perception is “correct”’ (p. 10). Instead, I ‘challenge the reader to join me in finding the truths, and more importantly, interpreting the meanings in all of the responses individually and as they inform each other’ (p. 10). Ultimately, it is this theoretical framing between voice, reflexivity, dialogical inquiry and self-narratives that not only breaks down the hierarchical barriers between myself and my participants, but also between myself and the reader. However, given that the hierarchical barrier between researcher and participants is never completely eliminated, and thus ‘narrative explanation means that one person’s voice, the writer, speaks for others’ (Richardson, 1990, p. 130), I wish to make it clear that the final

product reflects my own representation of the data. To give voice to the participants, I used their words and personal stories where I felt it appropriate to reconstruct their perception of their racial identity development, and everyday experiences as they interact with popular hegemonic discourses. As a result, the data is an outcome of my own interpretation of the interactions and events that unfolded.

Guiding the Framework

The purpose of this study is to explore the social phenomenon of interracial intimacy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal couples from a new perspective, stepping away from popular interracial theories. To better understand the social reality of intimate interracial relationships, I listen for the voices that have long been silenced and subjugated in the interracial literature of Australia. Therefore, the focus is not on verifying or creating theory that attempts to describe objective reality, but rather to interpret the issues of interracial intimacy in a way that leads to greater understandings of the meanings interracial couples attach to their experiences together; understandings that refer to meanings constructed at the subjective level and shared and reconstructed in interaction with others. From the ontological and epistemological assumptions that reality is socially constructed and that we can learn about it through the interplay between subject and object, I reject the positivist position that true statements about reality can be deduced from impartial observation and experience. Instead, I agree with Strauss and Corbin (1990) that socially constructed knowledge can only be drawn from empathetic understanding, systematic introspection and personal interaction. Ultimately, it is through this focusing on people 'telling' their stories that understandings of particular socially constructed knowledge may be sifted out and interpreted. Therefore, I am guided by a way of knowing derived from an interpretive research approach, congruent with a social constructionist epistemology based on empathy and interaction, aiming to explore experiences, processes and meanings.

Data Collection

Because autoethnographic understanding provides a way of framing lived experience that acknowledges, through its methodology, that 'knowledge, subjectivity, and society are

inextricably linked', it belongs to interpretive qualitative research. Like interpretive research, it seeks, '[t]o make the strange familiar and the familiar strange' (Terre Blanche and Kelly, 1999, p. 139) by employing a field work approach that allows for a rich description of what the participants have experienced and their understandings of their experiences (Denzin, 1997). So, in order to access multiple sources of information, portray the issues from multiple perspectives and present a balanced re-presentation, I used multiple methods of data collection. I gathered data mainly through (auto)ethnographic methods of participant observation, the taking of field notes, self-disclosure strategies and dialogical, open-ended interview techniques.

Participant observation is based on the premise that events are best understood by knowing and considering the settings in which they occur (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). According to Spradley (1980, p.58), the ethnographer must maintain a dual purpose, participating in group activities while watching the self and others at the same time. In doing so, the ethnographer must also keep an ethnographic record of both objective observations and subjective feelings (Spradley, 1980). Whilst I found note-taking particularly laborious, I have tried to observe my interaction with interracial couples with extra discretion. Throughout the study, I strove to turn the observer's eye on myself as well as the interracial community at large, so that I could see the culture, rather than simply participate in it. According to Geertz (1973), culture presents the ethnographer with contexts that can be thickly described. By translating my field notes into more detailed accounts combining observation and reflexive introspection, I have tried to provide as many layers of description as I can to make the landscape of interracial intimacy in Townsville become substantial and alive to the reader.

INTERVIEWS

Eighteen face-to-face, open-ended interviews, which lasted on average 75 minutes, during visits that ranged from one-and-a-half to five hours, were audio recorded and transcribed into text as the primary source of data for the study. Respective interracial partners were interviewed, individually at first to obtain thoughts and feelings that may not be

shared in the presence of others, then together as a couple. Most interviews were conducted at the participant's home, except one couple who chose to undertake it at their workplace. Because a social constructionist perspective guided my line of questioning, I sought to uncover how interracial couples construct, assign, and negotiate meaning in their life experiences together. As sensitive, subjective information was required, I approached the interviews as dialogical conversations, initially surrendering control over to the participants with the expectation that almost any question would generate narrative. Following Riessman's (1994) advice, I trusted that the research participants, if uninterrupted by standardised questions, would 'hold the floor for lengthy turns and organise their replies into long stories' (p. 68). With this in mind, each interview began with open-ended questions that sought to 'let individuals become the autobiographical narratives by which they tell about their own lives' (p. 68). In the single interviews, I started with general questions regarding participants' family of origin and the traditions and values that formed their identities before they entered the relationship. Past intimate relationships were also explored, along with participants' family reaction to the relationships. In the couples' interviews, I asked about the history of their current relationship, the influence of categories of racial and cultural differences on the relationship and the reactions of family, friends and society at large to their relationship. I sought evidence of race and gender issues in the dynamics of the relationship and in each other's self-image. I observed facial expressions, body language and words used to describe people and their relationships. Although the initial interviews were open-ended, subsequent interviews incorporated specific questions about topics discussed earlier. Consistent with grounded theory, the questions were recursive and became increasingly structured as data was analysed and themes began to emerge.

Since race was a sensitive topic of each interview, it was essential to situate myself as the researcher. I addressed this by encouraging a dialogical inquiry that followed Frankenberg's (1993) lead. She described her dialogical approach in the following way:

Rather than maintaining the traditionally distant, apparently objective, and so-called blank-faced research persona, I positioned myself as explicitly involved in the questions, at times sharing with interviewees either information about my

own life or elements of my own analysis of racism as it developed through the research process. (p. 30)

This approach, she maintained, democratised the research process by reducing the extent to which she was positioned as an invisible presence, silently evaluating the participants. Merging my perspectives with the participants' perspectives and telling them about my experiences as a woman involved in current and past interracial relationships, enabled me to be open and upfront with them. Indeed, not only did this approach invite participants to contribute their responses to my own interpretation of issues, but it also showed my participants that I was willing to be receptive to what they had to share with me. At times, I was required to be open to beliefs and experiences vastly different from my own. However, as the interviews served to expose the viewpoint of interracial couples and not to study issues of popular objective reality, no attempt was made to resolve contradictions if they appeared in the interview. This ultimately was what provided the rich data for this study.

Data Analysis

I used the constant comparative method in this study, which emphasises an iterative process of data analysis by comparing incident by incident, category by incident, and category by category and captures commonalities (recurring themes, phrases) in the experiences of the participants (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 1983). This technique also calls for concurrent data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 1983). I prepared detailed field notes immediately after conducting interviews, which were then transcribed within a few months after completion, and were coded upon receipt. By transcribing and coding interviews early in the process, my preliminary analysis of the interviews informed subsequent interviews.

Following Charmaz's (1983; 2002) version of the grounded theory method, I conducted open coding and basic axial coding. Initially I did a combination of line-by-line and paragraph coding of indigenous concepts, which are terms used by participants (Patton, 1990, pp. 306, 390 - 400) to code the entire transcript. After the individual responses were analysed, spouses' perspectives were then compared for similarities and differences

within couples. Both the individuals' and couples' narratives were juxtaposed and analysed through cultural categories and variables, such as race, gender and class (Gilgun, 1995). These, in turn, were merged to construct research categories at a more conceptual and interpretive level (Charmaz, 1983). Interest in this level was grounded partially in a previous literature review, including the reading of fictional and non-fictional Australian literature and autobiographies that focused on subjective experiences of interracial intimacy. My interest was refined through my open-ended interviews with interracial couples in which they constructed their own autobiographical narratives of their everyday (embodied) reality. I then conducted a form of axial coding that required a more systematic analysis of the 'links' and connections between categories.

The grounded approach to data analysis was based entirely in the language, themes and associations emerging from the data. This was achieved by immersion in the data from all sources, recreating the 'felt experience' of the fieldwork in this autoethnographic study. The justification for employing a grounded theory approach was based on the premise that it provided a set of procedures for coding and analysing data that suited the interpretive approach. Consequently, this procedure created a close association between the analysis and the data, thus providing inductive discoveries about the phenomena under study. Also, as Strauss and Corbin (1994) highlight, the theories that are produced are 'fluid' because they 'embrace the interaction of multiple actors' and the development of the categories facilitates the process of interaction in a natural way (p. 279). This facilitating of interaction between my participants and I was the key component upon which this autoethnographic inquiry was founded.

CHAPTER 2

A HISTORY OF SECRECY, SEDITION, SEXUAL DESIRE AND LOVE

'Cripes...A man doesn't love a gin, not a white man'

My father was an unknown white man — the rat — making me one of the many sunburnt babies to roam our country. I am neither white nor black but of a new breed, to be punished along with our mothers for what we are. (Marnie Kennedy, 1990, p.3)

Australia is already what racial supremacists have long feared: a nation marked by a great deal of 'sunburnt' skin, or what many in the past offensively referred to as 'mongrels' (Broome, 1982, p. 93). In skin tone, texture of hair, width of noses and other apparent signs, the faces and bodies of many Australians bear witness to the so-called vice of 'miscegenation'. Miscegenation was a term used during the early colonial period to loosely refer to interracial marriage and interracial sexual encounters (Harris, 2003). Whilst some of these encounters were personally gratifying, many (perhaps most) were not. Many qualified as rape. Others contained elements of either choice or coercion and violence. The full spectrum of historical interracial relationships, then, ranged from 'absolute sexual depredation to mutually supportive and loving relationships and marriages' (Roberts, 2001, p.1). Yet, despite this complicated legacy of abuse, and the subsequent establishment of anti-miscegenation laws restricting such relationships, intimate interracial relationships between Aboriginal Australians and Whites continue to be forged.

Throughout Australia, intimate relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are becoming more prevalent. According to the 2006 census, Indigenous Australians have a high rate of interracial marriage, including de-facto marriage (Heard, Khoo and Birrell, pp. 3-5). Indeed, the 2006 census signified a significant shift in the social realm of Indigenous people: for the first time, a majority of Indigenous persons, both male and female, were partnered with non-Indigenous persons. Beginning in the 1980s, the proportion of interracial households has seen a steady increase: 46% in 1986, 51% in 1991, 64% in 1996 and 69% in 2001. The most striking feature of this increase is that a great

majority of such couples are living in metropolitan centres, predominantly the larger eastern cities such as Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Similar trends were recorded in Perth, but not for Darwin or rural communities outside city centres (Commonwealth of Australia).

Many explanations have been given for why there has been such a dramatic rise in the number of interracial marriages between Aboriginal and White Australians. Heard, Khoo and Birrell (2009), in their report *Intermarriage in Australia*, attribute the increase to several factors. The first relates to the growing de-stigmatisation of long-standing racial divisions and accompanying negative stereotypes. Nevertheless, the researchers assert that 'only a small minority of non-Indigenous Australians were prepared to say that they would accept a full-blood or part Aboriginal person as a relative by marriage into their family' (p. 1). Today, though, it appears that prejudice against such unions is dissipating, especially in metropolitan centres 'where there is plenty of opportunity for interaction between the two' (p. 2). The second is that there is a growing propensity to identify as Indigenous. As Heard, Khoo and Birrell (2009) propose: '... confidence in one's identity may be accompanied by greater engagement with non-Indigenous Australians. If so, this might increase opportunities to partner outside of the Indigenous community' (p. 2). Third, the research team's data, drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, indicates that it is not politics, but demographics that feature strongly in the growth of interracial relationships in Australia. Whilst the occupational, income and educational gap is slowly narrowing, Heard, Khoo and Birrell (2009) contend that regardless of these attainments, the main contributing factor to the high rate of Indigenous exogamy, or 'marrying out', is proximity (p. 10).

Similarly, June Duncan Owen (2002), in a study that covers the history of marriages between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal couples since 1788, also associated an increase in exogamous unions to a greater likelihood to self-identity as Aboriginal, an increase in opportunities afforded contemporary Aboriginal people, and a greater degree of social contact between racial groups. Owen (2002) further observed: 'This astonishing increase in the number of Aborigines who marry 'out' can be partly explained by the increase in part-Aborigines who identify as Aboriginals, and could also be linked to their move into cities and away from the bush where they are more likely to marry another

Aborigine' (p. 101). In considering the steady, ongoing migration of Indigenous people from the bush to capital cities like Sydney, Owen (2002) explains that 'most Aborigines in Sydney would already be racially mixed, and have only a tenuous link with the land, language and traditional life of their forefathers. Many more Aboriginal Territorians, however, are not racially mixed ... and perhaps even more importantly, many still have their Aboriginal language and clear links with the land and traditional life' (p. 101). Although such comments may appear to be loaded with assumptions, even taking these assumptions at face value does not explain why intimate interracial relationships are rapidly increasing in the Australian population.

While interracial relationships have a high public profile, existing research rarely provides rich qualitative data on how blacks and whites envision their relationships. Traditionally, research within the Australian context as well as the United States has largely been confined to the realm of 'race relations' or 'identity politics' (Saunders and Cronin 1988; Chesterman and Galligan 1997; Pascoe, 1991). Much of this literature, therefore, deals with the changing politics of 'miscegenation' and the role of the differing state histories in regulating 'intimacies' (Rolls, 2005; Ellinghaus, 2006). In previous generations, strict social norms emerged to curtail the formation of intimate and mutually beneficial interracial relationships, as they were a source of anxiety about racial purity and, perhaps more pointedly, traditional power relationships. Ironically, quite often they were also considered a strategy to eliminate Aboriginal cultural and biological heritages (Huggins, 1998; Ellinghaus, 2006). Another interconnected branch of study examines the existence of 'mixed-race' progeny and the ambitious plan to 'breed out the black strain' by 'fuck[ing] 'em up white' through the process of cultural absorption, otherwise referred to as assimilation (Rolls, 2005, p. 65). As Auber Octavius Neville, senior bureaucrat in Western Australia from 1915-1940 and a national figure in Aboriginal Affairs during that period, stated at a National Conference in 1937: 'Are we going to have a population of 1,000,000 blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into our own white community and eventually forget that there ever were any Aborigines in Australia?' (Rolls, 2005, p. 65).

Despite the documented historical evidence demonstrating an administrative concern with the politics of interracial intimacy and their 'dubious' offspring, first-hand accounts of how interracial couples view their own relationship are few and far between.

Whilst the explosion of Aboriginal autobiographies do offer an 'alternative to the failings of official records' and are self-authored stories, the reality is that many of these life stories, predominantly written by Aboriginal women, make oblique references to their parentage (Haskins and Maynard, 2005, p. 194). As Aileen Moreton Robinson (2000) affirms, 'Indigenous and white men are not mentioned or featured as main characters in the texts; it is Indigenous women's relations with other Indigenous women that are given significance' (pp. 15-16). Instead of identifying with their white or non-Indigenous side, many of these women tend to identify as Aboriginal only. In her thought-provoking article entitled *Kin-fused Reconciliation: Bringing them Home, Bringing Us Home*, Fiona Probyn-Rapsey (2007) further upholds this proposition when she confirms that 'on the whole, but with exceptions, life writings [of Aboriginal women] have not been particularly interested in celebrating mixed race identities' (p. 7). If interracial intimacy is perceived as the final boundary in achieving complete racial assimilation, it appears that many offspring of such relationships often wrestle with issues of racial and ethnic identity, preferring to 'blackout' their white ancestry in favour of an Aboriginal identity (Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, 2007, p. 6; Rolls, 2005, p. 65).

In contrast, in her article *Consent, Marriage and Colonialism: Indigenous Australian Women and Colonizer Marriages*, Anne McGrath (2005) also highlights the public silence practiced by many an iconised 'pioneer family', in particular the adulterous white father, with respect to their Indigenous offspring. Interestingly, she contends that 'Although the white "pioneer family" was reified in colonial legend-making, it was the cross-colonizer or mixed family that characterised the "nation-builders" of the frontier' (p. 5). Yet, despite the 'mixed' composition of frontier families, McGrath describes the erasure of such histories as follows:

When pastoralists or their descendants compiled family trees, their extra branches went missing. However, when not obscured by colonizer dismissal of the 'illegitimate' mixed descent family, the full genealogy often took on a distinctly polygamous appearance. (p. 6)

McGrath (2005), however, is not the only scholar to note the convenient forgetting by many pioneer families. In the Charles Perkins Annual Memorial Oration, former Chief

Justice of New South Wales James Spigelman also commented on the motley composition of the Australian frontier. According to Spigelman (2005), 'sexual contact began at the very outset of white settlement, because of the shortage of white women in the bush. It has continued in many ways, to the extent that few families from the bush have not had such contact' (p. 3). He further effuses, 'Let me state one undeniable fact. Millions of Australians have an Aboriginal ancestor ... For most of our history this has been regarded as a matter to be suppressed' (p. 4).

The enormity of this suppression is not only echoed in the life stories of Aboriginal women like Jessie Argyle, who is quoted in Alice Nannup's (1992) *When the Pelican Laughed* as saying, 'My [white] father never claimed me. But I don't care. I remember my mother and I got a life' (p. 120), but also in the story of Marnie Kennedy's mother, Rose. In *Born a Half-caste*, Marnie Kennedy (1990) tells us that her mother, a 'full-blood' Kalkadoon woman, was 'taken' from her family at the tender age of 'nine or ten' and trained to work on stations. Not surprisingly, it was the station owners who named her Rose. Although Rose worked long hours and received no payment for her labour, it appears that:

... as she grew older and began to blossom like the flower she was named for, the white man soon had his way. She had three children to the white man. That was her crime and she was sent to Palm Island as punishment. (pp. 2-3)

In her provocative article entitled 'White Girl Gone off with the Blacks', Liz Reed (2002) argues that white men were simply not accountable for the maintenance of their 'mixed race' progeny. Neither formal sanction nor moral persuasion held any sway over these white fathers. She further contends that government reserves, such as Palm Island, were established precisely to deal with the 'problem' children who 'threatened the fantasy of white Australia' (p. 15). Stephen Gray (2011) agrees that policies directly relating to the 'Stolen Generation' and people like Jessie Argyle, who were removed from the north to the south of Western Australia, originated in white men's guilt surrounding the mixed heritage of their illegitimate offspring (p. 79).

In Australia, sexual relationships between Aboriginal women and European men were a common feature of the physical and psychological landscape. As the following

inquiry demonstrates, the archetypal model for representing these relationships has historically been one of controversy and contempt, mingled with sexual aggression manifested through systematic violence. Roberts (2001) speaks to the prevalence of this violence with the observation that 'interracial intimacy was placed firmly in a context of vice and sex, rather than of reproduction and family' (p. 69). Although relationships between Aboriginal women and settlers occurred, they seem to have been more opportunist and exploitative than loving; concurring with this analysis is Liz Reed (2002), who explains that, 'sex between white men and black women has historically not been for the purposes of reproduction but has more often been expressive of [white] men's power to gain sex opportunistically' (p. 17). In the minds of colonists, sex with Aboriginal women was construed as easy sexual sport that was 'there for the taking' (Roberts, 2001, p. 74). More often than not this meant that Aboriginal women were exiled from the category of genteel and graceful womanhood and increasingly characterised as 'low class' prostitutes, a status conveniently blamed on the inherent immorality of their race (Miller et al, 2010, p. 354). Not only were they perceived as chattel offered as barter by 'their' Aboriginal men, but they were also blamed for spreading disease and were therefore considered unqualified to uphold familial obligations (Roberts, 2001, p. 78; Reed, 2002, p. 13). Denigrated as racial and national contaminants, they were denied the basic human right of maintaining a family. Yet, despite these charges levelled against them, Aboriginal scholar Jackie Huggins (1998, p. 7) and Hannah Roberts (2001), insist that black women also managed to represent 'an odd picture of attraction and repulsion intermingled' (p. 76). Could it be that, in some interracial 'liaisons', Aboriginal women were perceived as more than just 'merely a root-grubbing, shell-gathering chattel, whose social assets were wiry arms, prehensile toes and a vagina' (Hughes, 1987, p. 16)? Nonetheless, Reed (2002) suggests that, ultimately, the bodies of Aboriginal women were sites of sexual desire to be controlled, 'with love rarely invoked' (p. 16).

As suggested by Marnie Kennedy (1990), white male sexual privilege was customary and widespread. However, whilst white men did hold the power to dominate and control black women, she also suggests that they were similarly seduced and tempted by them. Referring to their worth as black domestics, Kennedy (1990) states that 'we must obey, work hard, do as we are told and be used in any way the white man wishes. White

man had a few names he would call us such as “gins” and “lubra” and when he wanted a bit of lovin’ we were “black velvet” (p. 24). ‘Black velvet’ was a sexualised term applied to the ‘use’ of black women by white men until, diseased, they were discarded or ‘shot at’ (Roberts, 2001, p. 73; Probyn-Rapsey, 2009, p. 95). Neil Black, a stockman in the 1840s, explained that it was common for ‘these rascals to sleep all night with a lubra (native female) and if she poxes him or in any way offends him, perhaps shoot her before twelve next day’ (Black and Mackellar, 2008, p. 202). Anthropologist Gillian Cowlishaw (1999, p.153) confirms that a bit of ‘black velvet’ was the necessary prerequisite for stockmen working on isolated stations; such liaisons, it appears, were rarely formalised as marriages. In settler society, Aboriginal women were simply not ‘suitable’ for romantic relationships (Jensz, 2010, p. 40). Yet, whilst they were held in contempt, many white men considered it their legitimate right to indulge their desires. This ‘indulgence’, as clarified by Huggins (1988), ‘frequently saw the necessity to conquer the [black] women as an integral part of their colonial adventure’ (p. 15). Even Jackie Huggins’ own mother, Rita, herself a product of domestic servitude, details the ‘horrifying’ level of sexual degradation wrought by such ‘adventures’: ‘Because they [the masters] had the right to our services they believed that this had excused them to attempt to use our bodies too’ (p. 16). In reference to the widespread vulnerability experienced by black women during colonial times, Behrendt (in Robertson, 2005), further explains that ‘when the British invaded Australia, they murdered and mutilated the Aboriginal people. The rape of Aboriginal women, as in any war, was part of the conquest’ (p. 39). In 1958, just under a century or so later, Bill Harney, (in Harris, 2003, p. 95) a well-known bushman also wrote, ‘... the pioneer makes the country by using the gifts within it to his needs’. The excessive abuse of these ‘gifts’ not only disarmed the pretensions of polite society, but in doing so, challenged the very foundation upon which such a society was built.

Not even refined white women, who came to represent the foundation of ‘civilised’ society, could restrain the disorderly behaviour of their men (McGrath, 2005, p. 14; Tonkinson, 1988, p. 32). And, the foremost manifestation of this type of behaviour was, of course, illicit interracial encounters and their progeny (Rolls, 2005). This, then, is why the events that took place in 1965 during the Freedom Rides bus tour through northern New South Wales remain infamous. At a time when race relations were undergoing national

upheaval, tensions erupted into violence in the streets of Walgett. Twenty or so students from Sydney University, who were there to peacefully protest the continuing discrimination against Aboriginal people, were caught in an ugly crossfire of abusive exchanges between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal families. This abuse conveniently reached its peak outside the Walgett Returned Servicemen's League (RSL), which apparently barred Aboriginal people, including those Aboriginal Diggers who fought alongside their fellow countrymen in the World Wars. As recounted by the late Charles Perkins, one of the student leaders of the Freedom Rides at the time, in the midst of the rock hurling and poisonous words exchanged, an Aboriginal woman bravely stepped forward, pointed her finger at a white person in the opposing crowd on the opposite side of the street and fearlessly declared:

What did you say your name was? That's my name too. You wanna go and ask your father where 'e used to spend his Friday nights, out there at the mission with my mother, that's where 'e was. (in Probyn-Rapsey, 2007, p. 1)

So stunned were white families at this revelation, that the white women 'turned on their husbands and they all started arguing amongst themselves and the crowd just disintegrated' (in Probyn-Rapsey, 2007, p. 1). Reflecting upon this particular incident, the late Charles Perkins concluded 'the message was very clear for everybody to hear. After that discussion Walgett was finished, it had no answer to racial discrimination' (p. 1). Nor, it appears did it have an answer to interracial cohabitation, despite the friction it caused between the races.

Although white women held the legal status of wife, their husbands, who seemed to live double lives in different parts of the town, did nothing to bridge the gap; they neither acknowledged their infidelities nor the mixed-race children who were borne of their seed. Instead, as Myrna Tonkinson (1988) shows, these children were often raised as their mothers' Aboriginal husbands' children:

...sharing their poverty and economic prospects, regardless of the financial circumstances of their natural fathers. This placed the White and Aboriginal mothers on entirely different footings, even in cases where their children had the same father. (p. 34)

Such was the tangled web of discontent as played out in the township of Walgett. Clearly, the presence of white women in the bush did not always exert a 'civilising' effect upon their spouses, as initially hoped for by government officials, but rather compounded the hypocrisy of it (Tonkinson, 1988, p. 98). Inevitably, this led to trauma, ongoing suspicion and great mistrust between families of the coloniser and the colonised, creating conditions that, according to Tonkinson (1988), cultivated a racial landscape devoid of friendship, especially between Aboriginal and white women (p. 34).

As the marker of discord between the two populations, the fearless woman from Walgett exposed the underlife of the town and by extension, the White Nation. Often conceived through violence, or what Larissa Behrendt (2010, p. 354) refers to as 'economic exchanges', the offspring she represented not only destabilised the established social order but undermined popular notions of White Australia as a doctrine of racial purity (Rolls, 2005, pp. 64-65). Condemned as degenerates who inherited the vices of both races, these children were considered a national menace; something had to be done (Rolls, 2005, p.64). After all, as one Queensland politician asserted:

We must be careful to see that the half caste is not given the same liberties that are enjoyed by the whiteman. We do not want any further mixing of the population. We want to keep the white race white. (Broome, 1982, p. 161)

The solution eventually came in the form of segregation, or the creation of government policies designed to 'protect' the purity of both races and especially Aboriginal women from widespread abuse. Discriminatory legislation was introduced in each state. A relatively progressive instance of the legislation included the forced removal of 'mixed-blood' children from their mother and 'camp' life (Roberts, 2001, p. 76). Not only were these children denied the liberty of existing in their own right, but Anglo law rendered them 'illegitimate' and therefore subject to intervention and segregation. Interestingly, Fiona Probyn-Rapsey (2008), who references previous research by Jolly and Sharp (1993), makes the point that "'colonising women'" were often stereotyped or represented as supporting such harsh racial segregation to control the habits of their husbands' (p. 75). As further explored by Probyn-Rapsey (2008), this thought was not limited to white women only; black women also felt the stigma. Using Aunty Ella Simon as an example to reinforce

the idea that white women were sometimes more interested in maintaining the social hierarchy than white men, she quotes:

One thing I have noticed, though, is that men accepted me more than women generally. Somehow the white women seemed to have a thing about having to show she was better than I was. And make it obvious, what's more. I don't know why. Could it have been jealousy? If so, jealous of what for heaven's sake? (Probyn-Rapsey, 2008 p. 76)

No wonder relationships between Aboriginal and white women were often described as 'friendless' or even 'hostile', as interracial liaisons directly threatened the institution of marriage and therefore constituted 'an insult' to white women (Tonkinson, 1988, p. 31). For many white women, Aboriginal women were viewed as 'the enemy' and the main source of white man's degradation (Riddett, 1993, p.5). After discovering her husband's first wife was Aboriginal and that she was expected to act as step-mother to their mixed race heritage children, one particular white woman, as conveyed by Roberts (2001) 'wrapped herself up in a blanket soaked in kerosene, lit a match and burned to death' (p. 72). Furthermore, as Lyn Riddett (1993) explains, there were even cases in the Northern Territory of white women earning the pejorative title of 'gin shepherd' because of their practice of locking Aboriginal women up at night to keep them out of reach of the white men. The reason was because 'settler women knew what could not be openly acknowledged in settler society' (p. 6). Sensitive topics such as interracial, adulterous sex were avoided by settler women in the Territory because such topics apparently disrupted settler tradition (Riddett, 1993). Because white women were expected to uphold settler tradition, they did not question it.

Riddett's (1993) *Watch the White Women Fade* and Tonkinson's (1988) *Sisterhood or Aboriginal Servitude* make plain that a 'sisterhood' between Aboriginal and white women on the frontier was fraught with tension. Instead, there was a dual standard that denigrated Aboriginal women as sexual playthings and valorised white women as the antidote for their husband's adulterous 'playfulness'. Acutely aware of their precarious status, white women perceived Aboriginal women as their sexual competition. However, despite the 'veiled rivalry' between them, white men continued to engage freely with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women (Tonkinson, 1988, p. 38). The difference, according

to Tonkinson (1988), was that they often behaved more 'intimately' with the 'dominated group', thus leaving the women of the 'dominant' group even more 'aloof' (p. 29).

Therefore, notions of racial and gender superiority led to endemic abuse of Aboriginal women. So rife was this abuse, that a 'veil of silence' protected the 'honour of the white race'; specifically white men (Reed, 2002, p. 13). As Huggins (1988), Roberts (2001), Reed (2002) and Harris (2003) agree, white men, by virtue of their social, political and economic power, were able to take sexual license with their 'domestic servants' and cloak this abuse in silence and denial. To evade culpability, they reduced Aboriginal women to objects of lust, possessing such permissive and promiscuous sexuality that even the most unyielding white man succumbed. As depicted in Katherine Susannah Pritchard's (1929) popular novel *Coonardoo*, Hugh Watt is one such man. In a conversation with Sam Geary, who is presented as a despised user of black women, Hugh defends his right to marry white:

'What are you givin' us, Youie?' Geary expostulated. 'Have I got to mind my bloody p's and q's when I open my mouth on Wyaliba these days?'

'Too right you have,' Hugh assented.

'You're one of those god-damned young heroes. No "black velvet" for you, I suppose?'

'I'm goin' to marry white and stick white,' Hugh said, obstinate lines settling on either side of his mouth.

Geary laughed.

'Oh, you are, are you?' he jeered. 'What do you think of that, Bob? Well, I'll bet you a new saddle you take a gin before a twelvemonth's out – if ever you're in this country on your own.'

No stud gins for mine — no matter what happens he swore to himself, disturbed and irritated.

Not surprisingly though, Hugh does 'take a gin', a childhood companion named Coonardoo, and she bears him a son. Despite his abiding attraction and affection for her, he cannot bring himself to allow his natural feelings for Coonardoo to progress, as his moral conscience will not allow it. Repelled by his fellow stockmen's casual attitude towards sexual relationships with Aboriginal women, Hugh forgoes his own chance of happiness with Coonardoo and 'marries white'. Tragedy ensues: hoping that Mollie, his white wife, will save him from his own errant desire for Coonardoo, Hugh instead hurts her, himself and Coonardoo. After Mollie discovers the truth about Winni, his illegitimate child

to Coonardoo, she chooses to use it as an excuse to leave the station she so loathes and never returns again. When Coonardoo's tribal husband dies, Hugh acknowledges Coonardoo as his woman, yet refuses to legitimise their relationship. His moral conditioning, influenced by the teachings of his mother about the vices of miscegenation, continues to prevent him from living with her. Later, when Hugh is away, his nemesis, Sam Geary, who has long coveted Coonardoo, 'seduces' her. When Hugh finds out, he violently beats, burns and banishes Coonardoo from the station. After this, Coonardoo runs away and drifts 'aimlessly and forlornly as a dispossessed and hopeless black woman', until years later she returns to Wyaliba, her ancestral home, to die, diseased and discarded by all (Miley, 2006). In her critique of this novel, Linda Miley (2006) states that 'while it goes some way to acknowledging the devastating effects of the colonial enterprise, it draws back from allowing the interracial relationship between Hugh, a landowner and Coonardoo, an Indigenous woman, to flourish as a solution to the situation' (p. 12). When Pritchard wrote this novel, it scandalised readers not so much for its portrayal of the misuse of Aboriginal women, but rather because it sanctioned a concept that was at that time in Australia's history considered shocking—the possibility of interracial love between a white settler and an Aboriginal women (Modjeska, 1990, p. 3). Whilst 'taking a gin' was tolerated and even encouraged in the bush, it was considered a crime against the nation to feel, as one critic claimed, 'any "higher emotion", than pity for a black woman' (University of Melbourne review, 2010).

Not only does Pritchard's novel present a complex portrayal of the moral repercussions of interracial intimacy, but through the main characters and the travails they endure, it also gives us disturbing insights into the racial and sexual paranoia of White Australia. More specifically, *Coonardoo* reveals a national obsession with theories of racial superiority laced with fears and fantasies of miscegenation, particularly interracial transgressions. On one level, there is the fear of white men desiring black women as sexual objects, which is further fuelled by the more overt fear of white men falling in love with black women; something which had the initial publishers confirming: 'Our experience with *Coonardoo* shows us that the Australian public will not stand stories based on a white man's relationship with a black woman' (Modjeska, 1990, p. 1). During this time, the conventions of Australian society curtailed lasting and equal relationships between Aboriginal

women and non-Aboriginal men. In fact, a belief in the hierarchy of races nurtured the assumption that no white person would readily choose a black woman over a white woman. Anxieties such as these therefore supported state laws that regulated marriages on the basis of racial classification.

In Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, marriages between Aborigines and non-Aborigines could not take place without the permission of the Chief Protector of Aborigines or his equivalent (Ellinghaus, 2001). By the 1930s, most laws governing interracial marriages or even permanent relationships between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people were subject to increasing intervention (McGrath and Stevenson, 1996, p. 47). In some states, marriage between Aboriginal people of full descent with non-Aboriginal people were 'outlawed', and in other states, people of full Aboriginal descent could only marry those of similar descent (Spencer, 2004, p. 62; Ellinghaus, 2006, p. 194). Other states, such as Western Australia, promoted the 'breeding out of colour' by encouraging interbreeding between white and part-Aboriginal people only (Ellinghaus, 2006). Queensland passed legislation in the early 1900s that forbade cohabitation: any non-Aboriginal man found living with an Aboriginal woman could be charged with a criminal offence, fined or imprisoned (McGrath, 2005, para 13). Similar measures were adopted in the Northern Territory in 1936, where cohabitation with an Aboriginal woman was rendered illegal, especially if the non-Aboriginal man was married (McGrath and Stevenson, 1996, p. 48). Rather than be convicted, many Aboriginal partners and offending progenies were discarded; after all, white men's taste never extended to marriage (McGrath, 2005). By defining their encounters with Aboriginal women as 'prostitution', Anne McGrath (1987) argues that this allowed white men to 'assuage themselves of possible guilt for rape, disease, or the children they left in their wake' (p. 69). Thus, white men could indulge their wayward desires without obligation, heedless of their securing of a white marital partner. Ultimately, it was behaviour such as this that Hugh so despised in *Coonardoo*, and that is what sets him apart from other men in the novel. Or does it? Instead of imagining the Aboriginal woman Coonardoo as an exotic site to be controlled, we are led to believe that he actually does care for her. Despite not publicly acknowledging their son, he is portrayed by Pritchard as a 'decent man'; more decent than the average Australian stockman of the time (Modjeska, 1990, p. 3). His love for Coonardoo

seems sincere, as is hers for him, but alas, it could never be acknowledged, other than with 'secrecy and shame' (p. 2).

Coonardoo therefore 'ends without a solution', because Hugh, whose 'repressions have rotted in him' refuses to express the ardent nature of his personality. Whilst Coonardoo personifies his love interest, she also interferes with his identity as 'a good ordinary ... man'. Out of loyalty to himself and his late mother, who embodied 'polite' society, it is Hugh's promise that there would be 'no stud gins for mine — no matter what happens', that leads him to deny his longing to live with Coonardoo. In a sense, it is this internal battle between desire for black Coonardoo and blind obedience to white 'civilised' society that both fascinated and repelled readers at the time. According to the author herself, though, 'the motive of the book was to draw attention to the abuse of Aboriginal women by white men — a subject that demanded immediate attention' (Bird, 2001). However, the suggestion put forward in *Coonardoo* that it is better to disavow the desire for Aboriginal women and acknowledge the integrity of one's racial code, even at the price of sacrificing love, is a mixed message. Whilst Coonardoo herself is presented in an endearing and nuanced way not witnessed before in Australian writing, the novel still reinforced racial divisions within society and the inappropriateness of interracial love between Aboriginal women and white men. In rejecting the potential for intimate love to flourish between Coonardoo and Hugh, it presented an acceptable societal paradigm, which very much ridiculed intimate interracial relationships at the time, as stated in the novel itself: 'Cripes ... A man doesn't love a gin, not a white man' (p. 223).

At a time when taboos against forging intimate relationships existed, *Coonardoo* dared to break the mould. Whereas White Australia maintained that interracial relationships were 'shameful' (McGrath, 2002, p. 91), *Coonardoo* outraged audiences with its acts of 'sordid' miscegenation. In exploring the attitudes of white men towards Aboriginal women, *Coonardoo*, like Xavier Herbert's later novel, *Capricornia* (1938), reflected deeper anxieties about racial mixing, thereby unsettling the white population of Australia. Just as Hugh was unsettled by his own desire for Coonardoo, he was also unsettled by the antagonistic dictates of his own society, which believed that only debased men engaged in 'improper activities'. Such thinking therefore presented those white men who did care for their Aboriginal partner with a difficult dilemma to resolve. Hannah Roberts (2001)

unpacks this discord in her study on interracial sex and the discourse of miscegenation during the late 19th and early 20th century: 'To admit that white men desired Aboriginal women or relied on them awoke fears that in carnally knowing the Other, their own 'civilised' selves would be lost' (p. 76). Roberts further declares that:

When white men did acknowledge Aboriginal women in the context of family, or permanent relationships, various social and legal difficulties tended to arise. Any such acknowledgement was constructed as 'going native' – and men were stigmatised with names such as 'combo'. This was the ever present danger of consorting with black women. (p. 77)

Other terms used for white men who engaged in prolonged sexual intimacy with Aboriginal women were 'gin-rooter' and 'gin-jockey'. Although these particular terms were not employed by Pritchard in her novel *Coonardoo*, they were nevertheless the rhetoric of the day, manufactured to instill a 'sense of shame' upon those white men in relationships with black women. As Ann McGrath (1987) highlights in *Born in the Cattle*:

The white man could sometimes enjoy a white prostitute or a casual liaison without disgrace, but the man who 'indiscreetly' associated with Aboriginal women had 'fallen', and was labelled a 'gin-jockey'. The man who made a habit of this or admitted to an attachment to black women was a social degenerate — one of the ostracised 'combo' class. (p. 70)

In some ways, it was virtually impossible for Hugh to admit his love for Coonardoo, as perceptions of the time were burdened by prejudice and a racial ideology that professed the alleged innate superiority of whites and the inferiority of blacks. Therefore, Australians had no time for relationships based on equality (Ellinghaus, 2006, p. 166). Consequently, white men who formed relationships with Aboriginal women were judged as outsiders and referred to as 'scum' who 'had sunk' (Probyn-Rapsey, 2009, p. 96).

Except when they committed the crime of 'going native' and falling in love with a black 'gin', white men, on the frontier, could escape relatively unscathed from engaging in sexual relationships across racial lines (Ellinghaus, 2006, p. xii). As the ruling elite, white men held power and benefited from their dominant status. In contrast, white women who dared to challenge the status quo and married or developed a loving relationship with black men were 'at the bottom of the scale, the extreme to which other interracial marriages were measured' (Ellinghaus, 2006, p. 149). According to Ellinghaus (2006),

the reason why such a notorious double standard existed on the frontiers of Australia and in the United States was because interracial sex was the prerogative of the white man, a symbol of his authority and power. Whilst white men were entitled to indulge their desires 'willy-nilly', white women were held to extremely rigid standards of propriety (Tonkinson, 1988, p. 34).

Representing symbols of both Western civilisation and white male property, white women were expected to 'reproduce' white children (Ellinghaus, 2006, p. xii; Probyn-Rapsey, 2008; Spencer, 2009). As the vessels through which a White Australia would continue, they were also expected to keep the Nation pure and not contaminate it with 'coffee coloured brats' (Broome, 1982, p. 93). For a white woman to marry an Aboriginal man, she would be required to commit the moral sin of crossing racial boundaries and stepping beyond acceptable societal norms for all that was virtuous, sacred and ladylike (Tonkinson, 1988, p.33). For a white woman to 'willingly' surrender her body to an Aboriginal man was 'akin to being conquered by the "other" race' (Jensz, 2010, p. 37). In freely engaging in a loving and emotional relationship with an 'Aborigine', white women not only transgressed the racial code, but they also violated the status of white men, rendering them 'impotent' (Haskins and Maynard, 2005, p. 198). White men therefore stereotyped white women as delicate and vulnerable victims, requiring their 'protection' (Spencer, 2004, p. 63). Integral to the agenda of protection and salvation of their women was the construction of black men as physically and mentally inferior as well as sexually and socially inept (Haskins and Maynard, 2005, p. 206). As in the United States, relations between a black man and a white female were considered an affront to the white man's power and therefore condemned as immoral and inconceivable (Ellinghaus, 2006). Unless emphatically denied by their white partner, they were also categorically classified as 'rape' (Reed, 2002; Ellinghaus, 2006b; Haskins and Maynard, 2005).

Interestingly, one of the earliest reported cases of a white woman's denial of 'rape' dates back to 1861 in Victoria. At the time, a renewed humanitarian attitude towards 'Aborigines' resolved to establish reserves to isolate and 'protect' them from the 'vices' of unprincipled white men (Reed, 2002, p. 9). In doing so, colonial authorities not only denied 'the possibility of agency' on the part of 'Aborigines', but as Reed reveals through her research into the life of a teenage girl 'in love' with an Aboriginal man, during this period,

white women were also treated differently (Reed, 2002, p. 9). Although public rhetoric at the time demonstrated concerns for Aboriginal women, Reed stresses that white women also came under scrutiny and were denied agency as well. Such was the disturbing case of Selina Johnson, a 'White girl', reported to the authorities as 'Gone off with the Blacks'. Selina, the daughter of a local settler, is 19 years of age when she declares her love for Davy, an Aboriginal labourer on her father's station. So in love with Davy is Selina that she secretly consents to marrying him. Upon discovering she is pregnant, Selina runs away from her family and is reported missing. Eventually she is found by local authorities and promptly returned to her father. Much to the irritation of 'The Central Board Appointed to Watch Over the Interests of Aborigines' and her father, no charge of rape could be brought against Davy on account of Selina's spirited protest that she consented to 'mutual frequent connection' for 'considerable time' (Reed, 2002, p. 10). After Selina gives birth to a 'remarkable healthy boy', it abruptly dies of 'Inflammation' just 15 days later and as Haskins and Maynard (2005) explains, neither Selina nor Davy attended the funeral (p. 197). Despite the child being initially documented as the first 'mixed race' birth in the colony, the name of the father is mysteriously erased on the child's birth and death records (p. 197). Dejectedly, Selina calls off her wedding to Davy, and acquiesces to her father's demand that she 'marry any white man who will have her' (p. 197). For good measure, the white man Selina marries is reported by Liz Reed (2002) as being 'promised' her father's station, the prize for marrying a 'tainted' girl, momentarily 'left holding' a black baby (Maynard and Haskings, 2005, p. 196; Ellinghouse, 2002, p. 57). Such a white husband, as explained by Reed (2002) 'would somehow erase the blackness from the baby' and hopefully 'reinscribe racial respectability' (p. 15).

To their wives' vexation, encounters with Aboriginal women did not violate the hierarchical or patriarchal order. Within this order, white men were at the top. Not only did they dominate 'Aborigines', who were considered inferior, but they also dominated their wives and daughters. By Victorian standards, white women were treated as economic, social and sexual possessions of white men (Tonkinson, 1988, p. 34). In *Golden Shadows on a White Land*, Kate Bagnall (2006) confirms that white women were also:

... Subjected to a set of ideological and physical boundaries which controlled their lives on a broad level by hegemonic conventions of morality and respectability, on

a personal level by husbands, fathers or other male family members. Within the boundaries of morality, respectability and domesticity ... [white women's] sexuality was closely scrutinised and controlled. (p. 5)

Within this grid of ideology, Katherine Ellinghaus (2006) also maintains that a white woman partnered with a black man undermined the gendered and racialised dominance of white men. In 'subverting the hierarchies of race and gender by which settler society operated', white women, in particular, were treated as 'oddities, as women who did not submit to or understand the social hierarchy of society' (p. xiii). As shown by Reed (2002), it appears that Selena Johnson was one of these women. Neither Selina, nor the Aboriginal man she loved, escaped unscathed by what happened; they both suffered in different ways. Selina suffered because she was tied to a society that demanded subservience and docility, a society which did not value the differing opinions and emotions of women. The fact that she betrayed the expectations placed upon her gender and class rendered her behaviour the subject of intense scrutiny and control; even her baby was 'hastily done away with' (Haskins and Maynard, 2005, p. 197). Whilst Selina's behaviour was perceived as 'deviant', Davy is portrayed as 'passive', in spite of the fact that he too 'had challenged the racial code' (Reed, 2002, p. 12). However, because Selina strenuously insisted that their relationship had been consensual, colonial officials could not imprison Davy for rape. As a result of their defiant behaviour, both Selina and Davy were compelled to justify their actions to a hostile and intolerant public, which left them little choice but to submit to the roles created for them by a patriarchal state. For Selina, it was a life that proffered a profound contempt for the black race, hence a life without Davy.

As this backdrop clearly demonstrates, interlinking systems of patriarchy, class and race often drove whites to maintain their social, economic and political advantage by vilifying any person who violated the unspoken racial code. Interracial relationships, even marriages, were therefore interpreted as an immoral venture that threatened the integrity of the White Nation and the Australian race. Ironically, the law preserved white privilege by regulating intimate relationships between blacks and whites (Ellinghaus, 2006). As a result, sex, sexuality and interracial intimacy were used as a weapon to keep not only the lives of Aboriginal people under submission, but also the lives of those unfortunate whites who dared to 'cross the colour line' (Reddy, 1994). Selina was duly stripped of her white

privilege for having a child to an Aboriginal man. Whilst illicit sex was tolerated and even encouraged in the bush, marriage across class boundaries, according to Tonkinson (1988), was considered 'outrageous' (p. 31). This outrage led to Selina's father's forced decision to offer the family station to any white man who would reinscribe some sort of respectability by agreeing to marry his daughter. In sum, Aboriginal people were represented as unfit partners for romantic relationships with whites. Jensz (2010) further explores this issue:

Indigenous men were not seen as being suitable marriage candidates for white women, and Indigenous women were not seen to be strong enough in moral character to resist the influences of European men within broader colonial society. (p. 40)

Whilst black women 'had their place in the scheme of things', it appears they were positioned as sexually 'easy' and thus experienced the brunt of male brutality (Tonkinson, 1988, p. 30). In fact, it is now well documented by scholars like Evans (1982), Harris (2003) and Huggins (1998) that ruthless and unrelenting cruelty was systematically meted out to Aboriginal women in the outback.

Though the level of physical and institutional violence is an important part of the dominant frontier narrative, this narrative has recently come under fire from Gillian Cowlishaw. In *Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas*, Cowlishaw (1999) contends that in these narratives 'white men have been demonised and Aboriginal women rendered passive victims, and thus the possibility of loving relationships... has been denied' (p. 149). According to her research, the history of white men's involvement with Aboriginal women has been pathologised as 'abrupt, casual, often coerced unions', which does not necessarily take into account the 'inherent possibilities in human attraction' (p. 149). She further contends that this hackneyed image of white men denies the fact that 'some intimate relationships did manage to flower in frontier conditions' (p. 150). In a society where Aboriginal women were categorically dehumanised as 'damned whores', Cowlishaw (1999) proves that it was actually conceivable for the most intimate of feelings to flourish by relaying the story of two white men from Mainoru, Billy Farrar and Jimmy Gibbs, who defied an intolerant public and married their Aboriginal partners, 'even though their relationship did not depend on them doing so' (p. 150).

By drawing upon such uplifting stories of white men who courageously declared their love and devotion for their Aboriginal partners, Cowlshaw (1999) disrupts the dominant story of debauched sexual violence and calls for new ways of exploring interracial intimacy. By directing us 'not to essentialise black-white frontier relations with a meta-narrative', Aboriginal scholar Larissa Behrendt (2010, p. 354) also encourages new ways of thinking about old paradigms. In doing so, she challenges us to rethink how Aboriginal women have been misconstrued within old stories of colonial conquest and to consider the 'other' side of frontier sexual engagement. In her article *Consent in a (Neo)Colonial Society: Aboriginal Women as Sexual and Legal 'Other'*, Behrendt (2000) argues that whilst Aboriginal women did suffer continual sexual violence, to imply that this violence was always 'forced' is to reproduce stereotypical views that Aboriginal women were passive victims who had no control or '... agency with which to consent to sexual relations' (p. 355). The fact that consenting sexual transactions did occur with 'the boss' shows that Aboriginal women were more than capable of enacting female agency and making their own decisions (Behrendt, 2000, p. 355). Negotiating sex with 'the boss', if not 'the captain', offered Aboriginal women favours in the form of protection, and, as explained by Behrendt (2000), 'economic security for themselves and their family' (p. 355). To 'capture' a captain, a term Kevin Gilbert (1977) defined in *Living Black* as 'the reserves people's name for a white man who visits them to trade money for grog or sex' implies a sense of cunning resourcefulness which rebuts the myth of passive submissiveness (p. 302). Therefore, in the face of limited opportunities, Behrendt (2010) shows that some Aboriginal women strategically engaged in interracial sexual relationships with white men on the frontier. In doing so, they demonstrated resiliency coupled with a decisive adaptability and versatility, which in effect sometimes created tension between their kin husbands and white 'captains', especially those white men married to white women who were not too thrilled about sharing their husbands (Riddett, 1993).

In *Modern Stone-Age Slavery*, Ann McGrath (1995), like Cowlshaw (2004; 1999) and Behrendt (2010), also explores the multitude of ways in which whites and blacks were constructed on the frontier. However, it is the way in which she explores representations of both black and white men that is the most intriguing. Whereas Aboriginal men were

commonly represented as 'bludgers' who treated their kin wives poorly, white men remained the 'good guys' who were hailed as the 'heroic rescuers' of Aboriginal women, a status which:

... heightened their own sense of masculinity and asserted superiority over the 'primitive' not because of his physical strength, but according to the value of their ideal of 'gentle' treatment of women. There was no need to prove that the lower classes were rougher than 'gentlemen'; that was part of hegemonic ideology, implicit in the very language of class. (p. 37)

As pointed out by Behrendt (2010), 'misunderstanding, bitterness and conflict' was a constant feature of frontier relations (p. 354). Whilst there were many reasons for this conflict, it appears that sexual competition over black women was high on the list. In this battle between white and black men, competing discourses were consciously or unconsciously contrived to despoil the 'Other' (McGrath, 1995). In constructing Aboriginal men as 'undeserving' of their women, this entitled white man to degrade them as 'lazy, incompetent, dirty, [and] untruthful' (McGrath, 1995, p. 44). This notion of 'laziness' reflected upon their construction as 'poor workers' who 'loaned' their women for favours. Therefore, because they did not know 'how to treat a lady', white men thought they knew better (p. 46). Aboriginal spokesperson Vincent Lingiari, who represented his people in the 1970s Wave Hill strike, provides an opposing view.

Whilst 'censored' at the time, one of the key reasons for the walk-off was due to the double standards of white men who had an 'unfair sexual monopolisation of Aboriginal women' (McGrath, 1995, p. 45). According to Lingiari, Aboriginal men were deeply concerned at the practice whereby they were 'required to stay out in the bush, whilst the white ringers came back every Friday night' (p. 45). In the words of Lingiari himself:

Some them white fellas play bloody hell with black gin women, leave Aborigine natives out in bush for that. When Aborigine stockmen come back they have to pack up and go away again. That not right. (McGrath, 1995, p. 45)

From this description, it seems that Aboriginal men did care for their 'black gin women'. In fact, when the strike camp was 'raided' by Vestey's white station workers 'with

grog and guns, looking for [Aboriginal] women', Lingiari 'feared this would break the strike', that the young Aboriginal men would retaliate 'in order to get the women away from the white men' (p. 45). So, as this example provided by McGrath (1995) highlights, sexual disputes *were* considered important to Aboriginal men. The strike, which became pivotal to land rights in Australia, was not just about wages but also the demeaning treatment of Aboriginal workers, especially women (pp. 44-45). However, another underlining motive was that Aboriginal men were 'demanding the right of access to white women' (p. 44). As McGrath (1995) elaborates, 'this was largely kept quiet... because the public was not ready for it at the time' (p. 44). Therefore, contrary to the hegemonic narrative of white men as 'heroic rescuers', this event, as narrated by McGrath (1995), flips the conventional his-story of white men as 'the good guys' and provides strong imagery of them as gin-stealing, 'gun-toting' 'rednecks' (pp. 38, 48). 'Rednecks' is another word for Australian pastoralists who have 'apparent yet partial control of land, resources and blackfellas' (Cowlshaw, 1999, p. xiii). In this case, the 'blackfellas' walked off the station and staged a seven-year strike. In doing so, they showed tenacity, acumen and agency. In allowing Vincent to express his 'lament' for those women who were taken 'so white fella play hell with them', McGrath (1995) challenges the long-standing image of Aboriginal men as 'incompetent', 'parasitic', 'pimps' who 'lent out their wives to white men for a suck from a brandy bottle' (pp.37 & 47; Behrendt, 2000, p. 356). By interweaving Vincent's version of events with the story of the Wave Hill strike, McGrath gives 'voice' to those black men previously silenced and allows us insights into an alternative view of frontier relations.

Whilst Behrendt's (2000) and Cowlshaw's (1999) warnings about the dangers of making generalisations in relation to interracial sex on the frontier is particularly pertinent in these ever-changing times, McGrath (1995) adds to the discourse by providing examples of some of the 'uncomfortable silences' surrounding these generalisations (p. 48). In discussing aspects of class and gender struggles in relation to the Wave Hill strike, she encourages reflections upon the changing dynamics of colonialism, especially from the perspective of Aboriginal men who refused to conform to agendas of white patriarchal control. However, whilst it is important that scholars representing a myriad of perspectives

are challenging stereotypes and trying to develop new ways of interpreting the interracial landscape, the reality is that some of these antiquated stereotypes still linger.

A Contemporary Paradox: 'I'm white in the skin and black in the heart'

In the last decade, postcolonial scholars have alerted us to some of the contradictions and complexities of interracial intimacy in frontier narratives, where the historical context is based on a set of assumptions and societal myths regarding the predatory nature of white men and the passive compliancy of Aboriginal peoples. These narratives, as shown by Larissa Behrendt (2000), Gillian Cowlishaw (1999) and Ann McGrath (1995), were partial accounts that told only half the story. Essentially, interracial intimacy on the frontier occurred in many guises, including rape, economical sex, adulterous sex, casual sex and long-term marital or de-facto sex. Regardless of whether they were fleeting or lasting, such 'liaisons' created misunderstandings and conflict in the form of rivalry between the races, especially for Aboriginal men who began thinking about white women differently. As McGrath (2002) states, 'While there is no evidence that Aboriginal men preferred white women, some saw the right to unite with a white women as signifying an important means of redressing colonial inequalities' (p. 94). Because of the social 'stain' attached to such unions, most relationships occurred outside of marriage; unions between Aboriginal men and white women were considered unspeakably scandalous. For example, Wendy Holland's great-great grandmother, who married an Aboriginal man in the early 1930s, was labelled a 'race traitor' and promptly 'disowned' by many of her white family. Yet she persisted in her relationship even though she, along with her husband, were relegated to 'outsiders' (Holland, 1999 p. 3). Therefore, whilst ample research exists on *how* couples were perceived and treated in terms of their interracial 'transgressions', little is known about how interracial couples themselves defended their choices and navigated the often prejudiced terrain upon which they ventured.

Although there is a body of research that deals with the history of miscegenation, including the existence of mixed-race progeny in various contexts throughout Australia, less is known about what couples' lives were like once they acknowledged a committed relationship, whether through marriage or some other arrangement. Additionally, most

research on intimate black-white interracial relationships in the Australian context has primarily been placed in the context of race relations — of white reactions to these threatening incursions and the development of laws to regulate them (Chesterman and Galligan, 1997; McGrath 2005; Ellinghaus, 2006). Gillian Cowlshaw has authored two of the more important recent works specific to this research area: *Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas* (1999), as previously discussed, and *Blackfellas, Whitefellas, and the Hidden Injuries of Race* (2004). Both of these studies deal with the intertwining of black and white relationships in different times and in different places. Whilst *Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas* (1999) foregrounds the relationship between the Rembarrnga people and the pastoralists of Mainoru and Gulperan Stations in the Northern Territory, *Blackfellas, Whitefellas* follows the ‘riot’ that took place in Bourke, a northwest New South Wales town in December 1997, when Aboriginal people clashed with police. By examining the ‘hidden injuries’ of race relations in Bourke, Cowlshaw discusses sensitive issues of race, identity and the local politics of racialised violence. In doing so, she ‘brings indigenous Australians into the contemporary global race relations — a discourse largely dominated to date by discussions of African Americans and American Indians in the United States’. The great virtue of Cowlshaw’s work, according to fellow anthropologist Rosita Henry (as cited by Wiley, n.d.), is the ‘way in which she articulates her discussion with the voices of Indigenous people’. Whilst this book does transport the Indigenous voice from local to global prominence, it also makes accessible the voices of those non-Indigenous partners who chose to love across ‘the boundaries’.

Under the chapter entitled *Boundaries*, Cowlshaw (2004) provides startling insights into contemporary understandings of interracial intimacy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. What Cowlshaw reveals is that many of the stereotypical discourses that were forged in the furnace of colonialism still linger in Bourke. Despite people coming together for reasons of love and security, Cowlshaw provides testimonies that highlight entrenched contempt towards such unions. In drawing upon firsthand accounts of two white men who experienced estrangement from family and friends, Cowlshaw (2004) provides evidence of racially fractured families who choose to disown their child rather than embrace or respect his decision to form a relationship with an Aboriginal woman. Rick, one of Cowlshaw’s interview subjects, explains that ‘Years ago I had white

friends. Growing up I would have, but now I've got more black friends than white friends ... and that's a fact ... I don't talk to me family' (p. 118). He further goes on to say:

I had white mates, but them fellas used to stay home. I don't know, I just had a different life to them. I've been called 'gin-rooter' and all that over the years. That's only a name, fuck it. I don't know how they meant it, like it's a joke sometimes. People wouldn't make remarks now. I'd stand up you know, like [I'd say] 'Why run 'em down?' To be honest I'm white in the skin and black in the heart. (Cowlshaw, 2004, p. 120)

After his Aboriginal girlfriend fell pregnant and they had 'a young fella', Arnie received similar treatment. In vivid detail, Arnie relays his experience of working at the local meat works:

So I went out to the meat works to get work. In that environment, everyone has a go at each other, but if you can't handle it, well you quit. 'Cause I had all the stuff put on me about being a gin jockey and all that there, but that's all part of it I think. Even though [you] might be a bit upset, but if you retaliate then that's what people want. They try and look for some sort of reaction ... The meat works was a good initiation, goin' straight out there. It's not so much they're trying to harass you, what they're trying to do is get a response, and they tease, and have a go at you. A lot of it's a big joke to them. (Cowlshaw, 2004, p. 119)

By providing examples of how white men in Bourke are subjected to social 'sledding' and 'slinging off' by their good Aussie 'mates', Cowlshaw (2004) reveals the ominous ways in which racial loyalties are tried and tested between whitefellas and blackfellas (p. 120). By including rich ethnographic descriptions of long-standing racial tensions that continue to divide the community, Cowlshaw (2004) delivers distinguished research that is otherwise scant in Australia.

Turning Blackfellas into Whitefellas

Whilst research exists on Aboriginal women and Chinese men along the Kimberley coast and/or white women and Chinese men and their children in Southern Australia, contem-

porary studies exclusively based on couples designated as Aboriginal and white Australian are rare (Yu, 1999; Bagnall, 2006). Although Luke and Luke (1999) investigated interracial marriage in Darwin and Brisbane and found that class mediated the ethnic identity of the marital partners, their focus was primarily on couples of white Caucasian and Indo-Asian descent. On the international scene, there is an abundance of research in the United States on the subject of interracial couplings between white women and African American and Indian American men. Specific to this research is the work of Moran (2001) and Romano (2003), who explore how racial intimacy has been affected by laws and customs in the United States. Other works include studies that focus on the views of the couples, their experiences and their relationships with family and community. Of course, works that are primarily based on the narratives of interracial couples are the most useful for this study. Therefore, the work of Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell (1995), which offers valuable insights into the intimate relationships between black men and white women in the United States, serves as the catalyst for a comparative analysis of the Australian equivalent. However, whilst the issue of interracial relationships between blacks and whites in America has been explored from many viewpoints, Erica Chito Childs (2005) asserts that this research has largely neglected the voices of African American women. As a result, a body of research on African American women's responses to the stereotypical view that they are 'angry and opposed to' such unions is also starting to develop (p. 544).

This international interest in representing those previously 'neglected' in dominant national discourses is reflected in the comparative nature of recent work by Kat Ellinghaus, who focuses on the ideological and political contexts of marriages between Indigenous men and white women in America and Australia. In her book-length study *Taking Assimilation to Heart*, Ellinghaus (2006) suggests that the policies of assimilation endorsed by America and those encouraged by the Australian colonies differed greatly. In America, the emphasis on altering lifestyles offered social mobility through 'cultural assimilation', which enabled couples to attain middle-class standards. Whereas native men who married white women were often educated in America, this was not the case for Aboriginal men in Australia (p. xxx-xxxi). In fact, the absence of educated Aboriginal men in Australia is central to the argument put forth that, under the banner of a White Australia,

'biological absorption' was more about turning blackfellas into whitefellas through interracial marriage. Therefore, 'biological absorption' in the Australian context was not 'aimed at educating Aborigines' (p. xxvi), but rather engineering the demise of the Aboriginal population through legislation.

So, whilst policymakers in each Australian state had their own prescriptive solution to Aboriginal education, Ellinghaus (2006) contends that such solutions were 'a slap dash affair that offered no opportunities for Aboriginal people as a stepping stone to higher status within settler society' (p. 108). Although white Australians engaged in the rhetoric of cultural assimilation, 'they provided few practical measures to help Aboriginal people to become self-supporting' (Ellinghaus, 2006, p. xxiv). When Aboriginal men did attempt to improve their social status, 'their efforts were often quickly thwarted' (Ellinghaus, 2006, p. 108). Not only were they denied economic independence, but their wives were not seen as 'raising their husband's status with their own higher standing' (p. 108). Therefore, as compared to America, biological absorption had a greater hold as the form of assimilation in Australia. Rationalised as the product of 'good intentions at the time', this 'hold' created 'impenetrable barriers of prejudice preventing intimacy between Aboriginal men and European women' (Reynolds in Ellinghaus, 2006, p. x). As a result, when intermarriage between an Aboriginal man and a white woman occurred, these relationships were highly stigmatised by white Australian society. Whilst this work by Ellinghaus (2006) demonstrates the value of a comparative approach to understanding what happened in America and Australia around the turn of the late 19th and early 20th century, it also shows how prominent ideas about race, class and gender tied together with sexuality determined 'who was' and 'who was not' acceptable as a marital or sexual partner (p. 190).

So, what's love got to do with it?

In this chapter, I have not tried to unearth a comprehensive, chronological history of sexual relations between the colonised and colonisers, but rather provide a broad brushstroke narrative of the contorted and often conflicting ways in which these relationships have been managed by government officials, perceived by White Australia, and interpreted by postcolonial scholars. In telling these narratives, I have focused on the

interplay between patriarchy, race and class, which together fuelled the gender-based negotiations and struggles of colonial agendas. Embracing Ellinghaus' call for new research to explore 'the human story' of how people negotiated their lives, I interspersed the narrative with fictional and non-fictional stories about the personal histories of interracial couples who were caught in the mesh of colonial laws and social mores that had a chillingly widespread impact on their lives. These narratives therefore provide a panoramic view of the overarching social and racial attitudes of the time. For example, the story of Selina and Davy set in 1860s Victoria, is not merely the personal story of two people who loved across the lines; it is a story of the patriarchal state condemning such unions. In dismissing Davy from Selina's life, this story is connected to an even wider history that dismissed Aboriginal people as 'Stone-Age' people who were 'uncivilised' and therefore 'unfit' for romantic relationships with non-Aboriginal people (McGrath, 1995, p.30). When Selina and Davy had hoped to symbolise their love through marriage and thus legitimise their pending offspring, the patriarchal state stepped in and opposed the union on the mistaken belief that physical and cultural differences between races made them unsuitable for each other. Because Davy was black and Selina was white, this union posed a threat to the dominant white hegemony, which therefore demanded the micromanagement of their gender and sexuality. Whilst Davy was banished from Selina's life and heart, Selina was made to suffer the consequences of a white girl who gave birth to a black child. Her betrayal of racial loyalties was deemed socially unacceptable and her behaviour judged as 'fallen' (p. 47).

In comparison to white women, Aboriginal women were constructed as 'impure', 'exotic' and 'cheap' and never considered equal to the 'purity' of white women (Reed, 2002; McGrath, 1995; Tonkinson, 1988; Behrendt, 2000): hence the fictional story of *Coonardoo*. The title character Coonardoo is a black woman in love with a white man. Sadly, though, whilst Hugh Watts seems to reciprocate this love, he outwardly fails to return it. His incapacity to return the affections of Coonardoo is attributed to his high-mindedness, which drew from the (1930s) belief that casual sex was fine between the races, but love and emotional attachment were not (Modjeska, 1990; Miley, 2006). Though Hugh appears to understand and embrace the ways of his Aboriginal indentured labourers, the reality is he does not psychologically recognise them as fully human.

Hugh's inability to treat Coonardoo in the same way he treats his white wife, Molly, serves to reinforce perceptions of Aboriginal peoples as 'Other'. On the basis of this discriminatory categorisation, Aboriginal people were viewed as a threat to the wholesomeness of white civilisation. To Hugh, his Aboriginal workers were biologically inferior to, and different from, white British stock. To keep the white race uncontaminated, Aboriginal people needed to be segregated, hence his decision to 'segregate' his inner feelings for Coonardoo. Determined to protect his white racial heritage and middle-class morality, Hugh denies the very connection that could be his redemption.

In a literary sense, this novel is not a romantic story of star-crossed lovers, but rather a dark and dismal tale about the indecency of self-serving paternalism, heavily veiled under the guise of forbidden desire. In rejecting Coonardoo, Hugh rejects his chance for happiness and contributes to the tragic decline of a once-proud Aboriginal woman. He loses Wyaliba, his land, and Coonardoo forever. In the broader social context, this novel uncovers the unspoken legacies of sexual contact at the edge of the Australian frontier. It highlights white society's obsession with racial purity and dislike of difference. In doing so, it explores the complex interplay of hierarchies that are both gendered and raced and interlinked with Victorian morality, recognises heterosexual marriage and monogamy as the only 'natural' form of intimacy; not miscegenation in the form of interracial transgressions that produced a growing coloured population and became a growing concern. Denounced as degenerate 'mongrels', these children of 'unnatural' desires threatened the social order and bore the brunt of its contempt. Hugh Watts bowed to this social order, choosing to hide his paternity from Winni, his mixed-race child to Coonardoo.

Whilst these stories demonstrate how relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal became caught up in the larger colonial project of the late 19th and early 20th century Australia, they also reveal how ideas of respectability, morality and sexuality were linked to those of racial difference and, in particular, concerns about the degradation and contamination of white civilisation. During this time, dominant ideas of Imperialism, the science of Social Darwinism and Victorian ideals about how sexuality should manifest and be expressed all served to validate white male domination and legitimise policies and

practices of racial inequality and oppression (Broome, 1982; Cowlshaw, 2004; Ellinghaus, 2006). These practices dehumanised Aboriginal peoples as inferior and denied them the basic political, social and economic rights of citizenship (Chesterman and Galligan, 1997). Aboriginal people have subsequently endured mass incarceration, banishment to missions and the forced removal of their children, all sanctioned through official government policies. From the late nineteenth century until the 1970s, children of 'lighter skin' were removed from their Aboriginal families and communities and institutionalised as part of a racist system of intervention that was sanctioned and supported by state legislation. As part of the language of assimilation, these children were expected to 'absorb' or be 'merged' by eventually marrying white Australians. Whilst some states opposed miscegenation through 'biological absorption', others saw it as a means 'through which the demise of the Aboriginal population could be imagined' (Ellinghaus, 2003, p.186). Therefore, interracial relationships were regarded as 'problematic' because they 'symbolised the mixing of irreconcilable dichotomies: civilised versus uncivilised, Christian versus heathen' (Van Kirk, 2002, p. 1).

Yet, not all white Australians subscribed to these ideals. Cowlshaw (2004; 1999) demonstrated that some frontiersmen embraced a more culturally determined view of racial difference. In the intertwining of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal lives in Mainoru and Bourke, Cowlshaw shows how the choice of a partner from the 'other camp' challenged taken-for-granted assumptions. For example, the stories of Billy Farrar and Jimmy Gibbs, white men who married Aboriginal women, demonstrated a courageous heaving-off of history's chains. Even in the absence of equality, even under the strain of waiting several years for permission in writing from the Director of Native Affairs, these couples loved against the law and eventually won (Cowlshaw, 1999). They, like the white men from Bourke who also formed permanent and lasting relationships with black women, stand as a testimony to the unflinching influence of love. In the face of extreme opposition, Rick and Arnie braved prejudice and scorn and followed their hearts. In defying deeply entrenched notions of race and racial inequality, they flouted the invidious social order of assumed white ascendancy in Bourke through forming partnerships with Aboriginal women, demonstrating equality and respect. They challenged the code that claimed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cannot share any commonalities or connections, proving the

inherent cruelty of such codes (Cowlshaw, 2004). They also proved that loving across racial boundaries is no longer a crime against the nation, but a simple human right.

My goal with this chapter has been to reveal something of the 'human story' about relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. By approaching this chapter from a variety of perspectives and through a range of historical, ethnographic, autobiographic and literary sources, I have demonstrated that there was no single experience or interpretation of intimate relationships on the frontier. Through the personal stories of my subjects, I have also provided glimpses into the Indigenous experience of encounter and opened up this period of history to the varying levels of subjugation enforced upon white women, as well as the complicated and 'contorted' nature of relationships that prospered in resource economies (McGrath, 1995; Behrendt, 2000). Although the meta-narrative is dominated by stark images of violent and surreptitious sex where power and abuse are center-stage, this narrative only tells a small part of the story. Whilst the voices of Aboriginal women reveal much about the sexual exploitation imposed by white colonisers and contribute to the discourse, they do not completely reflect what Haskins and Maynard (2003) have referred to as the 'heart of things' on the frontier (p. 216). The frontier as documented in this chapter was cruel, antagonistic, pathologic, harsh and hostile, but in a few cases it was also rich, reciprocal, intimate, alive, enduring and hopeful.

CHAPTER 3

LETTING NARRATIVES SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES...

In this chapter the single and combined voices of four out of six interracial couples interviewed are presented with a view to letting their narratives speak for themselves. If narratives are the stories that people tell others in order to make sense of their lives, then as Aguirre (2000) comments they do not exist as singular accounts but rather as 'social events that instruct us about social processes, social structures and social situations' (p. 320). Narrative from this perspective is important because it allows us insights into how interracial couples choose to shape their stories in terms of what aspects they want to accentuate or downplay (Custer et al, 2008, p. 455). By presenting rich descriptions of the dominant aspects that best shape their particular story, I include the following four narratives for their ability to draw out differing themes reflective of their differing social situations. More significantly, these narratives are included because they resonated with me long after the interviews finished. Though all six couples provided responses to their particular set of circumstances, some couples had a flair for storytelling; for conveying detailed responses about themselves, their experiences and the social processes and structures that impact their interracial relationship more than others. With their carefully nuanced candour and ability to laugh in the face of disapproval, these stories were finally chosen because of their capacity to stir our imagination with their unique insights not only into the complexity of contemporary interracial relationships but also contemporary race relations.

Introducing the Couples

In what follows, I present self-authored narratives of the selected couples, providing insights into their backgrounds, characters and relationships. In doing so, I pay particular attention to the manner and style in which these couples work together to create their story and then I discuss the major findings that emerged from these interracial pairings in the final chapter. I also changed the names and place names mentioned by the couples in order to respect and protect their privacy. The first couple presented is Paul and Kat. Paul and Kat have been married for over 30 years. They met in Queensland in the early

seventies when exclusionist legislation was enforced by the most conservative and controversial government in Australia at the time.

Kat and Paul

Paul, a 50-year-old white 'Australian', was born in England and migrated to Australia in 1957, at the age of two. A self-confessed 'rat bag' kid, Paul grew up in a single-parent home with his mother and two brothers. He has a round face, a receding hairline and the exceptional ability to immediately put you at ease. With his polite mannerisms and warm and infectious personality, Paul radiated a gregarious energy that reminded me of a particular stereotype. After cordially enquiring as to whether I would like some refreshments, Paul sat next to his wife on the sofa and affectionately placed his hand over hers. The manner in which he did this reminded me of those charming southern gentlemen-type characters from a Tennessee Williams play; and Kat was his southern belle. Whilst the house was not lavishly decorated with garish furniture as is often the setting for such characters, it was impeccably presented. From the moment I walked into the modest lounge room, with its gleaming wooden cabinets cluttered with family photos, I felt instantly welcomed and extremely eager to commence the interview.

As a couple, Paul and Kat are visually striking. With her winsome smile, wispy shoulder-length hair and dark-russet complexion, Kat looks a lot younger than her 50 years. Only on the occasional angle, when she adoringly glances at her husband, do you see the tiny creases around her intense brown eyes and immediately hope that you, too, will age just as gracefully. Like her husband, Kat is also friendly and very welcoming. Unlike her husband, who grew up in southern Australia, Kat grew up in the rural north and proudly identifies as Aboriginal. Her family network extends beyond her mother and father and three siblings to incorporate uncles and aunts and their many children; a strong network that comprises of up to 50 people and, to Paul's dismay, who sometimes turn up on the doorstep 'unannounced'. Whilst Paul is in the Australian military, Kat works in administration at a local university. They have just celebrated 30-odd years of marriage and have two biological children. The eldest son is 25 and their daughter is 18.

The couple agreed to be interviewed after being approached by a mutual friend who thought they might be interested in sharing their stories. The couple undertook the interview in the privacy of their own home, individually at first, then as a couple. During all my encounters with Paul and Kat, both exuded confidence and seemed to genuinely enjoy reminiscing about their experiences as an interracial couple. Both were forthcoming with their stories, even though Kat sometimes deferred to Paul at different times throughout the couple interview. In fact, I noticed that whilst Kat revealed a lot more intimate details during the single interview, it was Paul who dominated the couple interviews with his sharp wit and long anecdotes laced with vivid memories of their courtship dance and subsequent romance. A born storyteller, Paul had the hypnotic ability to captivate me with his dramatic and engaging style. However, whilst many of these stories were peppered with humour, there was a certain clarity that delivered an otherwise sombre message.

As a child, Paul often found himself involved with various community organisations such as the Cubs, the Scouts and, later in life, St John's Ambulance, which all contributed to his decision to join the Army. Paul has been in the Army for over 30 years and it was his placement in a garrison city that led to him meeting his wife, Kat. Kat and Paul first met in 1973, when they were both 18, at a popular haunt on the nightclub strip in Townsville. At this time, Paul had just entered the Army and Kat was a cleaner at the local hospital. According to Paul, 'Kat gave me the cold shoulder and that's how we met'. Kat, however, tells another story. Apparently, Kat had 'spotted him' previously at the nightclub and 'sort of fell in love with him at first sight'. So strong was the attraction for Paul that Kat was not impressed upon her first introduction when Paul 'picked up' her cousin and not herself. However, despite the awkward set-up at the beginning of their relationship, Kat just knew that she 'was going to marry him' and all 'worked out in the end'. In fact, within eight weeks of their meeting, Paul moved in with Kat's Aboriginal family and, within the year, they were married. This revelation fascinated me. By their own admittance, this was a time when they were both publicly 'barred' from entering local pubs together. Yet, despite social disapproval, Paul decided to abandon the familiar and structured environment of the predominantly white Army base to move into working class suburbia and live 'bohemian' style with a mattress on the floor, not only with a lady who he just met, but also with *her* Aboriginal family as well. Considering Queensland was the last Australian

state to 'abandon exclusionist policies ... and legislate [for] multicultural policies in the early 1980s' (Luke and Luke, 1998, p. 736), this swift act of social defiance, called for extraordinary courage; something Paul did not lack.

In fact, numerous times throughout their relationship, Paul has made many decisions that have not conformed to the standards of the day, especially in relation to 'marrying outside' his class. When I asked both him and Kat what the reactions of their families were to their initial decision to move in with each other, they both relayed the following accounts. According to Kat, her family 'wasn't too concerned ... They just took to Paul, as far as I am aware, without hassles'. The only 'hassles' Kat knew about their union was the fact that a few of her kin-male cousins had a 'little talk' to Paul as 'I was the first girl in the family to become involved this way and they just wanted to make sure he knew the rules'. Looking towards Paul with a mischievous grin, she pronounced 'you know, you hurt me and you die'. I asked her why she thought her cousins did this, whether it was to protect her or not. Kat's response was 'Yes, they didn't say it to me but I've heard they probably said it to Paul'. Paul, however, chose not to respond to this in the couple interview, preferring instead to focus on his side of the family. Indeed, after Kat explained that her side of the family was very much 'on side' with their daughter's choice of spouse, she then announced that 'On Paul's side, it was a different thing altogether'.

Whilst both couples related the story of Paul's mother visiting them in Townsville independently and co-jointly, I have respectfully let Paul speak for himself. I have done this because 'narratives give insights into the more subjective reality of how individuals and couples make sense of their experiences in those relationships' (Custer et al, p. 454). As the following narrative attests, crossing the barriers of race, culture, religion and class can be both affirming and alienating; more specifically, it can empower your relationship with your mother or it can leave emotional scars so deep that it takes significant time to heal.

Sharon: Can I ask when you first met Kat and you were planning on getting married, what was the reaction of your family?

Paul: Uhhh, yeah, it wasn't an issue for me. It never was an issue. For everybody around me it seemed to be a huge bloody issue. But I phoned up my mother and said 'I'm engaged and we're going to be married' and she said 'Oh, that's good'. And I told her that she was Aboriginal and the phone hung up

... Twenty four hours later and there was a knock on the front door and there's my mother standing there. 'Hello', and scared the crap out of the Murphy family because she was there done up to the nines. She was an Avon manager and she had all the brooches on, all the diamond pins and the pearls and the full-blown body wig and, you know, the million-dollar suit and her teeth in!!! 'I'm drawing pictures of Mother', [he says to me with a mocking smile!] Well! You could have just watched their faces hit the floor. And my, Kat just raced, she ... went to the door and slammed the [front] door in my [Mother's] face and raced out of the room and slammed the bedroom door and I'm going 'What! That's my Mother'.

'Hi Mum, how are ya?' Paul says, as he calmly opens the door to let her in ...

'I've come to meet this girl', says Paul's mum.

I said 'Alright' and it started from there. Poor old Gwen nearly shit bricks! Gwen was Kat's mother. She was a short, round woman with a heart of gold. And she just stood there, eyes like saucers. Ray came home from work and Ray was a house builder so he had cement all over his boots and was covered in dust and grime and sweat. They had finished doing a slab that day so they'd had a few beers after work to celebrate the throwing down of the slab. And he rocks through the door, as he normally does, and takes his boots off and says 'I'm home'. He just saw [her] sitting there and – ahha, well!

So, that was their [Kat's parent's] first introduction to Mum. And she stayed for about a week. We all went out. She got to know the family. After the first 24 hours she decided to let down her guard and let them see the real Jocelyn, the one that I knew, and she was sitting at the table and they were all sitting around all terribly prim and proper and it was terribly hot and sticky and muggy and she said, 'Oh I can't stand this anymore', and she pulled her hair off because she had short hair like I've got, and put it down. And the faces around the table were just priceless! Then the teeth came out. And the pearls came off. She put on a comfortable house coat and it was like she had lived there all her life. Like she had been sitting in that chair for her entire life and the whole family, like you could see the tension level just go *shoink*, down to nothing! And everybody was alright. Everybody was happy. But before that it was, you know, like, [you're marrying] an Aboriginal, are you crazy???

'No Mum, I'm fine.' 'Alright,' [she said]. She didn't come to the wedding. I don't know why. Can't remember why she didn't come. Didn't faze me, didn't faze me at all. We got married like six months later so it was all good.

- Sharon: Uhm, yeah, just that whole explanation. 'You've come to marry an Aboriginal ...'
- Paul: Oh yeah, a good 24 hours later, there she is on the door step. That shocked me. My mother never moved that fast in her bloody life, you know ... I think she came up here with the thought that she was going to save me. When she saw what I've walked into, she knew she didn't have a hope in hell. No, she didn't. There was just, you know, by then I had been with the family about four months. I mean we were just over a year before we were married, from the time we met to the time we married. I mean... when I walked in there [into Kat's parents' house], it was with cheek. My first words to Gwen [Kat's mum] were 'Giddy Mum' and she just ... she really liked me straight off. Just wrapped me up in her arms, took me in and said 'Okay, you're *the* boy'. I don't know how she knew, but yeah, they [daughter and mother] must have spoken, but ... I moved in, literally that night! That's how quick it was. They [Kat's parents] moved out of the big bedroom into the little bedroom and me and Kat moved in and that's where we stayed. We threw a mattress on the floor. It was all terribly bohemian back then and it was just really good.

Whilst told humorously, this narrative has a serious undertone. Although the conspicuous absence of his mother on his wedding day did not 'faze' him, it seems that Paul's decision to marry an Aboriginal woman did affect previous understandings he held towards specific racial issues. Whilst he 'never saw' himself as 'marrying into an Aboriginal family' and admitted that it was one of the 'hardest things I had to come to terms with', Paul also confers that his relationship with his white military friends, 'who he used to go out and party with', changed considerably when they discovered an interracial marriage was pending. As Paul stated, '... Yeah, they found out I was going out with a black and that wasn't too bad, and [then] they found out I was marrying her and that was that'. When asked specifically, how they reacted, Paul quickly forewarned me that, 'Yeah, okay, this is not the so pretty side of it ... but, I was a nigger lover, a tree shaker, coon boy, black mamba prince'. After experiencing outright rejection through overt racism, which stripped him of his white public status and sexualised him as a 'black mamba prince', Paul found himself isolated and marginalised. This change in circumstances forced him to become cautious of those who he previously trusted. This distrust extended to those in authority over him at the military base.

According to Paul, in order for him to marry Kat, he had to seek the permission of the Australian military 'because I was marrying interracially'. In doing so, it was advised

by senior authorities that he 'get counselling as well'. Although he did get counselling, and eventually was permitted to marry Kat, it came at a cost. Just as Paul's mother tried to 'save' him from marrying someone beneath his social position and had 'no hope in hell', the military also tried to do the same. Through a conversation with 'the padre', Paul was brusquely asked if he was 'aware of what he was getting into'. He was also informed that if he continued to pursue his desire to marry an Aboriginal, that he would be duly ostracised as 'you will be penalised in the messes and you won't have a social life because nobody will mix with you'. Of course, Paul threw caution to the wind and declared, 'I don't care ... stop bothering me; I'm getting married'.

When one hears stories like this, one cannot help but understand the reasons why Kat fell in love with Paul. Despite the cautionary warnings, Paul stood firm in his devotion to Kat. Whilst this devotion required 'a lot of sorting out ... not only with my peers but with my bosses and seniors who tried to take advantage of a digger and thought they could get away with abusing Kat', it also taught Paul many valuable lessons. One such lesson was in relation to how he previously thought about racism. According to Yancey and Yancy (2007), 'Merely being married to someone of a different race places whites in a special position that can alter their racial perspectives'. Whilst Paul is white, he is also very candid about how he has become more conscious of issues pertaining to racism since marrying Kat. Reflecting upon his own behaviour, Paul declares that he is ashamed of some racially motivated rants that he once engaged in on the football field. As the following story attests, before meeting Kat, Paul's interaction with Aboriginal people was very limited. When he did encounter a 'fierce competitor' on the football field who just happened to be black, Paul confesses to deliberately provoking and antagonising him in the hope that he would retaliate:

The only black or Aboriginal I ever met, was a bloke by the name of Kep Rogers in South Australia. I used to play football with him ... I used to sledge him something chronic and I would, I would call him names that I am ashamed of now. And he would turn around and he would chase me across the football field and I would run away and he would always get penalised and I would get a free kick... he turned up at *my* school in grade seven and scared the living crap out of me. 'Holy shit, what are you doing here Rogers'?

'I'm coming to school here,' [Rogers declared].

'No you're bloody not!' So we played our last year together. We were never close because of what I had done previously. I really alienated him and I didn't understand why then.

Here we see that Paul has learnt to reflect upon and evaluate racial practices that he engaged in previously. The practice of 'sledging' Aboriginal people on the football field was once routine practice for Paul. But, since he found himself 'ostracised by my unit', Paul has experienced a shift in his thinking about the power, prevalence and effects of racism. This shift has not only developed within him a strong aversion for people who are 'bloody ignorant', but it has also transformed his thinking about 'who he allows in his house'. Instead of partying with military men, Paul now surrounds himself with a 'very, very selective few' whose racial ethics and moral values are more open and accepting of difference and diversity; rather than simply condemning it.

So, despite the fact that Paul's social life radically came to 'a screaming halt' when he married Kat, he seems more content with the boundaries he has created in order to 'protect' his wife from 'arseholes that he dealt with on a daily basis'. By his own admission, this protection has consumed a good part of his marriage because he 'didn't want her to experience any hardship'. In radically altering his social network, Paul has also altered his allegiance, shifting from a white mainstream majority mindset to a multiracial outlook that is more inclusive of his beautiful wife and her extended Aboriginal working class family.

However, as Paul concedes himself, this shift in thinking did not just happen overnight. Coming to terms with some of his wife's family traditions and their particular ways of doing things did require some adjusting to. In fact, when Paul was asked to comment on his interactions with the extended family, he likened it to undergoing an initiation rite; one which required learning a completely new set of values and traditions.

Sharon: You said that, when you first met, you were very protective of your family. Did you find it extremely difficult dealing with the extended family?

Paul: Initially it was overpowering. It was huge. In my first Murphy's family Christmas...I nearly died of bloody shock. Because my family Christmases [consisted of] my two brothers and mother and the third man, the third father, a sort of tree, breakfast, lunch and then we'd be off to see our mates. We

had a lot of social commitments that we had to do with church and that sort of stuff.

Comes my first Christmas [with Kat's family], she says, 'We're going to Ayr'.

This is the first [I've heard of it], 'All right, what's in Ayr?'

'So we're leaving on the 19th...'

'Why?', I say. 'So, I gets up there and the first thing I'm told is 'to go and buy a keg'. Not asked! Told! By Mr Murphy, Granddad, Father, 'Go and buy a keg!' So I go to the pub and come back with a keg and all the bits and pieces and he says 'Right, set that up over there', and the men all go over to set this up.

Kat: Yeah but before that you have got to ...

Paul: Oh yes I will get to that ... so the keg is set up, the glasses are out and the table is set up and I thought, well I brought a keg and then I see another keg arrive and another keg arrive and everybody that came brought a keg! And these kids! Hundreds of friggen kids, EVERYWHERE! And nobody in control of them! They were running in between your legs, up on the back of your head, having a great time. And everybody was laughing. I couldn't understand it. Somebody should have beat those kids to death. Show them some discipline because every now and then you would hear 'whack, stop it', and this kid would go out and play with another lot of kids and off he would go again.

'We're going to get the tree,' [says Kat]. 'Ah right!' So, I'm looking for all these bloody big pine trees ... There's not a pine tree to be seen for bloody miles.

'What are you looking for?' [I asked Kat].

'We're looking for a gum tree' [was the response].

We find a gum tree and chop that down and that was our Christmas tree. 'Oh, All right, Fine!' And then they put tinsel and crap all over the gum tree! It's a native tree – and it's just WEIRD!

Kat: And then we get to the presents.

Paul: Yeah it was like, 'Just bring your presents in' and, I joke you not, these [presents, were] ... at least half of this room, just laid out all around the tree stacked to about yeah high, as he indicates with his hand – presents all for kids and the odd ones for the adults. Everyone got a present but it was all for kids. And then the elder would come out on Christmas day, this is why you got to go down four days early because the kegs had been drunk. It was just drink, eat, party on and sleep and drink. Unless you were an elder,

it was drink, eat, drink, eat...they just didn't sleep. It was unbelievable! We crashed after about a day and a half unconscious, and they would still be in the same spot, drinking and talking and laughing. There'd be card games going on and there'd be football and cricket and the kids would be off in the cane fields.

Kat: Entertainment, Entertainment, Entertainment!

Paul: And that was just a culture shock to me.

Kat: And the attendance was probably about 50 people.

Paul: It never ended. If one lot left, another lot of family came. They'd just turn up. Nobody ever mentioned food. It was just understood that if you came you brought something and if it wasn't cooked you cooked it. And the men would cook. So the women could have time with the kids and natter and we'd cook and drink beer and have a go at the kids. If they got rowdy [you would] come back and cook some more. And I was introduced to this cooking business – 'we're going to cook spaghetti!' All of those Christmases were like that! Just 10 years of flat-out family.

Obviously the first 10 years of dealing with such a staunch Christmas regime with its different emphasis on setting up kegs, drinking, eating, sleeping and cooking spaghetti, did catch up with Paul. Although he enjoyed the 'bohemian' lifestyle initially, the differences in regards to conflicting cultural values did eventually chip away at his sense of propriety. When the tables turned, and Paul found himself hosting Kat's family for Christmas, the following confession was conveyed:

Paul: The family would come to our place and I would get bitter. 'You twits, stop touching my stuff!' It was my stuff because I had worked for it, I had paid for it, and it was, you know, our stuff. 'Get off the bed! Get out of our room and stop touching the stuff'. And they would sleep everywhere and eat the house out of house and home. I would come home from work looking forward to a beer and there's no beer in the fridge. It took a long time to get used to it and she would say 'Shut up and get used to it. Get used to it!'

Kat: I used to say to him, 'Well you joined the family!'

Paul: I joined the family; the family didn't join me ... And then it worked in reverse the first time we went down to Adelaide [to have Christmas with Mother].

Kat: Well, you saw the change as well, says Kat pointedly.

Sharon: How did that go Kat? Your introduction to ... [Christmas at Paul's instead of your family?].

Kat: It was weird. It was very sterile, you know. For me, I didn't see any love going down that way. I went to Sydney for the first Christmas. There was just no love. There was just this very prim and proper attitude. I don't remember having a big Christmas party at all. There was nothing there. It was like a normal day for them. Very strange!

With their 'prim and proper attitude' and predilection for attending church on Christmas day, it becomes clear that Paul's family startled Kat just as much as her family startled him. For a man whose values and traditions are deeply embedded in his upbringing, Paul has not always found it easy to accommodate Kat's demands for big Aboriginal gatherings as he finds them intrusive and disrespectful; especially when he comes home from work to discover there is no beer in the fridge. Similarly, Kat too has struggled to make compromises between her husband's cultural norms and those of her own. However, whilst Kat described her first Christmas with her mother-in-law as 'sterile and loveless', she, along with her husband, are acutely aware of each other's shortcomings, especially in relation to the personal changes and adjustments they need to make in order to ensure their 'family unit' stays strong.

One manner in which they do this, is through the use of humour. As Paul explains 'I can make her laugh. Even when she's really, really pissed off with me and [is] ready to throttle me, I can make her laugh'. However, whilst Paul can and does make Kat laugh his use of humour is also an interesting discursive device, which metaphorically deflects a lot of the intensity life has wrought.

Although Kat admits that Paul was the 'apple of my mother's eye from the very beginning', it did take some time before Ray, Kat's father, accepted him. Paul maintains it was because 'he was the father and she was the daughter'. However, eventually:

Paul: He [Kat's father] bowed to the inevitable when Gwen [Kat's mother] told him the marriage was going ahead and he bowed quite gracefully I suppose. Um, about six to twelve months, when I was still there and we were still together. Yeah, it would have been after we were married about six to twelve months. I mean he was friendly. He wasn't rude or obnoxious or anything. But he was distant for that – not distant – reserved would be a better term... Wasn't going to completely enfold me... After we had been married and moved out of the house and we were living in the married quarters for twelve months and we were still together, I think that was a big thing. He thought it was going to be a *whoosh* and then go. But it was never going to be that way, not once we were married. There were doubts before, but not after.

Like Paul's mother, Kat's father also had some preliminary misgivings. Given the history of white male sexual violence against black women in this country, this is not surprising. However, once Ray was satisfied that his daughter's relationship with her white

partner was durable, honourable and able to withstand the harsh criticisms that society dealt, he gave 'his blessings'. Something which meant a lot to Kat as she especially chose Paul because he 'is exactly like Dad. Dad's got the same sort of attitude; he's very funny [and] easy going and Paul is exactly the same'.

What particularly resonated with me in relation to meeting Paul and Kat was the fact that they married three decades ago, at a time when historical taboos against the social relations of 'race-mixing' lingered. As a result, crossing the colour line in the early 1970s in Queensland brought many challenges in their life. During this time, they not only had to contend with overt racism directed at them by an intolerant society, but they also had to contend with structural racism in many forms. In the individual interview with Kat, she relays a story about attending a 'mess function' with Paul at the military base.

Kat: I can remember a Mess function, it was a formal function, and the rule of a formal function is that you are not supposed to talk about race, religion or politics but at the end of the meal they tell jokes. This guy got up and told an Aboriginal joke. Everyone thought it was funny and Paul was sitting across from me and he said 'It's only one joke we can take one joke,' and the same guy told another Aboriginal joke and Paul said, 'Alright we are leaving'. So we got up and walked out. It was frowned upon. We got up and walked out and several of our friends had followed us ... but by walking it was showing [them] how disgusted [we were] with what was going on. But it showed us that we were running away from the issue. Some of our friends said 'Come back in and we'll get this sorted out', which I wouldn't of thought about doing ... and Paul was trying to protect me from those sorts of things. He didn't want anything to do with it but we went back in and the word was that he didn't realise that there was an Aboriginal person in the mess. He thought I was Indian or something else so it was alright to tell an Aboriginal joke.

Sharon: So let me butt in here, so you couldn't talk about religion, politics or race but you could talk about Aborigines?

Kat: I don't know where he got his thinking from, but if you know the rules of a formal function you just don't do it.

Sharon: It was interesting earlier when you mentioned the gentleman who said the racist joke thought you were Indian. Was that the first time when someone thought you were Indian? Why do you think they thought you were Indian as opposed to Aboriginal?

Kat: They probably just look at the skin, and thinking that no Aboriginal would go

to a Mess. Indians are more accepted. What was disappointing about the whole incident was that nothing was done. There was no formal apology to me regarding the incident. That was the most disappointing part.

The fact that Kat did not receive an apology speaks volumes in terms of the era in which it occurred. Though Kat did express her disappointment at being mistaken for an Indian instead of Aboriginal, it appears that this was not the only disappointment she encountered throughout her marriage to Paul. During the interview, it was evident that Kat was particularly concerned about her children. According to Kat, both she and Paul brought their kids up 'with the feeling that you treat each other as you would want to be treated, and [that] everyone is the same. You have to respect everyone'. So, when her eldest son found himself the victim of some racial 'attacks', simply for 'being black', this 'shocked' Kat to think that 'this sort of thing can still happen'.

Despite the emotional and social turmoil Kat and Paul encountered throughout their marriage, it appears that they have both learnt to live with this history on a daily basis and not become diminished by it. As confirmed by Paul: 'If you live in the past you will go nowhere'. Yet, when such prejudicial patterns are directed at their children, it hurts them deeply. As a result Paul and Kat have learnt to keenly perceive the attitudes of the world around them. Whilst Paul stresses that, 'You live in a white man's world, whether you like it or not', he also makes it quite clear that he is prepared to challenge the status quo because 'you have got to survive and that means you can walk uprightly and you don't take shit'. By choosing to challenge racism, in whatever form that comes, Paul is not afraid of asserting himself in a constructive manner.

And, this is why Kat loves Paul, because he is assertive. He does not conform to what others think is desirable for him but rather makes his own mind up. Hence, the reason why they remain a strong married couple today. Like Kat, he does not see difference as a deficit, but rather a strength that enriches and complements their relationship. Having open, continuing communication, sprinkled with a bit of humour, has allowed both Kat and Paul to question assumptions that may typically go unnoticed. Despite the assertion that he is 'always right', both Kat and Paul have learnt to compromise when prioritising issues affecting them. Whereas Paul refers to Kat as 'the glue that binds the family', who

'has taught me what family means', Kat sums up his allure as: 'Yeah, he's got a silver tongue this fellow. It's part of the attraction'.

When asked if they had any suggestions for other people who are just entering a relationship, the following advice was given:

Paul: Trust their feelings. Go with their feelings. The intellect is a great thing but the intellect can be skewed by other people.

Kat: If they love each other nothing else is going to matter. Even if harm comes to you via outside issues, then the love of each other will support you through anything.

Paul: When they're young, couples need to have mentors. And it's not necessarily people who have lasted a long time in marriage. That's not necessarily a good thing. It's got to be people who are fiery because it will show them that it's not all cuddles and niceness. There are raging arguments that happen and they need guidance through them, because ... they will surprise themselves with the feelings that come out that they didn't know they had. And if they haven't got somebody to talk it over with it can be really damaging and it can take a long time to heal, a long, long time.

Kat: Well, we haven't had any arguments that ...

Paul: 'That's because I'm always right,' he says perkily.

Kat: I just believe that love carries everything. If there wasn't that, it wouldn't last much longer.

Paul: By the time love wears off a true friendship develops.

Kat: But, I don't want to be your friend ...

Paul: Love is still there, it just changes from that fiery lust. I mean after 35 or 40 years, you change. But generally, go with their feelings. Trust themselves. Trust their instincts. And then when it all turns to shit and everybody around is getting cranky they can turn to each other and they know on blind faith that they can trust each other and that is strength.

Clearly, trust, love, humour and synchronising priorities, despite different upbringings and heritages, are ultimately what have strengthened this relationship over three fiery and faithful decades.

Like Kat and Paul, the next couples have drawn a great deal of strength from immersing themselves in their partner's culture. Such immersion has increased their sensitivity towards each other and enhanced their appreciation of each other's experience and worldview. Despite their cultural and gender differences, Nate and Darlene decided that in order to maintain a solid partnership they each had to look internally and question previously held assumptions regarding each other's race and colour. For Darlene, this meant questioning her own identity as a white woman who is relatively exempt from the same

oppression her husband is subjected to. As the following narrative indicates, Darlene did not expect the degree of challenges Nate would present with as an Aboriginal man trying to deal with structural racism in the workplace. Whereas initially she thought Nate was 'just paranoid', now she has come to the realisation that despite the rhetoric of 'a fair go for all', intolerance continues to persist.

Darlene and Nate

Nate, who is tall and broad-shouldered, was talkative when recounting his three-year relationship to Darlene, a very vivacious 48-year-old 'white Australian', with Scottish and Spanish origins. Describing himself as coming from 'a very religious family', Nate has also completed an undergraduate degree at university and is presently pursuing postgraduate studies. Keen to advance their prospects financially, Nate is acutely aware of his social status as an Aboriginal male in Australian society. While Nate now resides in Townsville, he grew up in a regional town where he was 'accepted as a top Asian sportsman. But the minute I started to stand up politically for Indigenous rights, I then started to find that people ... turned on me'. Though Nate proudly acknowledges that his mother is Aboriginal and identifies as 'being Aboriginal' himself, Nate 'didn't like the Asian side of my family very much' because they were 'more business, less fun to be around' and more 'opinionated'.

As the offspring of an interracial relationship himself, Nate openly discusses the benefits of having an Asian father at a time when Aboriginal people were experiencing some unique challenges:

You know, when the missions were closed down, they [Aboriginal people] moved to the outskirts of the city and because Indigenous people at the time weren't on the electoral roll and weren't recognised as full citizens of this country, they were treated like animals. Because Mum married an Asian fellow who was a full citizen of this country [and] a highly regarded tradesman, we had all the respect in the world. And a lot of our Indigenous people, well, when I say Indigenous, Aboriginal people within the communities despised us because they thought we were above them. Because we got rights that they didn't have and, you know, the police would go around and lock them up and do whatever they liked [but] we were treated like first class citizens, just like anybody else. And for a lot of the Aboriginal people, they

resented that, that we got this wonderful treatment and they didn't, and that was fairly sad. I didn't quite understand it myself as a kid.

Whilst Nate saw the degradation and challenges fellow Aboriginal people faced, he was also aware that his own family, in comparison, had privilege in the form of social standing in their community. Despite the fact that his father was Asian and his mother Aboriginal, from a young age Nate observed the different levels of 'racism' that existed in his hometown.

But, it's funny though with racism. Racism can be so different for dark people sometimes. Like my dad, you know, because he had tickets and he was a mechanic [and] was highly skilled, he was in so much demand by people ... People would never discriminate because he was able to fix the machinery that they needed fixed ... They didn't care what colour he was, as long as he got that machinery going. They didn't care. You see he didn't see that sort of racism. But I think, had he been a bloke on pick and shovel and lined up with all the other labourers, that he probably would have seen it, you know.

As Nate grew up relatively unimpeded by the effects of racism in country Queensland, it was not until later in life when he became involved with Darlene that his life changed radically. Although Darlene is Nate's second wife, he wholly admits that he is much 'happier' now because he has married someone who shares 'the same values and ideas'. This is particularly significant for Nate because his first marriage to a 'blonde hair, blue-eyed lady' ended abruptly and unpleasantly. According to Nate, 'I went home one day with the daughter and the mother stood at the front doorstep and screamed, "Get out of here you boong"'. Obviously, such a slur leaves a sour taste and one gets the impression that Nate is still coming to terms with the incident.

Darlene grew up in a family where the gender division was extremely strict. Her father was very authoritarian and 'belted the absolute crap out of us kids', especially after 'mother left for another man'. When she left home at the age of 18, Darlene states that she 'hadn't really experienced the world that much'. After living with a 'racist father', she was determined that she,

was never going to treat people like the way my father spoke of treating them. You know, what I mean, like he was dead set against blacks and all blacks were the same and I went out with the attitude, 'well, they're not' and

I see people as who they are and not their colour. So, yeah, it was strange that my first relationship was with a dark fella.

Whilst Nate was married previously and now has several children, Darlene's first relationship was with a 'Mauritian for four years and [then] with a Papua New Guinea man for 12'. Darlene is very proud of her 'two beautiful kids'; one of whom she calls 'a half-caste and the other is 'quarter-caste'. Despite the abuse Darlene experienced first-hand from her father growing up, he 'absolutely adored his granddaughter' when she was born and treated her 'very well'.

During the couple interview, the conversation was interspersed with a lot of jokes and laughter and centred on their coming together story, their justifications for marrying each other, his concern with racial profiling and their parenting of biracial children. Whilst Nate was enthusiastic and provided detailed responses, Darlene was even more so. Welcoming me into their home with a warm smile, Darlene walked immediately into their kitchen to make me a coffee. She started cutting cake whilst talking about how she and Nate first met. According to Darlene, she spotted Nate at a nightclub seven years prior to them getting together. When he refused to dance with her, 'I called him an uppity nigger! I just asked [him] for a dance, I didn't ask him to marry me'. Laughing, Darlene explained that:

Darlene: It's really funny because I actually had seen Nate 20 or 30 years ago because I used to go out and muck around with his cousin Nelly and Nelly used to always go on about this famous boxing cousin of hers and I thought, 'Oh big deal he is probably an upstart anyway'. And I had seen him a couple of times out and about and one time I had seen him at a club downstairs ..., you know, mock fighting downstairs sort of thing and Nelly said 'Oh that's Nate, my cousin'. And I thought 'Oh big deal, what a dickhead', he's got a blue safari suit on and that's the thing I remember about him, his safari suit. That was back then. He had long hair. He was totally different looking to when I met him up at the club. He sort of like, [had] neck-length hair, not quite to his shoulder, but I just had no idea who he was ... but I just liked the look of him. To me he was like, when I looked at him I thought oh he just reminds me of when I was a kid I used to fantasise about ... running off with an Indian chief, you know. And he sort of reminded me of an Indian chief, you know. So I started to fixate on this Indian look about him and I didn't even realise that he was Indigenous you know, so for quite some time, I just thought he was Indian, but American ... because that's what he looked like to me because his hair was really long. And

I thought all my fantasies might come true after all. This Indian might run away with me.

Sharon: You thought Nate was Indian, like Native American?

Darlene: Native American, yeah. That's what I thought he was when I first met him. And it came out then, as we got to know each other better, that he was Indigenous Australian.

Twenty years later, Darlene's fantasies did come true when she met up with Nate yet again, only this time he had much shorter hair and was spotlighting as a security officer on the nightclub strip. Whilst he observed that 'she was a nice bird', it took two months of scrutinising each other before Darlene actually plucked up the courage to initiate a conversation with Nate, then '12 months later we got married'. However, as Darlene highlights, the path to exchanging their hallowed vows, actually entailed exploring some unhallowed truths first. Glancing at Nate, she light-heartedly jokes: 'I got screened basically for weeks, for months, [beforehand], didn't I? It was like a screening process, you know, making sure I was all above board and a decent sort of person. Not some scallywag that was out to run amok'.

Nate's response to this claim of being 'screened' was interesting. Upon conceding that Darlene was correct in her assessment, Nate defensively jests: 'Oh yeah, I wanted to be sure you know. [Afterall], there are a lot of nutters out there'. So, before the courtship began, the screening process kicked in whereby Darlene was left pondering the real identity of the man she was hot keen to advance a relationship with. As the story goes:

Darlene: He came out with lies, you know. Like, he gave me this big story about being a sports teacher in a high school, and then I got told he was a janitor and then ... he's going on about being an FBI or CIA [agent] or something and ... it was all backwards and forwards and I didn't really know what to think or what he was.

Nate: I said 'If you're looking for me and you're in the school, just ask for the janitor. They'll know who you are talking about' ... says Nate teasingly.

Darlene: So he gives me his number, right, he gave me this number to call and it was a bloody fax machine and I'm ringing this number and I'm thinking this mongrel has done the dirty on me. He told me to ring and I got a fax machine, so I wasn't really impressed with that one. And I had to wait each weekend because I could only see him on weekends. I didn't ask where he lived or anything as it was just early stages sort of thing after we had just met. So each week I would be counting and pacing until Friday night to get down there and I said to him this one night, so what's the number you gave me?

And he's playing this game, you know, the number? And he said, 'No that's my number' and I said 'No mate, it's a fax machine'. And I think the thing that attracted me to him more than anything [even then] was his smile and his laugh. Like it was so addictive and I always looked for it every time I went down there. And I heard this big laugh and off he would go.

Sharon: Inquisitively to Nate, 'So you knew it was a fax machine number?'

Nate: Yeah, [I was] just making certain.

Darlene: *Because of a lot of young ladies out there...*

Nate: You don't know, like it's a nightclub and you don't know who you are talking to. People can sound good and above board and whatever else, but in reality you don't know who they are and you can't really tell just by looking at them at face value. They can sound great but, you know, I've come across a lot of people that sound great but when you get to know them they are *nutters*.

Interestingly, Nate uses the word 'nutters' a few times in the couple interview and usually after he has referred to women or more precisely 'ladies' who he met 'down at the pub' when working. Whilst Nate is in his fifties, he is rather good looking in a rugged kind of way. He has an intense gaze that cuts right through you and a sharp analytical mind that enjoys a good 'conversation'. Though he obviously does not mind engaging in some good old-fashioned banter, Nate dislikes superficial women who do not measure up to his standards of propriety. As the following recollection conveys, Nate feels uncomfortable when unexpectedly placed in difficult situations, particularly when interacting with white women and their families:

I had a young lady one night that came out with me that I had just met ... It was about 3 o'clock in the morning [when I took her home], her Dad was one of the sergeants at the police station and she wouldn't get out of the car. And I said, 'Love, I've got to go home, you know, you've got to get out. This is your parent's house and you've got to get out and let me go home'. And she said, 'No I want to stay with you'. And I said 'You can't stay with me mate'. This girl was quite normal, quite friendly and quite a normal human being. But then the normalcy went when she said 'No I'm not getting out of the car'. And I said 'I beg your pardon, it's nearly 4am in the morning and you've got to go and get some sleep and so have I' and she said, 'I want to stay with you forever'. And I said 'Listen you've got to stop this. This is stupid, I've only just met you and you've got to go home'. Anyhow, to cut a long story short, I ended up going up to the parent's door and knocking on the door at 4 o'clock in the morning and asking them to make their daughter get out of my car so I can go home and sleep. I think she was only about 17 years old and I was about 17 too. So, the mum comes down and asks her daughter to get out of the car and she again refused. So anyway, the

mother and the daughter ended up having a big punch-up on the front lawn. Like the daughter tackled the mother and they fell on the footpath on the grass and were rolling around punching each other and that gave me the opportunity to jump in the car and bolt and I never saw her again.

Directly after hearing this story, I asked, 'So, what do you think that incident was about Nate? How would you interpret that?' His response was as follows:

Oh, I think she was a *nutter*, that's all ... You've got to assess people properly and make certain of who they are or who they say they are. You just don't go on face value. Oh, they look nice or they may look the part. You've got to make sure of who they are and whether they are genuinely nice people. I thought she was a genuinely nice normal human being, you know, but when that happened it showed me otherwise. So, I suppose it's a lesson that I learnt that you've just got to be careful with who you associate with and who you are getting mixed up with I suppose.

Nate's aversion for those he deems 'nutters' is complex. Whilst I have included this particular story, Nate refers to many other examples where white women are seemingly perceived as untrustworthy and devious. This fixation with white women may stem from his unpleasant relationship with his previous wife because Nate finishes his conversation about this first interracial marriage with the following words: '... if you were going to marry someone and you looked into their family and the stature of their family, whether they're middle class, upper class, you know you're not going to fit in, well, you're not going to go there. You're going to steer clear of it because, you know, the racism is more damning at those levels'. What is particularly sad about this refrain is that Nate now finds himself questioning everyone, including himself. Hence, the reason why Darlene found herself 'screened' for a period of time.

Nate's first marriage has therefore taught him the importance of engaging in thoughtful negotiations when it comes to dealing with differences, especially in relation to conflicting cultural values. For Nate, having open and honest conversations with Darlene allowed them to question previously held assumptions about each other and to 'sort out some of the rough edges'. As the following narrative corroborates, talking through issues added a new level of richness to their relationship.

Sharon: So, what were the nice, the good things about meeting Darlene? How did your relationship evolve?

Darlene: *Taking our time ...*
 Nate: Yeah we took our time and we got to ...
 Darlene: *once we got through the KGB and the CIA bullshit ...*
 Nate: Well we started having ... more serious conversations about things and started asking the real question about what we wanted to know about each other and, I suppose, the indicators were we were receiving the message that we wanted to hear. That she was looking for a stable partner, a person to grow old with and share life with and she had all the other same ideas and values and things that I liked, I suppose, as well. So we started to think 'well there's compatibility here with what we wanted in life, you know' ... I thought 'Well, you know, we were both physically attracted to each other. That was one area we looked at straight up but we looked at other things, like compatibility, you know, her ideas and values and what she wants in life and things like that.' The long-term thing. And we thought 'Well, we're getting a match with everything we're looking for and that's virtually why we decided to go further with the relationship, you know.' And then of course, once you get mixed up in the relationship there's still other different things in life that we had to sort through. So once we sorted through those sorts of things, then I think that it's just a matter of enjoying one another now. We've sorted out the rough edges and that in our relationship and now I think that we're starting to enjoy more of our time together and more of what we want out of life I suppose. ... As I say the rough rock that gets washed by the ocean and once the ocean glides over it enough times it smooths out all the edges and I think that was like our relationship. The dos and don'ts and the dislikes and likes and once we got past all that we ...

Darlene: Both of us had rough edges and both had to sort of do a lot of changing and compromising with each other and we fine-tuned our relationship. And now we just cruise. It's just great.

Despite their different upbringings and heritage, Nate and Darlene agreed that in order for their relationship to progress they each had to compromise and make adjustments. Whilst Nate found it difficult adjusting to Darlene's past history in terms of her 'exes', Darlene has also had to make compromises in terms of embracing Nate's reverence for religion. As Darlene's father was a 'dead set atheist' who thought that 'God was an astronaut', this was new terrain for her to consider. In fact, Darlene even concedes that 'our biggest clash' is due to their 'different moral and ethical' upbringings and embedded behaviour patterns. Because her father constantly referred to her as 'a slut' and told her she 'was never going to be anything', Darlene 'took on' these criticisms and justified her 'abusive' first relationship that entailed numerous physical beatings as having 'deserved it'. As a result, Nate discloses that 'she has gone through life with pretty low relevance'. These overwhelming feelings of disempowerment and self-doubt created tension

in the marriage. Initially, Nate found it difficult to comprehend why Darlene put up with such abuse. As Darlene clarifies:

But he was angry because he knew that I had been used and abused and treated like shit and he knew that, deep down inside, there was a decent human being in there that deserved to be treated as a decent human being. And there was that big transition, you know, and I have just done this big, big turn around and I have made such a big change in my life and belief in myself, thanks to Nate.

According to Ting-Toomey (2009), the point to which one experiences relationship satisfaction is predisposed by the extent to which spouses get affirmation and feel validated by their 'significant other'. Whilst both Darlene and Nate realise the need to establish a secure relationship through open communication and taking seriously each other's disclosures and experiences, such motivation is not always easy to maintain. In the single interview, Darlene admitted that 'We've had two separations in the last 14 months because of my lack of understanding Nate's frustrations'. What Darlene is referring to here is her inability to understand racism as a complex structure which positions her husband as inferior and herself as 'scum' because she is 'with him'. Even though Darlene has prided herself on being attuned to other people's feelings, especially after living with 'a racist' father, she did not expect the level of challenges Nate presented with. Aside from Darlene's acknowledgement of Nate as a 'complex person', she also acknowledges that through listening to the personal testimonies of her husband she has developed a more refined awareness of the power that racism reaps in society. As Darlene divulged, 'I'm just blown away by it all because, you know, having believed that we are all equals and then to see this happening and it's happening to my husband because he is black, it's like ... a real eye-opener for me'.

What is particularly unsettling for Darlene is the realisation that such racism stems from her own culture and race. This realisation 'makes her shame to be white'. Whilst initially she was 'closed off to it [and] living in denial, like you do', about the history of 'blacks in white society', Darlene infers that through gatherings with Nate's family, she now considers herself more educated about social injustices:

They talk about actual documented history and that sort of thing. They're not just sitting there and saying 'Oh, white bastard this and white bastards that'. They've shown it to me and I'm like 'Oh! That didn't really happen?' And I'm like 'It's horrendous!' And ... I look around sometimes and I hang my head in shame and I think I'm ashamed to be white because of what's been done, you know what I mean?

This realisation also corroborates what Frankenberg (1993) found in her study on white women in interracial relationships. Seemingly, white women's awareness of their whiteness becomes more heightened when in an interracial relationship, hence Darlene is no exception. Darlene notes herself the profound changes of varied emotional intensity such a realisation wreaks upon her relationship with her husband. Despite the fact that her relationship creates what Frankenberg (1993) refers to as a 'social geography' which begets 'an intimate connection with racial oppression' through marital association, it also forces Darlene to question her own identity as a white woman who is relatively exempt from the same oppression her husband is subjected to (p. 111). As a result this leaves Darlene grappling with feelings of guilt and anxiety over the 'white privilege' she is accorded in society, especially when she feels it is used as a weapon against her (Frankenberg 1993). When referring to the very beginning of her marriage to Nate, Darlene found it difficult and 'upsetting' to learn that her husband was experiencing oppression in the workplace. But when he constantly referred to it at home, this made her feel:

Sometimes so angry with him that this is happening and I know that it is not his fault. And then other times I look at him and I just want to cry and hold him and tell him that everything is going to be okay. It's like my heart is split in two all the time. It's just very, very frustrating. Very frustrating for Nate and also for me. I mean, when he's cruising, when he's okay, so am I. When he's frustrated, he makes me even more frustrated because he needs to vent and I'm the person he's going to vent to because I'm the closest person to him. And being white doesn't make it easy. You know what I mean, 'All you whites, and all you whites'! And I'm like woo! Wait a minute. Yeah, I know what you are saying darling, but don't categorise me. I know that you guys are categorised. I'm seeing it. I'm seeing it firsthand. But don't turn around and do it here. Not all whites feel the same way darling and I'm on your side here. I'm with you. But he does, and I understand he is needing to vent. Yeah, it causes a lot of upsets. We've had a lot of blow-ups but love brings us back together each and every time. And now, I guess only in the last eight months, we have connected ... I've got a better understanding of

what's going on and he feels I'm more supportive because of it. Do you know what I mean?

Whilst Darlene found it difficult to cope with Nate's anger in regards to his encounters in the workplace, she has now come to realise that 'He is not angry at me, but [being his wife and closest confidant] I am the only person he can vent too'....Yeah, he's got to keep his cool. This is his job. This is his income you know'.

What adds another layer of stress is that Nate is a proud man whose gender dictates that he provides for his family. Furthermore, Nate is an educated man. Yet, after completing a degree at his local university, Nate is finding it difficult to secure middle management positions. Instead, Nate is still dependent on the same kind of work he was engaged in before he first met Darlene, only now he is working for a different company. If Nate therefore finds himself without a job, this would impede them financially. Consequently, Darlene has come to understand that Nate's feelings of anger are not intentionally directed at her, but rather the system she is associated with via the whiteness of her skin; a system which leaves him feeling disempowered and overlooked. Nate has already 'fought ... one of the biggest landmark cases in Australian history' and won his day in court. He 'fought it for racism, on the simple grounds that I couldn't get promoted'. This outright denial of professional advancement in the workplace based solely on the colour of his skin has caused Nate to question the system, especially when he saw 'me [white] mates were getting promoted around me [and were] better treated'. Therefore, Nate is no stranger to experiencing firsthand the damaging effects of racial profiling in the workplace. This experience has encouraged Nate to 'make changes because I don't want my kids and the next generation and the next generation [to] keep copping this crap'.

When it comes to his children, Nate wants the best for them. During the individual interview he specifically expressed his concern for his two eldest boys who biologically have blood connections not only to him but also their 'blonde haired' mother. Yet, it is this very connection that creates a feeling of unease for Nate as he knows that both his boys are regarded differently not only in society, but also within the extended interracial family. According to Nate:

One kid came out like me and the youngest kid came out like her ... blonde hair, brown eyes, and white skin and as they grew up, one talked about

racism and one... never talked about racism and had a different attitude. The white kid hung around all the scholars, all the high achievers. The Indigenous one hung around all the no hopers, all the bums, you know. And that to me was how society put people where they belonged. He was accepted by this group of people. The white kid was accepted by a higher profile of kids ... He's still going to a private school, still doing wonders. Whereas the Indigenous kid dropped out at 15 and just become a bum really, a labourer, you know, with no real big ambitions whatsoever.

But then the white kid comes home, the white son comes home, 'Oh granddad is a good bloke, lovely bloke!' He loves [his] granddad. The dark fellow comes home and says 'granddad hates me because he hates black people, Dad, so he doesn't like me'. So I mean, straight away you see the relationship, you know, and Thomas would complain about that ... he had a problem ... in the playgrounds. Kids would not know Alan was his brother and they would say to Thomas, 'what are you playing with this boong for'? And so Thomas would start to realise that, that he's got this high profile. He's quite accepted, but hey, his brother is not. His brother is like one of these disliked people of this race, this Aboriginal race that are labelled 'boongs' and this is why you see a lot of white Aboriginal kids who are going through university that disown their Aboriginality because they get better acceptance if they are white. They pretend to be who they are not. And you can see that happening with Thomas. I'll just pretend I'm white and, you know, when they are running my brother down I won't say anything and I'll fit in.

When I asked Nate how this affects him as the father to see both his children treated as such, he responded:

Well it just shows you how it's two different worlds. One kid will experience a life like a white person and the other guy will face the world as a black person and both are of the same blood ... I mean it just blows me away ... It's just the colour of his skin can make such a difference.

Nate's concern for how his boys are perceived in the public weighs heavily on his mind. As a man who is strong in his own identity, Nate is affected by the ways in which his 'lighter skin' son seems to reject his Aboriginality, preferring to sacrifice his blackness for the 'high profile' of his white heritage. However, as an Aboriginal man who has borne the brunt of racial stereotyping himself, Nate is also concerned about how his 'darker' skin son is treated, not only by the general public but also his maternal grandfather. Just knowing that his sons are travelling down two different paths because of 'the colour of their skin' leaves Nate feeling apprehensive about their future. Instead of denying or disowning

their Aboriginality or 'passing' as someone they are not, Nate wants them to embrace both their parents' racial heritages; not elevate one over the other. He wants them to become resilient to the taint of racial profiling and to feel strong and comfortable in who they are and what they represent, despite interference from others within the family and extended community.

After interviewing Nate twice, I must confess I found our discussions quite intense. When I first met Nate, I knew intuitively that this was a man who had experienced a lot. He spoke with authority and commanded your attention. He also spoke with his eyes, which in turn reflected his emotions. When Nate recalled first meeting Darlene his eyes glowed; however, when he referred to his children, his eyes were marked with such deep emotion that I felt his frustration and pain. Still, whilst I identified with Nate when he spoke about certain issues, I was a little stunned and bewildered when he made comments about black women in interracial relationships. According to Nate, Aboriginal women '... sort of think, well, if I married a white bloke, they're going to come into money, they're going to inherit'. The explanation here is that by marrying a white man, Aboriginal women have the opportunity to 'stay home ... and live a much protected sort of life because the white fellow goes out and does the work and earns the money and he [does not have to] face any sort of racism and he gets equality'. Whilst Nate's interpretation is understandable given that these comments arise from the pressure to 'compete' as an Aboriginal male within western hegemonic power structures that privilege white men over Aboriginal men, his remarks left a hollow feeling in the pit of my stomach nevertheless. At first I could not understand why I felt like this. Like Nate, I too, grapple with the reality of racism. If I was in the renting game again, I too, would follow Nate's advice and send my white partner in 'to get a house or a flat' simply because it does get tiresome dealing with the burden of rejection. However, whilst I, too, have felt the debilitating power of racism, I have never felt the force of it in the workplace like Nate has. The fact that Nate took a company to court on the grounds of racial discrimination and won is admirable.

Apart from this fleeting moment of bewilderment, I thoroughly enjoyed my discussion with both Nate and Darlene. Both were open and willing to provide glimpses into their lives. Both were approachable and passionate when discussing their joys, frustrations and vision for the future. Actually, the most striking feature about the interviews was the

realisation that both partners have invested time in thinking about and talking through issues that affect them as an interracial couple, be it encounters with racism or the occasional confused gawk directed their way at the local pub. Interestingly, when asked how they are perceived as a couple in public, Darlene stated that:

No-one looks at us and goes 'Oh Nate's black and you're white'. We're not seen that way. We're just like any normal couple. It's like it's just accepted

...

However, whilst Darlene insisted that they are inconspicuous in public, Nate jolts her memory when he reminds her about their visit to his hometown, when they stayed in 'the big posh hotel' where 'all the farmers associate [and] have their functions'. Remembering the event, Darlene immediately laughs and interjects with the following comments:

But the funny thing was that most of the men would look at me and look at Nate and look at me again. But the women – the look's different ... They look at Nate and look at me and ... it's a totally different look. It's like an mmm – it's an interested look, you know what I mean. Not a disgusted look. But the men were like, you know, what's she doing with him – he's black!

In order to deal with this scenario, Nate and Darlene decided to have 'a laugh' by visibly parading their show of togetherness. At one stage, when Nate went to walk beside Darlene, she purposely halted and 'after waiting until there were a couple of white people [in the room]', she pointed directly at him and determinedly stated in a loud, authoritative voice: 'Woe, woe, woe! Get back in your place!' In light of Nate's comment that 'You wouldn't have been able to walk into the same place together 20 years ago' because Darlene 'would have been looked upon as a misguided white woman', neither of them felt 'offended' nor 'hurt' by the stares directed their way. Instead, they conspired to delight in diffusing the situation the best way they could, through the strategic use of brazen, in your face humour which, to great effect, 'horrified' people most fittingly. So, whilst Nate and Darlene emphasised that they were 'just like any normal couple', they did identify this incident, which occurred in a public setting in a country pub as 'the only time we have ever copped something ... [because of our] racial difference'.

For Nate and Darlene, societal disapproval does not affect their marriage. Instead as the above pub narrative suggests, they use their interracial relationship to their own

advantage. They are not afraid to assert their togetherness, even when aware of negative reactions in public. They are also not afraid to 'talk openly about race' and discuss sensitive issues that are important to them. Whilst Nate unequivocally acknowledges that his wife has had a somewhat swift introduction to being married to an Aboriginal man, describing it as 'a whole new learning curve' for Darlene, he also appreciates her support, insight and ability to 'see' what he 'sees'. Even though Darlene concedes that living with Nate does test the limits of loyalty at times, especially when she feels pressed 'to become a psychiatrist, psychologist, wife and everything all in one', she also emphatically confirms that whilst it 'was daunting for me in the beginning ... now, I'm a part of him and he's fight is my fight too'. Ultimately, it is affirmation like this that Nate appreciates and values. After all, it is 'her understanding [that] completes the whole picture of my marriage' says Nate very modestly.

Like Nate and Darlene, our next couple Caeden and Nell, are the parents of biracial children from previous marriages. Unlike Nate, Nell is not too worried about the cultural identity of her children as much as the development of their 'personality and emotions'. Even though she already feels the pressure 'for her children to identify particularly with their Aboriginal side', Nell is adamant that such categorising will not eventuate until her children are 'comfortable in' deciding their own racial identity. However, until then she wants to protect her boys from prejudicial opinions as much as she can. Following is a narrative that deals with the challenges parents of biracial children face when encountering bias within and outside the family.

Nell and Caeden

Caeden and Nell were the third couple I interviewed. Whilst I had not identified them as part of the study initially, I was grateful when an acquaintance at work informed me about them. After first introducing myself to Caeden at the local university where he is studying a higher degree, I could not wait to meet his partner. With his well-defined 'South Sea Islander, Aboriginal' features, Caeden is the type of man who easily turns heads his way. A great lover of rugby league, Caeden is 35 years old and has been in a de-facto relationship with Nell for 12 years. Like Paul, Caeden has also served in the Australian Defence Force. After completing high school, Caeden then joined the Navy and for seven

years lived in various ports 'all over the world', but it was whilst being based in Sydney that he 'ended up' meeting Nell.

Nell is 31 years old and identifies as an Australian whose 'father's family is Irish'. Proud of their Irish heritage, Nell emphasises the importance of honouring this connection through 'the way that we do things in our family and in the way that we've grown up'. Just as softly spoken and mysterious as her partner, Nell also states that 'I grew up and lived in the same house, same everything till I was 18 years old when I finished high school and then left for university'. Even though Nell was socialised in a predominantly 'white, working class' neighbourhood, she was always fascinated by diversity.

When I first met Nell I felt a little anxious about how the interview would go. Being Aboriginal, I mistakenly assumed that I would feel more comfortable interviewing Aboriginal participants than their partners. This assumption did not last long as it was the total reverse when it came to interviewing Nell. Though I felt a little awkward at first, asking very personal and highly sensitive questions to a complete stranger about her relationship with an Aboriginal man, the interview flowed effortlessly. Whilst Nell initially seemed a little reserved, she answered my questions in a polite tone, which became even livelier when discussing her children. In truth, it was Nell's responses to my questions about raising biracial children that touched me the most. As a mother of two children myself, I could relate to Nell's concerns about how her children might be perceived by others in the world. It was this connection, I guess, which made interviewing Nell a very satisfying and stimulating experience.

Interviewing Caeden was just as upbeat, but a touch exasperating as well. Whilst Caeden is undeniably an unassuming man with a humble and polite disposition, I also wondered if he deliberately appeared a little detached at times. In fact, one got the impression that this was a man who did not reveal his innermost thoughts too often and, when he did, it would no doubt be to someone he trusted completely. As a result, I sensed his hesitation and desperately tried to engage the man behind the fixed expression. After interviewing Nell though, I realised that this was just very much part and parcel of his persona. Caeden is naturally restrained in his conversation style and, although I mistook his quiet confidence for detachment, he answered all my questions respectfully; just not as fervently as Nell.

Nell was 'nearly 19' when she first met Caeden 'so we had no intentions of looking for anything serious as I had just started university'. At this stage, Nell had left her tight-knit community on the border of southern New South Wales for the bright lights of the city. After 'being introduced to culture locally' in her hometown, Nell acknowledged just how little she knew about the experiences of Aboriginal people in Australia. Intolerant of disparaging comments, or more precisely, the 'bashing of any different cultures', Nell actively sought out information to educate herself about the history of Aboriginal Australians and 'went off and sort of attended little trips around the local area'. Driven by an 'interest in Aboriginal culture', coupled with her desire to become involved in 'programs to improve people's situations', Nell enrolled herself in an Aboriginal Health Degree at Sydney University, where 'there was probably more non-Indigenous people doing it than there were Indigenous'. At a crucial time in her life when Nell could have chosen something a bit more generic, she especially chose to specialise in Aboriginal health; embarking upon this initiative *prior* to becoming intimately involved with an Aboriginal man and giving birth to their two children.

In effect, this degree opened up a brand-new world to Nell. According to Nell, her social network expanded greatly as 'where we lived, we had a group of neighbours who were Aboriginal and South Sea Islander people and they were in Sydney and they were all from Queensland but they were going to the National Aboriginal and Islander Dance Academy (NAISDA)'. Having such a selection of racially diverse friends who, unbeknown to her, 'turned out to be Caeden's family' was fortuitous as this is how Nell was first introduced to Caeden, through mutual acquaintances.

So, when the stars collided and they met at a busy inner-city tavern one night, it seems that Caeden and Nell hung silently, just out of each other's sight, until eventually, Nell and her friend courageously approached him. Because of his life in the Navy, Caeden 'was out at sea for most of the football season' and was subsequently gripped with footy fever when they first approached him. Transfixed on the semi-final showdown between the 'Broncos and the Bulldogs,' Caeden was not overly responsive at first. That is, until the Broncos, 'ended up losing and I thought I'd turn my attention to them', meaning Nell and her girlfriend. As Caeden highlights, 'Yeah, from March to September I am not a very good communicator on a Saturday, Sunday or Friday night' so 'picking her up was a bit

of a shock'. Teasingly, Nell agrees with Caeden's assessment of himself, hinting that perhaps his lack of communication skills extended beyond the odd football nights. When I initially asked them what attracted them to one another, Nell responded:

I don't know ... But I have realised over the years that there *are* things that we do have in common. I just didn't know it then. Caeden's personality probably didn't let a lot of that out!

When I enquired as to what some of those commonalities were in the individual interview Nell once again reiterated: 'I don't know. I think that when we first got together we were very different people ...' Then, after taking a long pause, she further adds:

But I think we're probably more similar than I ever realised. Although we come from very different backgrounds I think that, in terms of our values and our personalities, we can be quite similar... like I see in Caeden that he is very calm and very balanced, like he has a balanced view about things and about the world and I suppose that I do too. It's really important to me that I make decisions and base my decisions and whatever I do on the information that is available. Like, I'm one that's never been into gossip or to make judgments on half-cocked bits of information and neither is Caeden. So, particularly on really important issues in terms of like culture and racism and things like that, he just has a very sort of balanced view about it and it's unbiased in what he sort of believes. I suppose what I like about him as well is that he has a real caring side, an empathy for people which is something that a lot of people don't see ... People who don't know him say 'Geez, he's quiet' and I say 'Oh, just give him a little time till he warms up' ...

Obviously, when I misjudged Caeden's quietness for disengagement I was wrong. According to Nell, there is a 'sort of real joker' in Caeden who enjoys 'entertaining' others, but is confined largely 'within his family'. It is this side to Caeden that Nell appreciates because, as she states, 'I can get really serious about things', so the 'light moments' that Caeden offers are 'probably good for me'.

Caeden is well aware of Nell's serious side as he cheekily announces that 'she goes off more than I do!' Nevertheless, 'as testing as that can be', Caeden also acknowledges that he is attracted to her because she has a 'social conscience' and 'understands where you are coming from', especially in terms of 'race and culture'. Nell is also a thinker and a patient listener, and these traits appeal to Caeden because 'it's good to find somebody with a different perspective on life'. In fact, Caeden remembers 'when I first met Nell

she asked me if I thought racism would ever become extinct'. Obviously such a complex question requires some deep analysis and one gets the impression that both Caeden and Nell's sensitivity to, and respect for, each other's opinions on certain issues is the foundation upon which their relationship is based. Despite days where 'you get a bit proud and don't want to admit you're wrong', Caeden emphasises the importance of 'working through things' and having those informed chats, which require 'a bit of maturity'. So, whilst Caeden admits that there are shifts where 'you just have to walk away [for] a bit', he also professes that until he met Nell, he felt like he had 'been wandering around aimlessly'. Nell therefore adds meaning to his life, as do his two sons.

Caeden and Nell are proud of their children. The eldest, who is five years old, already 'knows that there is an obvious difference between Mum and Dad'. According to Caeden, when his son 'answers the phone and it's his grandmother, he will say, 'Is this the black grandmother or the white one?' Whilst his son 'speaks like a Murray fellow', he is also 'at that age now where he sees himself as actually white; he identifies with his mother rather than with myself, yeah'. However, the difference according to Caeden is that 'because he hangs around my family all the time, he knows a fair bit about Indigenous culture'. To use Nell's terms, Caeden is 'quite dark' so whilst their eldest son 'has white skin', she clarifies that he 'may change his mind later and he may not. But it's up to him anyway as well'.

When I asked Nell during the individual interview what she thought about the identity of their children, she took some time to respond. After a while Nell mentioned that she had not really understood the enormity that identity and its associated racial meanings played 'until I had kids'. As said by Nell, 'It wasn't something that I had thought about before we had kids, but I suppose there are lots of things that you learn along the way', particularly when the kids 'get older and start asking questions and things like that, then it becomes really apparent'. Conversely, whilst Nell likened ideas about racial identity as being 'neither here nor there', it appears that she was not quite ready for the bombshell that raising biracial kids would bring in terms of other people's perceptions: 'Now that we do have children ... I suppose there is actually more comments made about them than has actually ever been made on us and that, I suppose, is the biggest challenge in being in an interracial relationship'.

As a white woman, Nell has made it her life's work to challenge racism and all its ugly undercurrents. This is particularly important to Nell because 'being a non-Indigenous Australian', she feels that she is 'made aware of obvious racism more so than Indigenous people because [white] people do not have the guts to say it to Indigenous people's faces'. In reference to her own race, Nell adds 'but they might see another white person and think 'Oh well, they think like I do'. Despite the expectation that she will conform to such thinking because of her whiteness, Nell finds this behaviour deplorable and clearly likes to disentangle and disassociate herself from it. However, as Nell learns, there is a difference between knowing and hearing about racism to experiencing it firsthand. Talking about her children, Nell relayed the following story about her youngest baby who is 'slightly darker' than the eldest son:

Because once you do have kids, you need to be aware that people will often make comments. Like especially with the new baby that we have now. I've had a few people say when I'm by myself with him, because they don't know who his father is, they will say, 'Oh where's his father from?' So they're assuming in fact that he's from another country to me. That sort of sounds like they're not asking what his father's background is or what his race or culture is, or anything. It's 'Oh where's he from?' So for me, it's suggesting he's from outside of Australia. I was really thrown the first time I was asked that and I sort of went, 'Oh he's from Australia', and then I thought 'Oh, that sounded like a real smart arse'. You know what I mean? But how else do you answer that?

After pausing a while to no doubt reflect upon the unpleasant memory such a question wrought, Nell reiterates once again:

I sort of went, 'Oh he's from Australia' and then I thought that sounded really stupid. The woman looked at me and said 'Oh, okay' and I said 'Well, he's Aboriginal/South Sea Islander' because I am assuming that they are picking up that the child has a different skin colour to me and that's why they're asking. You know, it's interesting and it's often complete strangers that are asking.

Although Nell refers to this scenario as 'interesting', she was emotionally shaken when telling this narrative. Acutely aware of the different tones of her children's skin colour, Nell reminded me of a lioness trying to protect her cubs from an interfering public with their entrenched ideas about racial 'cataloguing'. As she further elaborates:

I also find it sort of challenging in terms of people suggesting that the child has to identify with either black or white. Well, they're both and that is the reality of it and that's okay. And I suppose there is, does seem to be, a really strong push for the child to identify particularly with their Aboriginal side which I think is great. But I think they need to embrace both [cultures] ... just what I've noticed recently as well, is that there seems to be that real pressure that they have to identify that they're black you know and, you know, kids will perceive things very differently and they do, especially at such a tender age.

Whilst Nell encourages her son to learn about Aboriginal history and culture, she just wants her children to be raised with the totality of both their cultures; she does not want one culture dominating the other. Instead, she wants her boys to enjoy being young boys, until such a time comes when they can 'understand' the importance of their heritage. After all:

He is five and they can't perceive abstract things. But to him things are very literal and he sees that he's got white skin, so he's white at the moment. And that's it. And we can talk to him till we are blue in the face and say, 'Well look at Daddy and his family and his culture' and we can teach him and that's fine and he's happy with that. But he's got white skin, so he's white. That's where he is at the moment. And that's okay. I mean he's going to ... learn other stuff and change his mind as he gets older but ... I would hate to say, 'Well, you are black and you have to identify [as black],' ... that's not what he understands at the moment. I mean he's only 5 and he understands that Daddy's black and Daddy's Aboriginal but he's white and that's all there is to it and that's okay. So, I think as long as we teach him what we know about our different cultures ... he [will] get out from it what he wants to. But I hadn't sort of realised how difficult that is, just having more children, I suppose. And there are family members of ours who are from the same or similar race, they don't have those issues to deal with and I hadn't sort of realised that before I suppose. But it's just that some [relatives] are asking more and more questions. It is just another thing that adds to the complexity of our relationship.

Left trying to make sense of humanity and the sometimes extreme and invasive condition of people's perceptions, Nell confidently asserts that 'In terms of raising our children, it's more about catering for their individual needs regardless of what colour they are'. In acknowledging both parents' cultural heritage, Nell believes in the importance of education, particularly when it comes to 'providing them with as much information that we have about their own culture because I have no doubt that the issue of skin colour is

coming up for them ... as teenagers at school. So, it's something that I don't want to ignore, you know, try to dismiss it and ignore'.

The issue of skin colour was clearly a very sensitive topic for Nell. Having just given birth to 'a new baby' who is 'slightly darker than the other one', Nell often publicly finds herself on the receiving end of silly questions that she finds annoying: 'Oh, do you think he's going to be darker?' In reference to her youngest son, Nell responds in a frustrating tone, 'He probably is but why, for one thing, does it matter? I don't want that to be a huge focus on this child'. However, what is even more galling is when insensitive questions are directed from within the family. As Nell elaborates: 'What sort of does concern me in terms of children in interracial relationships is that there is often ... even your own mother asks, "Well, what colour is he, black or white"'?

In fact, this catch-phrase seems to be popular just in general conversation, especially in Aboriginal circles. And every time Nell hears it, she thinks to herself 'I'm not really sure why [people ask that question], can't they find that out later? ... And what gets me is that there is often a backlash, that there is associated negative connotations to being white and there's something wrong with that'. What alarms Nell the most about this is 'when kids [start] picking up on that'. Nell is adamant that 'people who aren't in interracial relationships don't realise the impact that that can have on children'. Whilst she 'doesn't take any offence personally ... I can understand Aboriginal people talking about white people in a negative way. I agree most of the time, that's the thing'. But, in terms of the children, Nell believes that, 'That's not what they are talking about, you know, they're talking about black and white in general and sometimes that being white is a bad thing. And again, this is something I hadn't realised until I had kids myself'.

As a university-educated woman Nell does not take her whiteness for granted. Even before meeting Caeden, Nell had a desire to educate herself about Aboriginal history and 'recognises and acknowledges that some of this stuff did take place in my lifetime, so I do understand that and in a sense, sort of take responsibility for it as well'. However, whilst Nell is aware of race and racialisation practices, her awareness has become even more heightened since the birth of her children. Many times throughout the interview Nell spoke of incidences that involved her children and then would finish with

the line that 'This is something I hadn't realised until I had kids myself'. What Nell is inferring here is that the birth of her children has refocused her vision and also her priorities in life. In effect, Nell now sees the world from the perspective of her children.

Being fiercely protective of her children, Nell wants to shield her children not only from the scrutiny of the public gaze, but also from insensitive comments from inside the family. This is important to Nell because she does not want everyone ascribing a race or a colour to her children; neither does she want any animosity that may exist between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities to influence her children's personal development. In fact, I got the impression whilst interviewing Nell that she just wants everyone to guard their own prejudices when around her children. As opposed to her children's identity being imposed by others, Nell believes that a natural progression of things will reveal their identity 'in time', when they 'feel comfortable' with whom they are, 'more so than how other people perceive them'.

Whereas Nell has encountered some unsavoury moments whilst out in the public, Caeden maintains that he is 'a bit oblivious when he goes out'. However, he qualifies it with 'I think you take those kinds of things for granted and find that people probably look at you and have an opinion about you regardless'. Referring to stares in the checkout lane at the supermarket, he states that 'that's a fairly common sort of thing'. But he also points out that he and Nell:

Probably don't make it overtly obvious ... that we're in the same line together ... But it's funny cause, seeing the little fella and that, because he's quite fair-skinned, people look at him and they look at me and look back at him and, you know, [you can see them thinking], 'Is that yours?'

Despite the fact that he stresses his 'obliviousness' to the public gaze, Caeden is razor sharp when it comes to picking up on reactions to what is happening around him. So much so, that he admits himself that sometimes, just sometimes, he feels the urge to sarcastically respond by adding: 'Yeah, I'm just babysitting for somebody else'.

Caeden is a man who truly believes that 'You either get on in the world or you don't'. Despite spending seven years in the Navy, Caeden is adamant that there were no 'racially motivated' incidents that he could remember only good memories. Whilst there were questions asked about 'people being treated differently because of their race',

Caeden maintains that these conversations were 'always banter, you know, it wasn't necessarily malicious'. After all, 'You would go to the homes of these sorts of people and have dinner with their wives and kids ... So it was more about how we got on with each other'. Even growing up in his hometown, despite the 'fairly racially mixed' school and church he and his family attended, 'People there treated us just like we were one of them'. Judging from Caeden's stories of growing up in the north, it appears that he and his family have a good reputation and solid social standing within the community. This obviously has not come easy, but Caeden appears proud of the fact that he is able to blend and function in multiple worlds; his Aboriginal, South Sea world and dominant society in general.

In fact, there is something endearing about Caeden because Nell even insists that 'My family love Caeden and I don't even know if they noticed that he was a different colour'. In reference to his colour, Nell upholds that 'It just doesn't seem an issue at all'. Even Nell's sister-in-law who has 'got racist [tendencies] ...', she gets along with Caeden fine as well, she just thinks he's different'. To Nell's sister-in-law, Caeden simply 'doesn't fit the stereotype'. Whilst Caeden is a forward-thinking man and tries not to dwell on 'the past', he is not afraid to challenge people's views about history; especially university lecturers who he feels are ill-informed and ill-equipped to teach about Indigenous issues. When Caeden hears comments like 'Australia has never had a history of slavery', he feels the need to interject and defend his heritage by saying 'Well, I come from a people who were dispossessed and put into slavery'. And they say, 'Aboriginal people weren't slaves' and I say 'well, they were and so were the South Sea Island people as they were brought here as slaves from another country'. Even though Caeden believes that Indigenous people are 'steeped in a history of dispossession and degradation', he also believes in the act of educating others through simple diplomatic conversations. After all, 'you just can't crack them [over the head] with nulla-nullas anymore'!

Considering that black-white relationships were pathologised as deviant and unthinkable in the past, I asked both Caeden and Nell if they thought there were any myths that were associated with such relationships today. I think this question caught Caeden by surprise, but after a long awkward pause, he speculated that there 'probably' is a per-

ception in society of Aboriginal men as being unreliable and irresponsible. Caeden suggested that if white women found themselves 'barefoot and pregnant', then it was thought that 'black fellas' would probably leave them 'in the lurch or something like that, you know'. Apart from this one myth, Caeden could not think of any other. Actually, out of all the questions asked, he seemed to skim this one real quick. But in terms of his relationship with Nell, Caeden realises that 'We need each other to get by'. Even though 'You've got to work on having a good lifestyle, in the end, when you are going home to your family, you've got to make sure that, that's okay'. It is this interaction with his family that 'makes life fun' and, according to Caeden, 'You need a bit of fun'.

In her individual interview Nell not only confirmed Caeden's thoughts regarding the perception of how Aboriginal men are viewed in society today, but she also highlighted that, when compared to other black men, Aboriginal men do not fare well. However, Nell posited that she thought the strongest criticism in society was aligned with a 'white woman entering a relationship with an Aboriginal man', but she 'didn't know why', except to say that she thought it was:

... different sort of being with an Aboriginal man because ... I remember there was this one bloke who was a bouncer at one of the nightclubs and my sister was older and one of her friends was going out with this guy. He was tall and really dark and handsome and you know very typical tall, dark and handsome and he was just gorgeous. I think that he had lived in Australia for a long time but I think somewhere along the line they were from Africa. I think that [he epitomised the] stereotype of a guy that's really strong and really sexy and everyone wanted him and whatever. And then again, I think unfortunately there wasn't that stereotype of an Aboriginal man being that strong and sort of [attractive], back then ... I mean there is a lot more so now, but I think there were still a lot of negative connotations as well and because Aboriginal women often took over the role of leading communities and things like that, Aboriginal men were often left by the wayside and didn't really know where they fitted in.

Reflecting upon when she first surveyed Caeden across the crowded room of a deafening tavern, Nell comments that 'I honestly wouldn't have been able to tell what culture he belonged to ... Like I met him in a crowd of people and I remember, I definitely noticed him and he *would* have stood out from everyone else there. I just thought he looked a bit interesting, you know'. She further goes to elaborate that:

I think I got trapped too because he seemed really quiet because you know, I mean being in the Navy some of them were pretty loud. So were my friends and I. But he was actually standing back and I thought 'Oh dear he's standing back by himself being quiet', but he was actually watching football on the TV at the time and I didn't know. I sort of thought he seems a bit quiet and ... that's how it started I suppose. My friends and I just went up there and we started talking, so that was it.

To finish this conversation and interview Nell flippantly remarked: 'And he *is* still watching football 12 years later, so nothing has changed!'

Contrary to popular perception, not all interracial relationships experience opposition from their parents. The final narrative illustrates how accepting both sets of parents were in terms of their children's decision to enter a relationship outside their racial group. In particular, it further reinforces how the racial attitudes of white partners change as they move from a position of ignorance to one of awareness. Before Scott met Kirra he virtually floated through life with 'blindness on', oblivious to the struggles of minority groups, as typified by the need to entertain others by telling racial jokes. In doing so, he never understood the injury he was inflicting, until he met Kirra who helped him confront the realities of racial stereotyping. As the following narrative illustrates, when love abounds, it forces people to look inward and work through their own racial biases.

Kirra and Scott

Kirra is a 31-year-old Aboriginal woman who has been in a two-year de-facto relationship with Scott, a 31-year-old 'Queenslander' whose 'grandparents on my mother's side are Italian'. Although Scott had never dated an Aboriginal woman before he met Kirra, she was not apprehensive about dating a white man because she had done so before. As Kirra comments herself, 'Most of my partners have been white and they couldn't accept it'. What Kirra is talking about here is that, despite her fair skin and straw-blond locks that flow wispily around her oval face, she identifies strongly with her Aboriginal ancestry; something which has not always fared her well in past relationships. Kirra remembers the remarks her previous partner's mother made 'when I was pregnant with my son'. She said 'Oh, he got a half-caste pregnant. And it cut me, you know'.

By using the Aboriginal expression 'cut me' here, along with the overt hand signal, Kirra is conveying how wounded and upset she was that someone could refer to her in such a pejorative manner. However, growing up in Townsville, it seems that Kirra is no stranger to such coarse expressions. As she explains:

I get it from Indigenous people because I'm not dark enough as far as they are concerned. And then, I get it from white people who say 'but you're not black enough'. So, that's my biggest problem. It's because I identify as an Indigenous person and ... it doesn't matter what percentage or anything because that's just rubbish anyway. But, it's how you feel and how you identify. I feel I still have a strong link, even though my skin colour is not very dark.

Although Kirra's 'white friends think that it's weird' when she goes to cultural events and jestingly accuse her of 'not being Aboriginal', Kirra is proud of her mother's Aboriginal heritage nevertheless. Outwardly she may not 'look the part' but inwardly Kirra is fiercely proud of the fact that her family can trace their heritage back to her grandfather's mother, whose name is listed in an 1906 Protector's Report. However, whilst Kirra feels 'a strong link' to her mother's culture and grew up listening to her mother tell stories about their Aboriginal ancestry; she also acknowledges her father's Northern European heritage. As the product of mixed-race parentage herself, Kirra feels fortunate to have grown up in an environment that placed great emphasis on valuing diversity rather than judging it. As Kirra states, 'I never heard my own father sling off at my mum and say 'Oh, you're an Abo' or anything like that. I've heard him be nasty to her, but I've never heard him throw that in her face'.

In spite of the odd wrangle between her parents, Kirra grew up believing that such relationships can help overcome racial bias and 'make a difference' in the world. Because she was 'brought up with not having a lot of racism around me', Kirra witnessed firsthand the growth and knowledge that can be achieved when two people from different cultures 'do work things out'. As her parents 'didn't chuck off at other [ethnic] groups' Kirra 'gets really angry when people are racist [and] finds it difficult to understand why they have to be like that'. A great believer in the sentiment that people should be judged 'not by the colour of their skin', Kirra was unprepared for the outbreaks of bigotry displayed by those outside her family environment. Though she herself experienced the richness of growing

up in such a supportive interracial setting, devoid of insults, she never realised just how 'lucky' she was until she encountered her first partner's family. Making the decision to follow him to Brisbane, Kirra really wanted the relationship to work. As a result she 'chose to ignore the signs' that were initially made visible to her. In reference to her partner's mother, 'saying that about me'. That is, calling her a 'half-caste', Kirra stated: 'Obviously it was just a sign that it was never going to work ... and I just chose to ignore it. Even though it hurt me I chose to ignore it because I didn't want to lose him'.

Whereas Kirra knew innately within herself that 'this one [relationship] was no good', she told herself 'to be strong and just ignore the hurt'. In the end, Kirra realised that no matter what sacrifices she made, she was never going to please him or his family. Kirra learnt many valuable lessons from this first failed relationship, namely that not all people are as open-minded and accepting of difference as her parents. Pinpointing the problem with this relationship as incompatibility in terms of race and culture, Kirra returned to Townsville 'a single mother with a young son and a bit broken'.

Given the strong opposition to her Aboriginality in her previous relationship, Kirra felt a little uncertain about entering the dating game again. Coming out of her last relationship was not easy for Kirra. A gnawing question she had to face seven years after leaving her son's father was:

What if? What if she fell in love with another white man? Are they going to accept my Aboriginality? You know, the way that I feel and the things that I like to do? Like, I like to go to cultural events and all those things.

Because she felt her Aboriginality was the determining factor in the disintegration of her first relationship, Kirra decided that she never wanted to go down that path again. As noted by Kirra, 'I guess that was the [deciding] thing for me with Scott'.

Reflecting on past experiences Kirra wanted her future to be different and knew that for a healthy, happy and robust relationship to develop she wanted both families' approval. She also wanted her potential new partner to accept her son, herself and her heritage as well. Attendance at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ball and other cultural events was not always expected, but highly desirable on her checklist too. So, when Scott appeared while she 'was watching the Tri-Nations series' at the local pub one

night, he did not exactly sweep her off her feet. But he did manage to gain her attention with his own unique style of introduction. As Kirra recounts:

He came up to me and asked 'Are you lost?' I looked at him ... and thought 'Who's this drunken idiot' because I had only had one beer at that stage! And I said, 'No!' And then I looked at him and thought 'Gees, I know him'. I said 'What's your last name?' And he said 'Paddington' and I said to him, 'You're Ringo's son' and he said to me 'and your Henry's daughter.'

Unbeknown to Kirra, Scott did recognise her. He saw her sitting there and 'liked her smile'. Because he knew her family, he thought he would 'have a friendly chat and that was that'. As relayed in the couple interview, Kirra and Scott's families were acquainted with each other because as children they 'used to go camping together on the same beach, but different spots'. The fact that Scott's family 'had a lot of interaction with Indigenous people' turned out to be the critical turning point in Kirra's decision to enter a relationship with him. Not only did Kirra feel 'really good' about Scott, but she also considered his family to be 'really good too'. Ultimately, 'that's what made it easier' for her to fall in love with him.

Counting herself 'lucky' as compared to her first interracial relationship where she felt vilified and alienated, Kirra now finds herself surrounded by an extended family network that seems open to learn about her heritage. During 'nights with Scott's family', Kirra has 'a few beers with Scott's father and [they] have big discussions' about Aboriginal issues. Though 'there are still some stereotypes', Kirra enjoys these cross-race conversations because she knows that 'they genuinely want to know [about Aboriginal people], I guess'.

Whilst Scott and Kirra acknowledge their relationship is still young, they believe that as long as they are committed to each other the disapproval and denunciations from the outside world are insignificant to their progression as a couple. As Scott comments, 'There's always going to be someone to sling shit'. What Kirra appreciates the most is that she has not had to forsake her Aboriginality. Instead, Kirra considers Scott to be her biggest supporter and best friend. Although it may not have been 'love at first glance, it was a love which grew stronger each passing hour, with each passing conversation'. What Kirra loves about Scott is his ability to always make her feel special, his 'support

and encouragement of all I do, the ways he reminds me of my worth and never lets me think poorly of myself'. Looking at Kirra tenderly, Scott says 'When you get upset, it affects me too'.

For this reason, Scott felt that he had to curb some of his own chequered ways. Known as the 'jokester' within his family, Scott was warned by his father that despite Kirra's white father, she also 'had Aboriginal blood' and 'to be careful about what I say'. By his own admittance, Scott acknowledges himself that some of his jokes 'used to get me in trouble', depending on 'how many beers I've had'. Shaking her head in agreeance, Kirra says 'Yeah, they can be a bit racial'. Since meeting Kirra, Scott's whole outlook to telling jokes has altered. Previously, he would tell stereotypical jokes at family gatherings without a second thought because he thought they 'were funny'. Now that Kirra has explained how dehumanising some of them can be, Scott has become more mindful of what he says. This has caused him to rethink some old practices he previously thought of as harmless fun. Instead of telling 'nasty jokes' Scott finds himself actually pulling other people up when he hears negative things being said about Aboriginal people. Recounting a scene at a family barbeque with her relatives, Kirra highlights the transformation in Scott from the family joker to protector:

But, sometimes cousins ... might say derogatory names, like Abos or boongs or coons or whatever and it just cuts me, you know. Those words! And, you know, I just look at them. Most of them know [how it upsets me] ... and Scott would be like 'Woops! What did you just say?' Because he's no longer like that either, he doesn't say those things to me and now they all know ... I don't want to have fights with them or anything. I want them to be able to speak their mind. But they need to learn before they just shoot off ...

When Scott met Kirra her race was irrelevant; it was who she was as a person that attracted him:

What Kirra is to me has nothing to do with her being Aboriginal. I love her because she's beautiful. I love her because she wants to better herself and [the fact that] she's nearly finished a degree at uni takes a lot of guts and courage and I think that's good. Yeah! And, hmm, she's teaching me a lot, you know!

Enrolled in a degree at her local university, Kirra is learning more about her culture and likes to engage Scott in discussions as well. A spraypainter by trade, like his father and Kirra's father, hence their families' familiarity with each other, Scott is not averse to learning about Indigenous history. In the short period of time they have been together, Kirra has taken Scott to a couple of cultural events, including the Tjapukai Cultural Park in Cairns. According to Kirra, Scott 'really enjoyed it'. Referring to the short historical movie that was shown at the Centre, Scott adds: 'Yeah, the slaughtering and taking the children away and all that sort of stuff, certainly makes you think'.

This openness to learn about Kirra's culture extends to actively listening when she is in the midst of studying. As Kirra relates, 'like, you're studying and so often I read things back to Scott and he hears what I'm reading to him and he's like "Oh!! Oh wow!" and he learns a lot from that'. When asked what he has learned about Aboriginal Australia through his relationship with Kirra, Scott referred back to his schooling days:

We weren't really taught anything about the other side [of mainstream history at school]. We were just taught about James Cook and how he discovered Australia. We weren't taught anything as far as the Indigenous side goes.

When the interview was officially over and we were casually talking, Scott did mention that he felt fortunate to 'have Kirra share her experiences with me' and that by doing so she has 'helped me to see things differently'. Obviously, Scott does take seriously the experiences of Kirra's family and cultural history. Whilst Kirra maintains that he is 'easy going and pretty much open' to exploring Aboriginal history, Scott puts it down to the fact that he has 'matured more and understands more'. After all, 'maybe ten years ago I probably would have told her to get stuffed'! Whilst Scott found the Tjapukai Cultural Park in Cairns 'full-on', I don't think he was quite prepared for the question Kirra asked in relation to their visit.

Kirra: Did you feel ashamed?

Scott: A little baffled. *Yeah!* That's like somebody coming into me house and murdering you and taking your children away.

Kirra: But did you feel ashamed of being a white person or not?

Scott: It wasn't so much ashamed. I thought it was more to do with the English when they first came here, not particularly to do with me but I thought it

caused a lot of problems everywhere I suppose. They were taking over properties and they were colonising. But I don't know my ancestors were probably convicts ...

This intense cross-race jousting seems to be very much the fabric upon which their relationship is built. At one stage during the interview, Kirra becomes very involved and enquires of Scott:

- Kirra: Did you feel comfortable with the relationship or were there any feelings of being nervous or embarrassed in public with me?
Scott: No!
Kirra: You wouldn't be embarrassed to take me around to your friend's house or...
Scott: No. You have a nice tan!
Kirra: Ok, but if I was darker?
Scott: No. I wouldn't. Honestly, I wouldn't.

Clearly the humiliation of experiencing ostracism throughout her life has caused Kirra to question everything, including her own beloved at times. Although she appeared chatty and confident throughout the interview process there were moments when Kirra appeared visibly upset when discussing her experiences of social stigmatisation. Whilst Kirra maintains that people do not view her and Scott 'as an interracial couple because I am not very dark', it is the 'reverse racism' she encounters from 'both sides' which hurts her deeply. Sometimes these feelings of insecurity leave her feeling overwhelmed and overawed to the extent where she doubts herself. Although she has experienced times 'where people have judged me' Kirra sometimes finds it difficult to express these 'feelings that get to you' to Scott. When I questioned why, Kirra voiced the following:

I think Scott ... thinks that I am paranoid. Well, he says to me "You're paranoid about it, you know, you're making too much out of it or whatever. But, I guess they don't see it too. Maybe [I am] paranoid. But maybe we see it and they don't. They haven't grown up with it so they don't know what it's like ... But they don't know because they haven't had time to put up with it. They don't know.

What Kirra is discussing here is Scott's hesitancy in speaking about issues of race. Whilst the issue of racial identity has shadowed her all her life, Kirra cannot understand the lack of consideration this issue receives in the world of whiteness. In terms of Scott

she questions whether he deliberately avoids discussing the issue because he's uncomfortable with the topic or whether he truly *never* has thought about the issue, since he is predominantly white. As Kirra emphasises:

But I don't know whether it's them [white people in general] thinking we're paranoid because they don't want us to make an issue of it or whether it's just because, like I said, they truly don't understand ... They're not there. They haven't been there. They can't see it. They are just ignorant to it ... ignorant is a strong word ... it's just that they don't see it.

Whilst Scott does claim that Kirra may suffer a little 'paranoia', Kirra tends to think not. Regrettably, Scott was not confident in articulating his feelings about this topic, except to say that he likes it when Kirra takes the time out to explain things to his family:

Yeah, but you need to tell them Kirra because I can't. I haven't got the knowledge that you've got. And, I can't explain what you already told me, you know what I mean. I've learnt a lot from you but I can't explain it because I don't know a lot about it. And a lot of that was hidden even when I was young. Even at school they didn't educate you about that sort of stuff. They didn't tell us about Aboriginals. Aboriginals used to hunt kangaroos. That's all I knew.

Though some of Scott's best friends 'were Aboriginal', he does admit to having some 'bad experiences with Aboriginal people' as well. Nevertheless, Scott has been introduced to a brand-new world and now finds himself step-father to Kirra's teenage son who he 'loves'. Whilst Scott does not worry about the racial identity of his stepson, as much as core values like honesty, respect, and willingness to work, Kirra does. To Kirra, her son's racial identity means everything to her. Highly conscious of her fair skin, Kirra wants to ensure that her son continues to acknowledge his ancestry so that future generations understand the continuing impact of history in this country:

If he hides that he's Aboriginal that hurts me. See, he's always been told that he is [Aboriginal] too, or that his mum is or that nanna is ... So, he's still got that link.

Whilst Kirra maintains that she would 'get angry if I hear him say anything bad, [about his Aboriginal identity]' her son is 'accepted in the Indigenous community' nevertheless. As Kirra affirms, 'They don't have a problem with it and he doesn't seem to get the racism that I had. Because they all play football too see. So that's a big thing'.

When asked if they had any last comments for a person entering an interracial relationship, Kirra suggested that they 'just have to be strong and if they really love each other then they can make it work ... If you let everything that is happening around you affect you, then it's not going to work'. The problem with interracial relationships, as Kirra sees it, is that 'some people are really attached to their family and when they grow up and they decide that they want to be with somebody ... if that person can't get along with their family, that's where a lot of the problems occur'. Whilst Kirra and Scott's families were both accepting and supportive of their relationship, Kirra maintains that this is not always the case for everyone. Sometimes 'interracial relationships can end badly and scar you for life'; as was the case with her first interracial experience. Otherwise, they 'sort of push you to be patient and flexible. But, you know, if you can negotiate your way through it and transcend the differences, it can take you to exhilarating heights too! Yeah, whilst they're challenging, they're also enriching'. She further observes:

Well, if we use us as an example, like the fact that we've met and I'm able to teach Scott about my culture, then we can teach our kids and then hopefully that will carry on and then that could improve [society], you know, that way.

Whilst Kirra finally adds that 'We're pretty cool, we handle it all', Scott finishes with 'Got to hey!'

Chapter 4

DISCUSSING RACE, GENDER AND IDENTITY

Does Love Conquer All?

In the early morning light his skin glowed against the dark red sheets. I woke to the touch of his hand on my arm. Even in sleep he has to know I am there. How peaceful he looks. How unsettled I feel. The realisation has hit me. I never imagined myself falling in love with a white man, much less living with one. But, it has happened and I am forced to deal with it. I can no longer fight myself. I have struggled long enough with the clichéd views buried deep within my mind about white men and what they may think about black women. It is time to challenge them, to be brave and face the truth that my world as I know it is swiftly starting to change. Am I ready for this? Am I ready to step outside the known blackness of my world and venture into the unknown whiteness of his? Am I ready to transgress the colour line so firmly embedded in my psyche and truly recognise the virtues of diversity instead of merely paying it lip service? My heart sings 'yes', yet my head screams 'No'. Then, he awakes and in a sincere tone, he says to me: 'Do you know why I like being with you so much?' I am afraid to respond. 'Because ... I like your quiet confidence, the taste of your lips, the feel of your skin ... and the fact that you make me feel different ... unnerves me'. I still remember my reaction to his complicated statement of attraction — he feels the same way I do! He, too, is a little ambivalent; perhaps a little lost 'in love'. Then, a pause ... and joy overwhelms me as I begin to understand that there is hope for this relationship to blossom after all. Instantly, I don't feel so afraid. Ever so confidently I squeeze his hand and just let myself bask in the glow of the early morning light as I soak up his glorious presence beside me ...

Narratives in the form of stories represent the ways in which people try to make sense of their world and the social world around them (Cluster et al, 2008; Aguirre, 2000). Although many of the narratives in this chapter serve as important vehicles through which unique perspectives can be viewed, they also highlight the inconsistencies between what people say and what they actually mean. Whilst my story, which opens this chapter, illustrates some of my profound reactions to an ever-deepening and ever-enlarging interracial romance, it is also loaded with connotations that may appear confounding, even uncomfortable to some readers. For example, what does it mean when an Aboriginal women says 'I have struggled long enough with the clichéd views buried deep within my mind about

white men and what they may think about black women'. Would you say the female protagonist in this vignette was sympathetic or judgmental of white men, or somewhere in between? In other words, is she considerate or narrow-minded, biased or racist? Is she inferring that white men only think of black women in terms of sexual trophies? Or, is she alluding to long-standing stereotypes and assumptions about sexual contact between Aboriginal women and white men?

Interracial intimacy has long remained a 'hotbed' of controversy in Australia. Whilst powerful sanctions against the forging of interracial relationships between Aboriginal and whites existed in the past, the question is, how are they perceived today? Do they continue to exist on the margins of society or, as the opening story illustrates, do they instead force us to rethink some of our own embedded ideas of racial categorisations? Given the strong social opposition long associated with interracial relationships, can the ability of two individuals to love across racial lines impact the social structure of race relations in this country, or in reverse cause even deeper divisions? In this chapter, I present key findings from responses to questions about contemporary interracial relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal couples and then I discuss the associated meanings attached to these unions. In doing so, I bring to the surface issues that are not just individual concerns but rather reflections of larger racial issues that permeate Australian society.

These issues include how couples experience the public gaze, confront their racial identities, raise biracial children and negotiate racial, gender and class differences. The results reveal how divergent the couples' experiences were when they introduced their partners to their families, how they began to learn, adopt and adjust to an otherwise 'foreign' culture, and what impact these adjustments have had on their identities. The results indicate that the experience of being with an Aboriginal spouse disrupts previous understandings white spouses held towards specific race-based issues. Another major finding is that interracial couples live a 'dual reality' that highlights just how 'ordinary' they are, despite keenly perceiving the racial attitudes of the community around them. Whilst some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families initially disapproved of their child marrying someone outside their race, results show that these 'concerns' were markedly different from each other and were tied to the history of race relations in Australia.

If you really love somebody, who cares?

According to Custer et al (2008), 'almost anyone in a serious relationship has been asked, at some point, to tell the story of how that relationship began' (p. 1). Whether 'it's friends eager for gossip about the latest prospect, parents curious as to where their offspring met a potential suitor, children at an anniversary party curious to know where their parents' relationship began', all are intrigued by the stories individuals and couples tell about their initial attraction (p. 1). In the American context, Byrd and Garwick (2004), along with Yancey and Yancy (2007), confirm that this is particularly true for those individuals involved in a black-white interracial relationship, especially when it includes negotiating deep-seated stereotypes associated with the former condition of slavery where white plantation owners routinely raped black female slaves.

In the Australian context, one can then appreciate the sensitive nature of recalling the memory and creating the narrative of how the couples met. Historically, the couples involved in this study represent the mixing of 'irreconcilable dichotomies' (Van Kirk, 2002, p. 1). Whilst one culture represented all that was considered civilised, pure and superior, the other represented all that was loose, immoral, diseased, abhorrent and inferior (Huggins, 1998; Roberts, 2001). Therefore, the simple task of 'telling' their 'beginning attraction' story was particularly challenging for some couples. For example, here is one beginning relationship narrative, told by Maddie, an Aboriginal wife who describes her 'embarrassment' at having to recall her first memories of meeting her husband.

Oh gosh, I'm embarrassed to say. Mason was in the Army and he was on duty and I had gone down to the mess to have a few drinks with friends. I was kind of forced into going. Yeah, I met Mason and I had a few drinks. I think I was flirting with him a bit and the next thing I know I get home and I get this phone call at work the following Monday. So, my friend had given him my phone number and that's how we met. By chance!

In contrast, the following is a more nuanced narrative as told by an Aboriginal woman, Kirra and her partner Scott, demonstrating some of the sensitivities these topics raise.

Kirra: Okay, so if I left you for someone who was Indigenous, would it bother you?
Scott: Of course it would.

Kirra: Because they are Indigenous or because I was just leaving you?
Scott: I would be jealous!
Kirra: Would it hurt you more if I left you for a white man or an Indigenous man?
Scott: It doesn't matter. Both of them would be in trouble. I would get you back!
Kirra: If my skin was darker would you still have considered having a relationship with me?
Scott: Of course I would.
Kirra: Why?
Scott: Because you're beautiful.

When I asked this couple how they initially met, it was interesting to observe the way in which they interacted. In her American studies on interracial relationships among black-white couples, Childs (2008) finds that asking white subjects to talk about their views of being involved with a black partner is often controversial, eliciting a pattern of responses or, more accurately, a lack of response whereby 'whites were often silent or hesitant to speak about issues of race and interracial relationships' (p. 2774). Whether this pattern could be interpreted as a strategic move to avoid discussing sensitive issues 'for fear of saying something wrong or being perceived as racist' is certainly something to consider in light of the above narrative (p. 2774). Here we have a case where an Aboriginal woman becomes so frustrated with her partner's evasiveness, that she pin-pointedly asks him whether her blackness affected his decision to form a partnership with her. Interestingly, whilst he responds to her questions, he delicately avoids the question of race, choosing to focus on the issue of physical attraction instead. Whilst Scott certainly melted my heart when he stated she 'was beautiful', in reality this scenario felt electrifyingly intense. Whether Scott deliberately deflected the bullets because he thought he would encounter a 'firestorm of criticism' or because he strategically wanted to avoid being labelled a racist is uncertain (Foeman and Nance, 2002). What is certain is that this scenario only serves to highlight just how sensitive and volatile such conversations can be. In particular, it shows the fragility and vulnerability one may feel when confronted with hard and fast questions about emotionally charged topics.

Foeman and Nance (2002) maintain that much of this vulnerability and volatility can be attributed to the fact that interracial attraction brings to the forefront two issues of great ambivalence: sex and race. Therefore, the probability that sexual attraction may be tied to a complex racial past can 'generate very uncomfortable feelings for many people'

(p. 239). In the case of the above scenario, Scott knew he was dealing with a sensitive issue by the manner in which his Aboriginal partner Kirra fired the questions determinedly and purposefully. Given the past condemnation of such relationships that pathologised them as problematic and perverse, one can then understand the discomfort Scott felt when questioned about sexual preferences relating to race.

However, whilst some partners felt some slight discomfort in telling their stories, others thrived and seemed to enjoy the experience. The following is a narrative explaining the attraction between Bo, a white Australian, and his Aboriginal partner of 10 years.

- Ana: Our eyes connected at a mutual friend's 21st gathering. After chatting for a while, he actually serenaded me! Can't remember the song, but I do remember feeling just a touch embarrassed. No-one had done that before!!! But, that's what I love about him, his ability to always surprise me, his self-assuredness and confidence in knowing what he wants; his ability to connect with me and make me feel beautiful. What I also love is his wit, his intelligence and the fact that we share the same values and interests just strengthens our commitment to each other.
- Bo: Yeah, we both like a drink on the patio, only I like beer and she likes a chardonnay.
- Ana: Mmm, we both like discussing the latest politics and what's happening in our childrens' lives too.
- Bo: See, that's what I mean, I love her feistiness, her strength, her independence, her sense of adventure and reckless abandonment, especially when we reminisce of when we first met ... followed by some fun.
- Ana: I can't believe you just said that! Do you have to tell the world?
- Bo: Why not! Face it darlin', after 10 years, you're still attracted to me!

Whilst some couples mentioned love and sexual attraction as their reason for forming a relationship, as the following narrative reveals, Kat, an Aboriginal lady, specifically stated that she chose her partner, Paul, on the basis of race.

But I would say I knew I was going to marry white ... because, I don't like to say this, but blackfellas are known for their treatment of women very well and ... If I had found a guy like Dad and he was black it would not have mattered, but I wasn't looking for a black guy. I was looking for a white guy to settle with, so it was just lucky that Paul turned up at that time.

In this case, Kat revealed that she knew she was going to marry white because she held a predetermined view of Aboriginal men and the lifestyle they offered. Despite

the fact that her father identified as Aboriginal and she cherished him dearly, she was determined to 'marry white' because she felt that Aboriginal men had a reputation for mistreating their spouse. Whether she observed this firsthand or not was never mentioned, but what Kat did disclose was a deep-rooted belief that, in order to succeed and get ahead in society, she needed to find a partner who shared the same values and aspirations as her. As a young woman, Kat wanted more than the mundane lifestyle that cleaning hospital floors brought. When she met Paul and fell in love, she articulated her views of interracial marriage not as a problem, but rather as an opportunity to obliterate entrenched boundaries of race and culture with their imposed assumptions of black womanhood and what was 'usually expected of my gender in the 1970s'.

According to Childs (2008), when 'blacks' decide to form an intimate relationship with a white man, they are often accused of 'selling out' and turning their backs on their community. For some American 'blacks' interracial coupling signifies a lack of moral and economic commitment to the African American community. In Australia, some Aboriginal people do express indignation about those who couple interracially on the grounds that 'shacking up' with a whitefella is viewed as lacking a sense of pride in their culture. When I first informed family and friends that I was thinking about moving in with my white boyfriend of three months, the initial response was not encouraging. Although several of my friends did have previous relationships with white men, I was unprepared for the overt 'messages' that followed. Made to feel like a criminal offender, I had to respond to several suggestions that I was betraying my culture. These feelings of betrayal were also evident when I introduced my partner to my aunt who unashamedly told me to 'be careful as some whitefellas cannot be trusted'.

It was introductions such as these that lingered in my mind, leaving me feeling utterly bereft of speech, hope and comprehension. Why did loving a white man make me feel like a traitor to my race? What was I doing that was considered so offensive? Whilst I thought I had personally confronted my own inner demons about 'sleeping with the enemy', I was unprepared for the disparaging comments made by those closest to me. Eventually, I came to realise that the concerns I faced were not exclusive to me but, rather, had a structural component that was intrinsically connected to being in an interracial

relationship. In speaking to the participants of this interracial study, I recognised a pattern similar to mine. Several of the partners began questioning themselves during the attraction phase; several of them struggled with mixed feelings about their relationship.

Ana described how she had to battle some serious inner struggles because of the prejudice she would confront.

Look, initially I, uhmm, questioned myself. Why am I attracted to this man, a white man and all? What do I mean to him? Am I just a casual fling, a classic case of jungle fever, or does he truly have mutual feelings for me? I knew that if I was to introduce him to my family, I had to be very certain of his feelings in order to defend the comments that would come my way. And the biggest question that did come my way was 'What's wrong with a black man?'

Kirra also emphasised the profound ambivalence she felt during the courtship stage of her relationship with Scott. Having had experienced a 'bad' interracial relationship previously, Kirra explained that she approached the relationship in a hesitant and cautious manner.

I really needed to ensure that Scott and I weren't going too fast and that he accepted me for me. I guess I just wanted him to realise that my heritage was not something I was willing to sacrifice. I copped a lot of crap, including being labelled derogatory names in my first relationship, so I definitely wasn't going through that cycle again.

Scott, on the other hand, conveyed that he did not notice differences between him and Kirra. His reasons for being with her were because 'she was beautiful'. To Scott, eliminating a potential mate on the basis of their skin colour is 'ridiculous'. However, whilst he saw 'no problems' in regards to his mate's choice of 'an Asian girl', he's also aware that some mates think that it is 'suicidal' to date interracially. 'But they're gutless. If they can't face up to you, they're not a mate.'

Ana's partner, Bo, answered in a similar way to Scott. Having been involved in an interracial relationship previously, Bo was unperturbed about what people thought about his decision to enter a relationship with an Aboriginal woman. As far as he was concerned:

People who felt obliged to respond negatively to my decision were not worth associating with. Such thinking never makes any sense to me. If anything, it just

shows what ignorant cowboys they are! Yes, meeting Ana did force me to take a long, hard look at my feelings for her but I could find no reason to 'stop'. Our backgrounds may be different but those differences don't define who we are as a couple. Sometimes they can create some mighty big disagreements, but the spark and essence of who we are and what we mean to each other remain rock solid.

As many of the narratives in this study denote, telling the story of how their relationship began was either embarrassing or troubled with tension for some couples, but positively exhilarating, liberating and uplifting for others. Whilst the majority of the couples found the experience reassuring and affirming, others indicated the cognitive dissonance they encountered when faced with ever-deepening feelings for their spouse. In particular, there are hints that some Aboriginal women experienced a critical shift in their racial thinking, which brought to light nuances that had not surfaced previously. As Ana's account shows, falling in love with a white man caused her to question not only the sincerity and motives of her partner, but also herself. The culprit of such questioning as Ana highlights 'stems back to history, where black women were viewed as sexual objects, a piece of "black velvet" to be used and abused'.

In her work on *Encountering the Other: one Indigenous Australian woman's experience of racialization on a Saturday night*, Blanch (2013) also confirms the strength of this perception when she candidly reveals how 'conversation/stories about sexual encounters between female cousins, aunties and white ringers and police' were common knowledge and practice in rural and remote communities (p. 254). According to Blanch, she 'learnt from an early age with a *sense of knowing* about what, how and why Aboriginal women are perceived in particular ways by white men' (p. 254). In the light of how Aboriginal women *sense* they can be perceived by others, it is not surprising that some are often suspicious that all 'white males' want from relationships is sex. When the relationship therefore grows more intimate, deeply ingrained fears and myths that have been ostensibly passed down from generation to generation through family portals ruminate and take effect.

As a result, forming an interracial relationship has significant psychological and social consequences that reposition some Aboriginal women at the 'racial border' of their own families and communities (Killian 2001a, 2012). In 'joining the enemy', Aboriginal

women not only have to renegotiate their own sense of racial insecurities but they must also confront new systems of discrimination that view such transgressions as a blatant act of filial disloyalty. After all, as my aunt reminded me 'there are reasons as to why you can't trust a white man'. Whilst I understand that her fears and resentment of white men are associated with a violent past that casts an ugly stain on relationships between white men and black women, the sad reality is they also fuel anti-white attitudes and contribute to the opposition of Aboriginal women towards forming romantic interracial partnerships with white men. Even though this cautionary warning was meant to protect me from 'being hurt', it also serves to highlight some of the powerful dynamics at play that can lead Aboriginal women to question themselves, their partner and even their own communities. At a time when entering a relationship should be an exuberant and promising event, some Aboriginal women experience deep emotional scarring that supersedes the overall level of joy one should feel when planning to make a serious commitment.

Similar to Foeman and Nance's (2002) findings in America, it appears that 'blacks' in Australia are more open to interracial relationships and just as cautious of them. As the narratives of Aboriginal women in this study attest, they too have to learn to 'manage many competing images' within their own communities, and also within their own minds about the negative stereotyping of white men (p. 247). However, whilst such ambivalence impacts their sense of racial identity and plays havoc with their inner feelings, it does not prevent their choice of a white man as a partner. When asked what ignited the spark of attraction for their partner, their responses were similar to other people in this study who mentioned compatibility and commitment. With the exception of Kat who found the attraction of being with someone different to an Aboriginal male alluring, other Aboriginal female partners in this study approached their relationship hesitantly and warily. Yet, Kat did not hesitate to question her attraction for someone 'outside' her race. Intuitively, Kat knew she was 'looking for a white guy to settle with'. Compared to her usual routine, Paul offered her a military lifestyle that differentially emphasised security, stability and an escape from the extended family regime where social engagement with kin determined one's everyday reality. The fact that he 'had a six-pack [body] and was gorgeous', she admitted, also contributed to her decision to 'marry white'.

Apart from Kat who chose her partner on the basis of race, many of the other partners, both black and white, indicated otherwise. Kat's white partner Paul, for example, 'never saw [himself] as marrying into an Aboriginal family'. Before he met Kat, Paul had no desire to 'marry anybody other than the normal girl next door'. Maddie, an Aboriginal woman with a flair for stylish dressing has been married to Mason, an Australian with Dutch heritage, for 18 years. When asked what the defining factors were that contributed to their decision to marry, they stated straight up that neither of them thought they would marry 'outside' of their own culture and race:

Maddie: I never would have gone out with a whitefella ... and I'm sure you never thought you would go out with an Aboriginal girl?
Mason: No!

As Maddie elaborated further, 'Even before I met Mason, I always said I would never go out with a white guy. But when I met him, I didn't see his colour. That didn't even come into it. I think we just clicked'. Similar to Maddie and Mason, Nate also stressed that whilst race may have been a factor he considered initially, it never changed his feelings for Darlene. Though he 'preferred to have married a dark person', the reality is that 'you have got to ... be compatible and be in love with that person'. The reason why Nate continued to pursue his relationship with Darlene was that she 'was looking for a stable partner, a person to grow old with ... and she had all the other same ideas and values that I liked'.

For Darlene, marrying Nate has caused all of her 'fantasies' to come true. When Darlene first spotted Nate, she 'just liked the look of him'. For Darlene the curiosity and interest in racially different men began from an early age. As she clarifies, 'When I was a kid I used to fantasise about running away with an Indian chief'. As a result when she saw Nate, 'he sort of reminded me of an [American] Indian chief ... so I started to fixate on this Indian look about him and I didn't even realise that he was Indigenous [Australian].'

Out of all my interviewees, observing the interaction between Darlene and Nate as they spoke about their coming together story was a fascinating scenario to witness. The way they looked at each other, touched each other and playfully conversed with each other spoke volumes in terms of their physical attraction. When Nate first saw her at the

club where he worked, he was 'instantly' attracted to her and 'thought what a nice bird she was'. Recalling the time when he saw her 'sitting up there like a little cockatoo being cheeky', all Nate wanted to do was 'knock her of her perch' but in a 'nice way!' Who spotted who first is uncertain, what is certain is that it was Darlene's fascination with racial difference that triggered a long-term romantic relationship with an Aboriginal man; not in spite of it. From this perspective, it can be presumed that, for Darlene, forming an interracial relationship with someone outside her culture and race only served to heighten her curiosity and intensify the attraction she felt for Nate.

As Rosenblatt et al (1995) have noted, forming a committed interracial relationship may have profound effects on one's sense of racial identity. Even though this was not the case for Darlene and Kat, who revelled in the opportunity to explore their attraction for difference further, this was very much the situation for several of the other Aboriginal women who spoke about the initial dissonance they felt when deciding to enter a committed relationship. Acutely aware of their social location in popular mythology as sexualised objects, Aboriginal women find themselves at a crossroads when compelled to evaluate their own motives for loving a whitefella versus the motives of the men they have fallen in love with. More significantly, they then have to weigh up and renegotiate the ruminations passed down through their own family portals versus the ruminations of a collective white consciousness that brands them 'loose' and lascivious women. 'The only person who can help you in this valley of indecision is your significant other,' says Ana. She further comments that 'If your partner truly loves you, he will reassure you and prove your fears wrong'.

Evidently, Bo did 'prove' himself to Ana as she maintains that 'In hindsight, I had nothing to fear. Don't get me wrong, there have been lots of twists and turns but he genuinely cares for me!' While these narratives indicate that love, security, having the same values and a shared vision of 'growing old together' were all elements that helped bridge the divisions each partner represented, they also demonstrate that some interracial couples experience certain levels of stress that leave them feeling ambivalent about their relationship. Whereas some of the participants saw their interracial relationship as an adventure to embrace, others expressed their surprise at pairing up with someone they

never imagined falling in love with. Others still, like Bo and Scott, thought it shallow and superficial to dismiss their relationships based solely on colour. Despite taking a 'long, hard look' at his feelings for Ana, Bo stated that he '... could not find any reason to stop'. According to Bo, 'I'm white, she's black, so what? Skin colour is irrelevant'. Interestingly, if anything, it is this motto that unites many of the partners in this study. When the afterglow of attraction wears off, and love stealthily creeps in, many realise the certainty that the catchphrase 'love sees no colour' brings to their lives and defend it fervently. As Mason claims: 'If you really love someone, who cares!'

In many ways, the narratives of Aboriginal and white partners in this study validate the perspective often espoused by interracial couples that they are 'like every other couple' (Killian 2001b; Root, 2001). More notably, they claim that the colour of a person's skin is not important when it comes to matters of the heart. Despite the cultural barriers based on race and gender, having mutual interests and similar traits as your partner far outweighs any sense of conflicting identity politics that one may initially feel when contemplating the risk of loving across racial lines. These findings parallel the work by Maria Root (2001), who established that 'love alone' was the major motivating force in the decision of almost all of her 21 participants to start an interracial relationship (p. 6). The irony of such findings, as shown by Cowlshaw (2004) and a later study by Luke and Carrington (2010) on interracial relationships in Australia is that whilst many interracial couples develop ideals that contradict their socialisation, race does affect one's life experiences. Therefore, regardless of whether interracial couples acknowledge it or not, cultural and racial differences do have the potential to present issues for couples, as does gender and class.

You're marrying an Aboriginal, are you crazy?

In their study on 50 interracial families in Australia, Luke and Carrington (2010) infer that the very reasons people make claims about not 'seeing' colour is because skin colour and race 'do matter'. Despite downplaying skin colour as irrelevant and insignificant, it is widely acknowledged in Australia that race has a significant impact on one's life experiences; including the formation of intimate relationships that were once closely regulated

(Huggins, 1998; Ellinghaus, 2006; Luke and Carrington, 2010). Though resistance to interracial relationships is historically embedded in Australia's struggle with a racist past, Henry-Waring (2006) maintains that there still remains 'a deep sense of agony and rawness' in terms of how interracial relationships are perceived today (p. 5). This finding concurs with the study of Cowlshaw (2004), who examined the ambiguous borderlands of interracial intimacy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Bourke and discovered that opposition to interracial pairing is still rife today.

In *Blackfellas, Whitefellas and the hidden injuries of race*, Cowlshaw (2004) writes about the involvement of two white men in intimate relationships with Aboriginal women and documents the entrenched hostility they encounter on a daily basis. By drawing on firsthand accounts of the discrimination these men face from members of their own particular race, Cowlshaw (2004) provides evidence of racially fractured families who elected to disown their child rather than embrace or respect their decision to form a relationship with an Aboriginal woman. Rick, one of Cowlshaw's interview subjects, explains that 'Years ago I had white friends. Growing up I would have, but now I've got more black friends than white friends ... and that's a fact ... I don't talk to me family' (p. 118). Similar to Cowlshaw's (2004) findings, my study has found that whilst interracial couples themselves do not believe they are doing anything wrong, some of their family members do.

Specifically, partners in this study described dealing with an array of negative responses from parents and extended family members to their decision to form a committed relationship. These responses vacillated from disbelief and anxiety about their kin's decision to 'step outside' their race to outright indignation and alienation when they decided to inform their parents that they were going to marry. Whilst this pressure was mostly applied earlier in the relationship, some couples struggled to make sense of their parents' disappointing first reactions nevertheless. One partner spoke about his family's decision not to attend his wedding and others spoke of being 'gently interrogated' about their motives for wanting to pursue a committed relationship with someone different from their own racial upbringing. Whilst both gestures have high symbolic value, they also represent the varying levels of resistance to the arrival of someone deemed 'wide of the mark'. Paul, in particular, spoke at length about how his relatives, including his mother boycotted his

wedding ceremony. Whereas marrying his Aboriginal partner Kat 'wasn't an issue' for him, it seems that it was 'a huge issue ... for everybody around me'.

Frankenberg (1993) proposes in her study of a similar event that 'refusing to attend a wedding suggests a refusal to witness and thereby endorse the public entrance of a stranger – here a stranger of the “wrong” kind into the family fold' (p.103). In Paul and Kat's case, it appears that there is some weight to this suggestion. Paul's mother's outburst 'You're marrying an Aboriginal, are you crazy?' indicates outrage, if not outright opposition to the 'kind' of bride her son has chosen to marry. On a deeper level, it also implies moral condemnation and judgment of not only Kat, but also her race as well. Whilst Paul maintains that his mother's 'only vision of anything Aboriginal was ... kids having runny noses', one can interpret her decision to turn up 'without warning' as a frantic act of filial duty to persuade her son otherwise. In her mind, this was her one last bid as a mother to rescue her son from making a bad decision. Her unexpected arrival was not something Paul initially anticipated.

Frankenberg (1993) further advises that one reason why some parents choose to embargo their offspring's interracial wedding is because their public and private persona may be 'at odds' (p.103). As Paul talked about the reactions of his mother to his decision to marry an Aboriginal woman in the early 1970s, it became clear that his mother's private and public 'face' contradicted her behaviour. When Paul's mother initially arrived she was 'done up to the nines' but, after experiencing Townsville's muggy conditions '... she pulled her hair off and the faces around the table were just priceless. Then the teeth came out, the pearls came off. She put on a comfortable house coat and it was like she had lived there all her life.'

Here the private and public dichotomy is exemplified by the 'two faces' presented by Paul's mother. Despite the unbridled tension within the home on this hot, muggy day, Paul's mother chose not to attend the wedding ceremony; neither did his brothers who 'were invited but didn't turn up'. Instead, they opted to 'send a telegram' and 'wished us well', says Kat. According to Frankenberg (1993), such deliberate acts of refusal, could be interpreted as 'an apparent rejection' of Paul's wife (p.103). Although Paul commented that he 'still didn't know why she didn't come', he also noted that Kat's mother, 'Really

liked me straight off. She just wrapped me up in her arms, took me in and said “Ok, you’re the boy!”, meaning as you are the ‘boy’ my daughter has chosen then you are most welcome to stay. After that Paul maintains that he ‘literally moved in that night, that’s how quick it was.’

Contrastingly, Paul’s recounting of his own mother’s reception was disquieting. Whereas Kat’s mother accepted her daughter’s decision to marry a white man, Paul intuitively knew that his mother would react differently. Identifying race as a central social marker, he thought she ‘would take about a week and then phone back and tell me she was disgusted with me’. By applying the phrase ‘disgusted with me’ in this context implies an assessment being made of the worth and qualities of the group under scrutiny. In this case, judgment is being made on the undesirable status and stigma associated with wanting to marry into an Aboriginal family. Alternatively, it also reveals more about the morals of the person making the assessment than about the reality of what is assessed. The fact that Paul’s mother informed him previously that she was ‘pretty well, all things considered’ suggests to me that she was fine, until she heard the disappointing news of her son’s engagement.

Therefore, as Frankenberg (1993) advises, one can interpret the decision to boycott her son’s wedding as an outright refusal to publicly endorse a marriage she opposed. As she did not view her son’s relationship with Kat as a partnership between equals, her conspicuous absence could also register as a notice ‘of protest’, or even an ‘act of war’ (Luke and Carrington, 2010, p. 15; Root, 1994). In this instance, a flagrant denouncement and dismissal of what she regards as socially unacceptable in-laws. This confers with the findings of Root (2001) who claims that whilst families give signals that they are unperturbed by the introduction of someone who is racially different, people are not necessarily thrilled when it becomes personal. This dismissal of the wedding can therefore be interpreted as a signal that they ‘like’ Kat as a person; just not that she is Aboriginal.

Despite the common ground found when Paul’s mother ‘unmasked’ herself and ‘everyone was happy’, the mask was fastidiously readjusted once outside the home. Because she sidestepped the wedding, her non-appearance on such an auspicious occa-

sion marked her denial to celebrate the tying together of two groups she deemed as utterly separate. Whether her absenteeism signified a direct act of disowning her son for committing such a reprehensible act; a 'you are no longer my son' statement or not cause's some confusion even for Paul who notes that he still does not know why she 'didn't come'. Inversely, while Kat argues that Paul's mother 'didn't stand in our way'; the reality is, after 30 years of marriage and two grandchildren later, Kat still addresses her mother-in-law in a formal manner. Instead of referring to her as Jocelyn, Kat says that 'even now I call her Mrs Clarke'.

Such stiff and ceremonious behaviour demarcates the lines between 'tightly defended group boundaries' (Frankenberg, 1994, p. 104). It also exemplifies an intransigent adherence to ensuring that social standards are enforced and complied with. In this case, rather than relating to each other in familiar terms, a hierarchical arrangement is drawn dividing both women into two different classes. This arrangement is designed to keep outsiders, like Kat, from entering and reflects the ideology that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. Determined to protect her white racial heritage and social standing, Jocelyn insists that Kat refers to her as Mrs Clarke because in her eyes, her son has married beneath his station. In tying the knot with Kat, Paul has violated the code of homogamy, which presupposes that if you are white, then you marry white and reproduce children who are also white; 'half-breeds' only upset the status quo.

The reason why there is no level playing field between Kat and her mother-in-law is because Kat has contaminated the mould. Kat does not fit into the neat little sanitised box labelled 'white and middle-class'. Consequently, Kat and Jocelyn's relationship is based on a deep-seated notion of an assumed white ascendancy that overshadows their interactions. In obligingly referring to her mother-in-law as Mrs Clarke, Kat is caught in a horrible bind. Since she feels the necessity to form a connection, it is important to Kat that she takes seriously the wishes of her mother-in-law. In doing so, Kat finds herself in the paradoxical position of having to sacrifice her own value system or suffer the consequences of alienating her beloved's mother and her children's grandmother. Kat already knows that a thin line already exists between her and her mother-in-law. Wanting to maintain a positive relationship, Kat has therefore learnt to deal with the paradox; not become

diminished by it. Because Kat is aware of the complex cost of maintaining a relationship based on trumped-up constructions of class and race, the accusation that she has sold her 'blackness for a white ideal' does not sufficiently summarise her relationship with her mother-in-law (Childs 2008, p. 2780). Instead, what these stories reveal is that racism and classism lurks everywhere, even in what may momentarily appear to be a kind and unguarded face.

These stories also reveal some of the challenges partners were willing to overcome in order to maintain amicable family connections. Rather than accepting a lessened sense of self-worth because of disapproval, Kat aspires to be the 'bigger person'. As did many other partners who were questioned about their decision to form a lifelong commitment to a partner from the opposite race. Despite living in an age of uncensored romance, where people can and do fall in love interracially, Maria Root (2001) contends that because race is a factor in interracial relationships, it becomes like 'a business transaction' (p. 23). She further explains that, whilst white families have traditionally viewed interracial relationships as a loss of social status, black families perceive them as a weakening of cultural solidarity. In line with Root's (2001) findings, one can therefore interpret reactions like 'Just because you've had a child doesn't mean you have to marry her' or 'sometimes it's best to stick to your own' as examples of parents who register their child's newfound happiness as a loss for their family. By questioning their child's decision to form an interracial relationship, they are imposing their own ethnocentric and prejudicial views of what they perceive to be the order of things. The notion that one 'should stick to their own' highlights the persistent need to enforce racial classifications. In the minds of family, race is central to socialisation and corresponds with the thinking of Feagin (2001), who suggests that people draw a dichotomous line that sees whites at one end of the spectrum and blacks at the other. Therefore racial homogamy becomes a normative standard, where marrying or living with the right partner becomes a filial duty or 'transaction' (Root, 2001). If children choose not to comply with the rule of 'sticking to your own' or go against family wishes by marrying their partner of another race, then they find themselves either 'moving interstate, away from all the negativity,' or 'facing up to it' says Kirra.

Whilst studies by Byrd et al (2006) found that ‘the turning point’ for the resolving of turmoil within the family of origin was the birth of the first grandchild, this worked in reverse for Kirra and Ana (p. 28). Whereas Kirra and Ana’s family of origin were excited about the birth of their first grandchild, their white in-laws were wary. Ana, in particular, stated that overhearing a comment directed at her partner ‘floored’ her. The remark, ‘just because you’ve had a child doesn’t mean you have to marry her’ wounded and confused Ana. But, as Ana maintains, ‘I can comprehend their misgivings. Reservations abound on my side as well’. Similarly, Kirra also relayed a story of anguish and confusion. In reference to her first interracial relationship, Kirra stated that her then mother-in-law did not exactly express any joy when she heard the news of the approaching birth of her first grandchild. The comment ‘Oh, he got a half-caste pregnant’, ‘cut’ Kirra deeply. In light of the fact that ‘all seemed well on the surface’ both women did not know how to interpret these experiences. Economically, they were both professional women who contributed substantially to the financial responsibilities of upholding a household. Yet, whilst Ana felt uncomfortable applying the label ‘racist’ to loved ones who she deemed as ‘generally open-minded people’, Kirra emphasised the need to ‘ignore the signs’. Instead, she told herself to ‘be strong and just ignore the hurt’. She further stated that she had to ‘let it go’. In both instances, both women tried to be the ‘bigger person’ despite the rejection they encountered. Whilst disapproval based on the intersections of race, culture and class emerged as variant categories for both groups, these narratives indicate that it was relatively more salient for Aboriginal female participants.

Conversely, many of the partners shared some beautiful narratives of their families’ willingness to accept and embrace their interracial relationship. Although some mentioned feeling tension from at least one side of the family, most of the tension was perceived as transitional in nature. For example, Maddie spoke about how she interpreted her father’s response to her going out with a white man. Whilst her mum ‘didn’t have a problem with it’, Maddie thought her father ‘didn’t accept it at first’. In her words, ‘he was from the old school where he just wanted us to ... find an Aboriginal person’. Even though Maddie always thought her father wanted her relationship to ‘just fizzle out’, things are different now. After ‘Dad got over that’, Maddie maintains that he ‘really accepts Mason and has a lot of respect for him, now’. As does Maddie’s extended family. According to her ‘they all

love Mason, all my aunties and uncles and cousins'. Unlike Paul's mother, who did not attend his wedding to Kat, Maddie's white mother-in law accepted her son's decision to marry an Aboriginal woman unreservedly. As Maddie relays:

I had spoken to her and she told me about when Mason rang her to tell her that he was going out with someone. She reckons that he was really nervous. He was 'Oh Mum, there's something that I need to tell you. Maddie is Aboriginal'. I started laughing and she goes 'Mason, that's got nothing to do with it. Are you happy?' So I knew she had accepted me even though we hadn't met.

Nodding his head in agreement, Mason also supports Maddie's account of how his mother reacted to the news of their 'togetherness': 'When I called mum and told her, she said "Oh, about bloody time! Is this one going to settle you down?"'

Although partners spoke of an initial wariness and disapproval of a family member, they also noted a general shift in perception. For example, just as Maddie spoke about her father's disapproval of Mason, Paul also experienced a similar scenario with his Aboriginal father-in-law. Whilst Paul thought that his father-in-law 'wasn't going to completely enfold me [into the family]' the dynamics changed 12 months later. Like Maddie's father, Paul's father-in-law 'bowed to the inevitable' once he knew the relationship was honourable, viable and sustaining. Whilst there were 'problems before', Paul maintains that 'it eventually all worked out'.

Unlike white families who believe that interracial relationships are a social embarrassment to their public image, Aboriginal families believe that the combination of black-white pairings will harm their relative. Aboriginal disapproval of interracial pairings is historically rooted in a racist past which featured extensions of conquest, domination and exploitation (Evans et al, 1988; Harris, 2003; Haskins & Maynard, 2005). As explored in chapter two, it appears that one of the meta-narratives that ruled colonial discourses at the time still informs opinions on how interracial relationships are viewed within the Aboriginal community today. Back then, the white male and black female combination suggested sexual deviancy (Behrendt, 2000; Huggins, 1998). Not only did it pathologise white men as demons, but black women were condemned as 'loose' and immoral women (Roberts, 2001). Because some Aboriginal women were sexually exploited, white men were viewed in the Aboriginal community as 'the enemy' (McGrath, 1995). This particular meta-

narrative remains so raw within the Aboriginal psyche today that it causes family members to express trepidation concerning their kin having a relationship with a white man (Blanch, 2013). Whilst a female member of the Aboriginal community in this study warned their kin that white men 'could not be trusted', others demonstrated their wariness through the symbolic act of remaining silent or reserved. This is particularly salient for Aboriginal fathers in these narratives, who worried about their daughters on two levels: firstly, they were concerned about their daughter's welfare in terms of how their partner treated them, and; secondly, because of the strong opposition to such relationships in the past, they worried about whether the relationship would be able to withstand the stigma associated with their pairing.

As suggested by Blanch (2009) the perception of Aboriginal women as 'a touch of black velvet and dark chocolate that offer [sexual] delights' still lingers in some white men's minds today (p. 257). Ultimately, this is why Maddie's father 'didn't accept' the relationship 'at first'. As Maddie affirms, 'If we were going to fall in love with anyone they had to be people who ... treated you properly. You, know, treated you with respect'. The phrase 'treated you properly' is loaded with meaning. At first glance, it implies a concern for his daughter's welfare. Yet, a deeper consideration of the comment signifies underlying apprehension associated with race, gender and sex; especially in relation to the influence of negative stereotypes of white men as violent abusers. In this case, judgment is being made about the motives behind the romance. Whilst Maddie's father 'never said anything', his silence speaks to the discourse surrounding the 'intentions' of white men who choose to form an interracial relationship with an Aboriginal woman. Besides being concerned about his daughter's welfare and the fidelity and faithfulness of her white partner, Maddie's father also believed that his daughter belonged with a black man. Hence the initial wall of silence about his daughter's interracial romance. In his eyes, an Aboriginal man was simply considered a better fit for his Aboriginal daughter.

Nevertheless, as illustrated in these narratives, the initial feeling of trepidation usually subsides after a period of time. As both Paul and Maddie relayed, once Aboriginal fathers saw evidence of longevity in terms of marriage and financial security, this, in effect, caused a change in perception. After Paul married Kat, this 'settled' his father-in-law

immensely. At first, Ray 'was reserved and wasn't going to take me on board' says Paul, but after a while they formed an amicable alliance. Similarly, whilst Maddie's father initially wanted her 'to marry Aboriginal', he too changed his outlook. After 15 years of marriage, Maddie maintains that her father and Mason 'have a respectful relationship now'.

Not unlike the findings of other literature, these narratives of actual relationships highlight the mixed reactions of parents to their child's decision to enter an interracial relationship. On the one hand, the basic attitudes of the discourse are the same: the insistence of an ascended racial hierarchy with whites on top and blacks below (Feagin, 2001); the demarcation of 'tightly defended group boundaries' by symbolic actions (Frankenberg, 1993); the view that whites partnered with blacks lose their white status and public image (Root, 2001); the struggles faced by blacks wanting acceptance from their white in-laws (McClain, 2011); anxiety about the fate of black daughters who get involved with white men (McClain, 2011); and a view of interracial relationships as socially unacceptable (Cowlshaw, 2004; Frankenberg, 1993); a forbidden subject imbued with systemic assumptions about filial piety and binding loyalties (Reed, 2002; Root, 2001).

On the other hand, these narratives support Frankenberg's (1993) assertion that 'flexibility and room to maneuver' can contribute to 'making the relationship viable' (p.110). They also reveal that the principal of homogamy, operating through the medium of family opinion with its bigoted notions of separating couples because of their race, is diminishing over time. Whilst there is no doubt that many of the challenges these interracial couples face are racially based, these challenges did not hinder their feelings for each other. Because they stood strong and resisted the disapproval of their parents, these couples, in effect, flouted the conventional racial ideologies from which others in society operate. Although there were parents who judged others because of their skin colour, class and gender, these narratives indicate that perceptions can be shot down when proven wrong. Even in the generally disapproving families there was evidence of change and adjustability, even if sometimes grudgingly. Not only did Paul's mother make adjustments and encourage visits from her daughter-in-law but Ana also insists that, despite the negative statement she overheard, her in-laws were otherwise 'embracing' of her Aboriginality.

Whilst other parents demonstrated varying levels of disapproval, these reactions were transitional.

Despite the initial trepidation parents felt, these narratives show that, once confronted with having to re-examine their own ingrained beliefs with the reality of what they were presented with, attitudes and opinions do change. As parents let go of their own ethnocentric expectations and come to terms with the changes taking place in their lives, and the life of their child, they begin to realise that the future does not need to be like the past. This is particularly the case for Aboriginal fathers who were very protective of their daughter's well-being and happiness. In contradiction to the work of Cowlshaw (2004), who exposed the narrow-mindedness of unbending parents who chose to disown their child rather than embrace or respect their decision to form an interracial relationship, these findings demonstrate that parents are willing to shift their perceptions. This shift, however, does not come automatically; rather it comes through the understanding that racial categories with their allied stereotypes are not as clear cut as were initially assumed. Therefore, walls that may seem impenetrable can eventually tumble down. Familiarity and getting over fear of the unknown can help parents overcome their biases.

But, what about the children?

One of the explanations often given for opposing interracial relationships is based on concerns about bringing children into a racially polarised world (Kelley & Kenney, 2012). Since biracial children of interracial unions were perceived as 'inheriting the worst characteristics of both races' and therefore 'irretrievably trapped in the chasm betwixt two cultures', myths and stereotypes abound today about their sense of identity (Rolls, 2005). Often, this prompts the question, 'What about the children?' which is recognised as the leading question often raised early in a couple's relationship (Kenney and Kenney, 2012; Killian 2001a). Just when parents are eager to celebrate the birth of their child, they instead find themselves dealing with stress associated with long-ingrained classification systems, which forecloses any critical thinking about issues pertaining to identity and race. Because interracial parents have to deal with the fact that their children are the

embodiment of two or more racial heritages, this, combined with their own negative experiences, causes parents to ponder how their children may be accepted in society (Kenney and Kenney, 2012; Root, 2001). Consequently, parents of biracial children are challenged 'to deal with the implications of society's obsession with race for themselves, as well as for their children' (Kenney and Kenney, 2012). This seemed particularly prevalent for white women with biracial children.

Nell touched on some issues she encountered as a white woman with two biracial children. One issue dealt with the disconnection between what she thought she knew about the influences of racism versus experiencing it firsthand. The 'biggest challenge in being in an interracial relationship' recounts Nell, is dealing with other peoples' perceptions: 'Now that we do have children ... I suppose there is actually more comments made about them than has actually ever been made on us'. Talking about her children, Nell relayed the following story about the 'assumptions' that are made when 'strangers' notice the discrepancy between her skin colour and the skin colour of her child:

... With the new baby that we have now. I've had a few people say ... 'Oh where's his father from?' So they're assuming, in fact, that he's from another country to me ... I was really thrown the first time I was asked that ...

Nell's narrative describing her reactions to encounters with strangers in public is validated by Luke's (1994) discussion on the potency of whiteness. Ideologically speaking, because whiteness is frequently constructed as the universal norm, it becomes the benchmark by which rewards and privileges are distributed according to an internal hierarchy of humanity. This ideology tends to subjugate racial and ethnic differences via the exempting of whiteness as an unmarked or invisible racial category, renowned for its structural advantage (p. 52). Its power, as Luke (1994) affirms 'lets whiteness conceptually off the hook as "not a colour" and thereby unchallenged as a powerful socio-political form of racialisation' (p. 52). By contrast, and in accordance with 'public discourses that racialise difference through the shorthand of cultural stereotypes', people of colour, especially in Australia, are marked as racial and treated as 'different and other' (p. 53). In effect, this ideology makes invisible the ways in which racism operates, not just between persons of colour and whites, but as Killian highlights (2001a), '*among whites as well*' (p.

21). As whiteness is a social signifier of privilege, white people generally take their white identities for granted and do not think about issues of race as being relevant (Luke, 1994; Karis, 2004). Being in an interracial relationship therefore means that white people can no longer close their eyes to the influence of race and racism on their lives. This is especially salient for white women in relationships with black men. As they are objects of both sexist and racist ideologies, Luke (1994) asserts that white women must 'negotiate a range of conflicting and contradictory identity politics hinged on the categories of gender and race' (p. 55). She adds that as white women move through various social sites and discourses, her positioning within the discourse is 'contingent on the visible and "public" company she keeps' (p. 55). Whether she is alone or with her interracial family, white women cannot escape the gaze that comes with being associated with 'people of colour'.

In her research on white women in interracial relationships, Carmen Luke (1994) characterises white women in interracial families as 'outsiders within'. According to Luke:

White women in interracial families can experience profound changes in identity and social relations as their public status changes following a de facto or legal union with men of colour. Their identities change from being insiders within their own dominant culture to becoming an 'outsider within' (p. 58).

Luke (1994) explains that whilst many white women experience 'unqualified acceptance' of their partners and children, many do not. Many others are rejected or 'experience various forms of overt or covert racism against themselves and often their children' (p. 59). Because white women in interracial relationships witness and are subjected to the harmful consequences of racism, Frankenberg (1993) refers to this routine as 'rebound racism'. The impact of this racism as accentuated by Frankenberg (1993) 'owes its existence and direction to an earlier aim and impact, yet retains enough force to wound' (p. 112). Effectively, what Frankenberg (1993) asserts and Luke (1994) supports, is that the racism that 'rebounds' onto white women originates from, and is shaped by their association with, black men. This suggests that a white woman's involvement with a black man sullies her image in society and consequently discredits her social identity. Because they have crossed the boundaries of race and colour, white women find themselves cautiously 'tip toeing' around the margins of both white and black domains (O'Donogue, 2004). As an insider within dominant white culture, Karis (2004) maintains that the same

system that accords white women privileges, excludes her black partner and children as outsiders. Yet, as an outsider within marginalised black society, she also struggles with being the only white person in the family and therefore lacks a personal sense of membership (Rosenblatt et al, 1995; O'Donogue, 2004). Consequently, white women are forced to deal with issues of race and racism in a way that is totally at variance with white women in same-race families.

As the proud mother of two children, Nell understands how her social position is perceived and interpreted by others and that it intersects with her sexuality as a white woman in an intimate relationship with an Aboriginal man. As the partner of an Aboriginal man, Nell sees firsthand how racism can operate. In the narrative Nell told previously, she illustrates how having biracial children provides opportunities to observe the demoralising effects of 'rebound racism' in action. In response to the question: 'Where's the [baby's] father from?' Nell retorted:

I sort of went, 'Oh he's from Australia' and then I thought that sounded really stupid. The woman looked at me and said 'Oh, okay' and I said 'Well, he's Aboriginal because I am assuming that they are picking up that the child has a different skin colour to me and that's why they're asking. You know, it's interesting and it's often complete strangers that are asking.

In this exchange, multiple categories of sexuality, gender, race and racism hinged on hegemonic notions of whiteness are made visible. In this case, the enquiring woman does not interpret Nell's maternal relationship with her son as evidence that she is in a loving relationship with an Aboriginal man because in her mind, and the mind of other 'strangers' who have asked, Nell does not take after the 'type' of white woman whom they assume would willingly choose to become intimately involved with an Aboriginal man.

In describing a firsthand account of what Frankenberg (1993) has termed 'rebound racism', Nell is demonstrating the devastating power of unchallenged whiteness. 'Rebound racism' as revealed in this narrative denies that a white, 'respectable', professional woman could have birthed a dark-skinned child through sexual contact with an Aboriginal man. The assumption that the child's father must be from 'another country' speaks volumes in terms of the positioning of Aboriginal men in racialised Australian society. It also enables some white people in our community (not all) to maintain their belief in the pristine

'white goddess' who needs protection from dangerous black 'brutes'; a perception that holds repercussions for women like Nell who choose to transgress racial and gender conventions.

Historically, unions between Aboriginal men and white women were considered utterly scandalous. Consequently, their bodies, as discussed in chapter two, were imbued with inflated ideas of cultural and social differences. Whilst Aboriginal men were painted as brutes, the bodies of white women were dichotomously constructed as either 'respectable' or 'fallen', depending on whether they conformed to conventions that controlled their lives (Bagnall, 2006; McGrath, 1995, p.47). As the vessels through which a White Australia would continue, white women were expected to 'reproduce' white children (Ellinghaus, 2006; Probyn-Rapsey, 2008; Spencer, 2009). They were also expected to keep the nation pure and not contaminate it with 'coffee coloured brats' (Broome, 1982, p. 93). Within the boundaries of morality, respectability and domesticity, white women's sexuality was therefore scrutinised and controlled (Bagnall, 2006). Because white women's bodies were deemed more virtuous than all other women, it was further expected that she not betray her calling to the rule of white supremacy. When white women did challenge 'the hierarchies of race and gender by which settler society operated', they were treated as 'oddities'; as 'fallen' women who did not submit to or understand the social hierarchy of society (Ellinghaus, 2006, p. xiii). Just as Selena suffered the consequences for breaking away from socially constructed conventions of white womanhood in 19th century Victoria, a continuing perception made evident in 21st first century Queensland is that white women associated with 'people of colour' are still perceived as 'less than' white today (Karis, 2003, p. 23). Through the brazen responses of strangers, it is made obvious to Nell that her choice of an Aboriginal man as a bedfellow is perceived by others as 'odd'; otherwise, as Nell exclaims, 'why ask?' in the first place.

Nell's experience exemplifies the subtle ways some people make it known that Aboriginal men and white women should not associate. The projected stereotype here is that, as a member of the white camp, Nell is supposed to be with a white man; not an Aboriginal man who represents 'the bottom of the scale' (Ellinghaus, 2006; McGrath, 1995). Therefore, as highlighted by Karis, (2003; 2004) the 'outsider within' view can give

white women insights into the intrusive racial hierarchy that exists in society. In the Australian context, it can also give white women, like Nell, a sense of the depth of racial hostility felt towards Aboriginal people and Aboriginal men in particular. Nell herself states that in terms of societal myths about interracial relationships, 'there are probably more [myths] about white woman entering a relationship with a black man than vice versa'. She further elaborates that:

Being [a] non-Indigenous Australian, sometimes you're made aware of the obvious racism more so than Indigenous people because [white] people don't often have the guts to say it to their faces. But they might see another white person and think 'Oh well, they think the same way as I do and they might say 'Oh, this and that' or 'Those people over there'. I mean, often they do. [But] there's also that underlying sort of stuff that people aren't game enough to say. It might be just the way that they look at people, or stuff that they mutter to someone else. So, I think that at times we are exposed to that as well and how do you sort of deal with that?

As Nell's narrative highlights, social perceptions have the potential to provoke real social consequences. Despite what white people 'mutter' about Aboriginal people, she is also well aware that 'There is often a backlash ... a negative connotation to being white'. Ultimately what concerns Nell is when the 'kids [start] picking up on that'. Whilst Nell understands Aboriginal people 'talking about white people in a negative way', when it comes to her children it does not fit soundly with her ideals of how children should be raised.

According to Nell, 'People who aren't in interracial relationships don't realise the impact that that can have on children'. Buttressed between conflicting viewpoints about how her children should be raised, Nell is forced to consider race in ways that differ from those who are not from interracial families. Because her children have blood ties to both the black and white communities, this tie prompts the question: How does one help their child to realise that they are the embodiment of two strong, yet diametrically opposing cultures? In his article on *The Changing Politics of Miscegenation*, Mitchell Rolls (2005) maintains that the descendants of interracial unions in Australia are more likely to 'categorise their children as Aboriginal, and raise their children in the expectation that they will *assume* an Aboriginal identity' (p. 67). According to Rolls (2005), there is a tendency 'to sway' children of biracial descent 'to forego their non-Indigenous heritage and proclaim

loudly their Aboriginality' (p. 68). Depending on parental standpoint, this 'vexed and complex' trend can create tension within interracial families (Rolls, 2005). To identify as Aboriginal or not triggers a proliferation of different and competing perspectives about culture, race and loyalties as well as questions about politics and even nationhood (Rolls, 2005). Consequently, raising biracial children requires parents to be prepared and ever-vigilant when it comes to addressing the politics of identity.

Raising a biracial child demands a delicate negotiation of both cultures and their intertwining histories. For Nell, it also entails having an awareness of race and how it operates in Australian society. Whilst race 'seems sort of a dirty word', it is also something she is conscious of because, in terms of her children, she knows 'it's going to come up for them as teenagers at school'. Equating race with skin colour, Nell comments that there 'does seem a really strong push for the child to identify, particularly with their Aboriginal side, which I think is great'. However, whilst identifying as Aboriginal is important, Nell also maintains that 'I just think they need to embrace both [cultures]'. As Nell clarifies:

Kids perceive things differently, especially our boy. He is five and he can't perceive abstract things ... to him things are very literal and he sees that he's got white skin so he's white at the moment. And ... that's okay ... So, I think as long as we teach him what we know about *our* cultures [then he can] take from it what he wants ...

For Nell, establishing the basis for a strong self-image during childhood provides preparation for the more difficult challenges faced when at school. This means 'providing them with information we know about both *our* cultures'. This narrative reveals how having biracial children, has caused Nell to think about the impact of race on her children's lives. Despite feeling the pressure to categorise her children as Aboriginal, Nell wants them to recognise her culture as well. By doing this, she wants her children to 'embrace' both cultures; not elevate one culture over the other. By teaching her children to embrace both cultures, she is refuting the assertion made by Rolls (2005) that biracial children are 'swayed' to 'forego their non-Indigenous heritage' (p. 68). Instead, Nell adopts what Karis (2004) refers to as a 'multiethnic' approach to raising her children. This approach believes that children should be raised with the totality or wholeness of both birth parents heritages. Even though this approach includes a commitment to promote Aboriginal history, it

also includes a belief that promoting blackness should not be at the expense of denying her children's whiteness (p. 5).

This approach actually works in reverse for Ana, Kirra, Maddie and Kat who believe in the necessity of promoting a black consciousness, which they feel is essential to their children's psychological development. For these black women, their Aboriginal identity is more than a history lesson or 'cook-up' activity during National Aboriginal and Islander Celebration Week. 'It is something we wear every day; something that distinguishes you from the rest' says Kirra, 'and sometimes, not in a good way'. She explains:

When you walk out the door, you are marked. When you attend a barbecue, you are marked. You are called derogatory names like Abos or Boongs or Coons or whatever and that just cuts me. Often, it's your own [white] cousins who say these things.

In a similar vein, Kat also spoke about the racism she experiences frequently. She states, 'Even in normal situations I've walked into a chemist, baby on hip, in a suburb in Melbourne and I heard the pharmacist say: 'Watch her'. According to Kat, 'they look at the colour before they look at me'. Through racist encounters like these, black women cannot retreat from the stigma that comes with being identified as Aboriginal in this country. Unlike white women who 'can sidestep' the persecution faced by her loved ones via the privilege of her white skin, Aboriginal mothers cannot (Karis, 2004, p. 2). As Aboriginal mothers who enter society as themselves, these women are keenly aware of the various ways people have discriminated against them. Through blatantly racist slurs, to experiencing negative reactions to their interracial relationship, as well as facing public scrutiny, hostile comments and demeaning incidents; all have felt the effects of racism. Whilst white women can redeem their whiteness and associated privileges when in society without their black husbands or children (Karis, 2004; O'Donoghue, 2004), black women continue to remain black women. They cannot escape the taint associated with blackness. So, despite their finest efforts at parenting, Aboriginal women know they cannot control how people will respond to their children. Therefore, teaching their children about racism and being prepared to deal with their children's racialised 'encounters' was a major concern addressed by Aboriginal mothers, but not isolated to them.

Bo, a white man partnered with a black woman, states the importance of educating his children about the debilitating effects of racism, especially in regards to how it penetrates the perceptions of others.

When it comes to raising our children, my partner and I thought that it was very important to talk to them about their racial background. We decided that the best way to address this was to have a candid conversation about race and the history of racism in Australia. Because of their fair complexion, they are often questioned about their Aboriginal heritage ... All we can do is teach our kids that the preconceptions others may have say a lot more about them than it does about us. That's why they need a history lesson. They need to understand how racism functions and ... how they can be perceived by others. We've just recently dealt with an issue where our eldest child was questioned about his identity at school. Ana automatically assumed they were questioned by her mob, the Aboriginal side, because of his fair skin. But it was a teacher instead. So, they don't fit the stereotypical image people judge others by. I told them not to let it affect them.

Ana also spoke about the importance of educating her children about the dangers of other peoples' perceptions. In doing so, she also expressed concern about how she may be perceived by others for her staunch parenting techniques:

When it comes to raising our children, I sometimes wonder if I'm perceived as being ethnocentric. If I am, I don't care! As far as I'm concerned we live in a society obsessed with racial categorisations. When my first child was born, I remember how 'others' began questioning me as to how I was going to raise him. I didn't catch on at first, but then the realisation hit me. In effect, the message was 'Don't mention culture to him'. Inwardly, I was livid. How dare, *they* tell me how to raise my child?. As far as I was concerned, my child was the offspring of the oldest living culture in the world and that was something to be proud of. Unfortunately *they* didn't see it like that. All they saw were the stereotypes. In a way, I should thank them. They really reinforced within me the need to educate my children about the dangers of other people's perceptions.

Unlike Nell, who believes in a 'multiethnic' approach to parenting her children, Ana talked about raising her children to have a 'black consciousness', something she sees as crucial to the countering of negative stereotypes that shadow Aboriginal people.

I take every opportunity I can to educate my children about their Aboriginal heritage. I do this because I want them to be strong in their identity. I promote a black consciousness because, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, we live in a society that privileges whiteness and denigrates blackness. As my children are fair-skinned, they are frequently grilled ... from both sides of the divide. As a parent, it

is my job to protect them. The best way I can do this is equip them with the skills to see racism for what it is, so they can reject it and expose it. But, in order to reject it, they must have a sense of who they are and where they come from. I need them to understand that, despite what others think, they do not come from a line of lazy, no-hoper drunks. Their grandparents and great grandparents worked long and hard to ensure the very best for their children. I have to do the same. I do what I do because my children are both capable and competent individuals. With their father's wit and my passion, hopefully they can repair the breach that our leading forefathers stuffed up. If that makes me ethnocentric, so be it!

When I asked Bo how he felt about Ana's parenting techniques, his response was:

I know Ana would like them to identify as Aboriginal and that we should encourage them to do so. I never discourage them. Sometimes ... I do feel a little uneasy with it. But, I can see where she is coming from. She just doesn't want them to deny their Aboriginal culture. But is that to the detriment of mine? Biologically they represent a blend of both, yet there seems to be this intense pressure, not only at home but also in the playground at school, that you have to make a choice of one culture over another.

Nate, an Aboriginal father of two children (one fair-skinned and one dark-skinned) to a previous interracial marriage, also spoke about the pressure his boys feel 'in the playground' at school.

The white kid hung around all the scholars, all the high achievers, the well-to-dos. The Indigenous one hung around all the no-hopers, all the bums, you know. And that to me was how society put people where they belonged ... In the playgrounds, kids would not know Thomas was [Alan's] brother and they would say to Thomas, 'What are you playing with this boong for'?

Because of the challenge they pose to the racial order, biracial children have always been perceived as a 'problem' in Australia. As previously discussed in chapter two, because their skin colour did not align with classificatory systems, biracial children were regarded as social misfits; existing between two cultures and never allowed close to either (Rolls, 2005). Ultimately, this is why those classified as 'half-castes' experienced mass removal from their mothers. In the light of this history, it becomes apparent that questions pertaining to the issue of skin colour continue to affect the overall development of an individual's identity today. Nate voices his fear of his 'darker skin' child not fitting in, of

being marked racially different and therefore feeling rejected and despised because of 'his colour':

Alan is like one of these disliked people of his race, this Aboriginal race that are labelled 'boongs' and this is why you see a lot of white Aboriginal kids who are going through university that disown their Aboriginality because they get better acceptance if they are white. They pretend to be who they are not. And you can see that happening with Thomas. I'll just pretend I'm white... and when they are running my brother down, I won't say anything and I'll fit in.

By emphasising his reasons as to why he thinks 'a lot of white Aboriginal kids' can choose to disown their Aboriginality today, Nate is expressing his frustration with the absurdities of existing demarcations, which continue to promote whiteness over blackness. The irony is, he is also making a social statement about those who 'pretend to be who they are not'. Nate's comments are consistent with his experiences of systematic racism. As an Aboriginal man who has endured the brunt of racism firsthand, Nate empathises with his 'dark'-skinned son because he knows what it feels like to be vilified for being black. After winning a 'landmark' case in court against racist employers who overlooked his potential for promotion, Nate has both a formalised and politicised understanding of how he is dislocated in society because of the colour of his skin. This dislocation has given him even deeper insights into the pathologies that are born from notions of white supremacy. Therefore, the reason Nate is suspicious of those Aboriginal students 'who pretend to be white' at university is because they have access to a kind of anonymity and structural advantage, which is not afforded to those of darker skin, like himself, who have to face racism front on. This is what angers Nate. In Nate's mind, the fact that some Aboriginal people receive better treatment than others shows the continuing existence of a clear pecking order. This order, initiated during the colonial period, positioned lighter-skinned children closer to whites as they were perceived as more acceptable than darker-skinned children (Broome, 1982). What is so frustrating to Nate is that this order continues to have implications for biracial siblings, like his two sons, because it pits them against each other, especially in terms of accessing opportunities that can lead to a prosperous lifestyle. In the words of Nate:

It just shows you how it's two different worlds. One kid will experience a life like a white person and the other guy will face the world as a black person and both are of the same blood ... I mean it just blows me away ... It's just the colour of his skin can make such a difference.

Whilst the children of Kirra, Kat, Maddie and Ana are of fair complexion, these mothers do not want their child conforming to social expectations that align with 'pretending to be white'. This is why they believe in endorsing a black consciousness, because they want their children to develop what Kenney and Kenney (2012) refer to as 'solid racial and cultural identities' (p.103). As mothers who are aware of issues regarding race, they know that their children will have to face the pressure of racial categorisation. Viewing themselves as 'racial transmitters', Aboriginal mothers find themselves assigned with the task of instilling within their child a positive ethnic image; one which will withstand public scrutiny. In order to help their children endure challenges they may face, Aboriginal mothers socialise their children to have pride in their Aboriginal identity by presenting them with information to counteract stereotypical and prejudicial perceptions. They do this by explaining the importance of 'Aboriginal history' not just 'Captain Cook history' as Maddie points out. They also teach their children, as Maddie further elaborates, to 'never be ashamed or embarrassed to say they're Aboriginal'. Because 'racism is something that hangs over your head', Kat also believes in teaching her children about the nature of racism, as does Kirra.

For Kirra, it is important that her son not 'grow up with racism', especially 'within the family'. Kirra maintains that:

If I go on about black people, he's going to think, yeah, they're bad. But if I teach him about Indigenous Australians and the positive things that I know, then he will learn. I mean he gets along real well with Indigenous kids and they accept him as well because he identifies. But, there are times when he says a lot about this terrorism stuff and [refers to] towelheads and all of this. He comes home with that and I say, 'No, we don't talk like that in our family'.

Kirra believes teaching her son to develop an awareness of multiple races and cultures is a vital part of establishing a strong foundation from which he can explore his own identity. As it is important that her son acknowledges his Aboriginal identity, Kirra spends time and energy educating him about his ancestry so he can defend himself when

questioned about his identity. As she comments: 'If he hides that he's Aboriginal that hurts me'. She also wants to ensure that her son continues to acknowledge his ancestry so that future generations understand the continuing impact of history in this country. This is important for Kirra because she wants him to maintain 'that link', which distinguishes him as 'belonging to a proud and resilient culture'. For Kirra, her Aboriginal culture carries important 'chunks' of who she is, chunks she wants her son to hold onto.

At the heart of these discussions about raising biracial children are concerns about holding onto or losing culture. Whilst interracial couples are a rapidly growing segment of Australian society, they are also representative of two competing perspectives that are both vying for prominence in regards to their child's identity and socialisation. Even though several of the white partners felt the 'sway' to categorise their children as Aboriginal, some complied with this socialising technique and some did not. Nell, in particular, wanted her children growing up knowing both cultures of their respective parents' communities. She believed this to be a positive step that encouraged a more complete and balanced identification process. Whilst many of the Aboriginal partners did not specifically reject this multiethnic approach, they did speak to the necessity of promoting a black consciousness that encouraged their children to embrace their Aboriginality. From what I gleaned when listening to these mothers speak, promoting blackness is not a question of 'proclaiming one identity, heritage and cultural influence at the expense of the other' (Rolls, 2005, p. 69). Rather, as Ana's narrative highlights, it's more a case of teaching their children the skills to 'see race for what it is'. Seeing race, in this instance, is about noticing the incongruities of an *assumed* democracy that continues to create social hierarchies and perpetuate racial inequalities.

Yet, in public Australian discourses, an automatic reaction seems to be that 'seeing race' is bad. Because 'race' is perceived as belonging solely to 'people of colour', it is likened to 'a weapon wielded against whitey' (Rolls, 2005, p. 70). But, whilst raising biracial children to feel good about their Aboriginal identity upsets the white racial order, Rachel Moran (2001) maintains that we all continue to make racialised choices in our lives on a daily basis. She further explains that the failure to notice race denies democratic goals of equality. Even when parents, like Nell, reject the notion of race on the grounds that it 'seems sort of [like] a dirty word', the reality is, we all think in terms of racialised

categories. According to Moran (2001) it's a big part of how people function in society. For this reason, she urges us, to 'undo race before it undoes us' (p.196). For Aboriginal parents, 'undoing race', as stated previously, is about 'seeing' it first. The premise, as inferred by these parents is that in order to defeat race, one needs to become cautious of the various guises it robes itself in. This means deconstructing systems of inherent inequality that grant privileges and opportunities to those at the whiter end of the scale, whilst discriminating against those closer to the blacker end of the scale (Moran, 2001; Feagin, 2000). The challenge for Aboriginal parents is to teach their children how to negotiate these double standards as a minority group member. This infers preparing their children to discern perceived threats by instilling within them a strong sense of racial pride. Instead of feeling ashamed of their Aboriginal heritage, which seems to be an apparent trend for some, black mothers want their children to be proud of that 'chunk' which they believe is important for the whole to function. This approach to ensuring culture is sustained and continued, in the face of a larger push to integrate, is a battle fraught with political tension. It is also a battle that remains contentious, particularly within the homes of interracial couples involved in this study.

In fact, the question of identity is one comparable to a balancing act; whether it is nobler to promote their Aboriginality and upset the status quo or ignore it completely, is a sensitive issue that assumes that biracial children must choose one race over the other. Unfortunately, such thinking also pits one culture against the other. Who will win this battle of epic proportions comes down to whether parents are willing to negotiate complex racial tension. In this study, interpreting race in order to understand and resolve this tension was found to be a critical challenge that interracial parents faced in raising their children. According to Kenney & Kenney (2012), psychologically preparing their children to embrace a strong sense of self requires interracial parents to be open, honest and willing to discuss and *collectively* address issues of race. Otherwise, as Foeman and Nance (2002) maintain, they reinforce the same old caste system based on race and colour that goes against everything parents aspire for their children to achieve in life. In order for their children to become 'the repairers of the breach', or 'the link to both worlds' as Kirra highlights, they must first feel comfortable in their own skin. Feeling comfortable in their own skin depends on the messages they receive from their parents. Whether their parents are

prepared to 'turn inward for new definitions and perspectives that are out of the box' is the determining factor that can either empower or disempower their child's sense of identity and progress in life (Foeman & Nance, 2002, p. 245). What these narratives reveal is that whilst parents are aware of the need to interpret race and intersecting issues of identity and colour, the motives behind the discussion varied.

We're just ordinary people, that's all we are!

According to Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell (1995), partners in interracial relationships often assert that their relationships are no different than their same-race counterparts, and that the issues, concerns and challenges that they are confronted with are similar to their same-race counterparts. They also explain that when interracial couples talk about their relationship, they consistently claim that race makes no difference in their lives. These findings concur with the work of Killian who found that interracial couples prefer to see themselves as 'ordinary' and, like other 'ordinary' couples, they 'struggle to make ends meet, strike a balance between work and home life, divide the labour, and parent their children' (p. 127). A recurring theme as identified by Karis (2000; 2003), is that whilst interracial couples deny the existence of race within the privacy of their homes, they become acutely aware of it when reminded of it in public. Interestingly, Rosenblatt et al (1995) likened this awareness to 'being on stage to society' and maintained that as a result, interracial couples were deeply concerned about the image they present to society (pp.161-163). Analogous with qualitative work done on interracial relationships in America, a persistent theme that emerges in this study is that, despite the assertion that they are no more problematic than their same-race counterparts, the issue of their partner's racial differences does affect their interactions with others in society. Therefore, whilst race may not matter in the bedroom, findings indicate that it does matter outside the bedroom.

Although optimists may argue that people of different racial backgrounds are progressively starting to see each other as equals, the social experiences of interracial couples indicate that lingering perceptions continue to taint their togetherness. Whilst we might expect that changing times should reflect greater social acceptance of interracial relationships, the narratives presented within this study describe the continuing struggles

many of the couples have to endure because of their romantic relationship. Specifically, couples reported having tolerated all or some of the following: having trouble renting houses, being ostracised by friends and facing opposition from parents, extended family members and even strangers. Further experiences included negative responses ranging from receiving the silent treatment to their denouncement and dismissal as a 'traitor', as well as having to suffer social and public humiliation that run the gamut from gawks, stares and racial slurs to acts of outright discrimination, hostility and structural violence. Other experiences included being questioned about their legitimacy as parents and feeling isolated and disqualified from both the white and black communities. Whilst there is no doubt that racism is the cause of such hurtful attacks, the everyday interactions of interracial couples are not always so evident. Reactions can also be subtle, but racist nonetheless. For example, Kat and Paul recounted a story about how their contrasting skin colour affected the way they were received in public. As relayed by Paul: 'In the day time, to see a white person and a black person walking out together holding hands or, even worse, hugging and kissing in public was frowned upon. We used to get really dark looks. And the cops used to be in on it too!'

Although occurrences like these were very much the racial reality for Kat and Paul in the seventies and eighties, this trend continues to follow interracial couples today. Speaking of her shopping experiences, Ana relayed a story about how some 'checkout assistants' tussle with the mere existence of interracial couples. According to Ana 'some people just cannot accept that Bo and I are together. I mean we stand next to each other in the checkout lane at the supermarket, yet they still want to serve us separately'. Identifying these experiences as part of a racist system that 'still sees us as mismatched' Ana feels peeved when incidences like these occur. Instead of 'seeing me as an equal, I am made to feel invisible, or worse still, grateful for being rescued from a heathen [black] lifestyle'. As these narratives illustrate, even when obvious signals indicate that interracial couples are a unit, people subconsciously want to separate them because of their race. The contrast of black skin against white skin reveals that the public generally do not recognise such relationships as partnerships between equals. Despite these varying examples of intentional and unintentional racism, how do we reconcile the stance taken by interracial partners like Paul who maintain that 'it's not about race' with the theoretical

assertion by Luke (1994), Karis (2003) and Killian (2001a; 2003; 2012) that racial differences do matter’?

Karis (2003) cites three reasons as to why couples downplay the claim that race is irrelevant in their interracial relationship. First, she states that ‘[o]ne way to understand the assertion that race does not matter within interracial couples’ relationships is to view it as a protective response to negative cultural stereotypes which make loving across lines unimaginable’ (p. 27). Assuming that interracial relationships exist within a social and historical context that pathologises them as deviant, Karis (2003) quoting Frankenberg (1993) refers to this cultural deviancy as a ‘discourse against interracial relationships’ (p. 77). In aligning this oppositional discourse with reductionist stereotypes that typecast black and white people who stray from their racial group as dishonorable and debauched, Killian (2012) asserts that some couples cope with this by describing themselves as ‘altogether unremarkable or unexceptional’ (p. 127). Second, Karis claims that the reasons why interracial couples differentiate between the private and public realm is because this dichotomous splitting in half could be perceived as ‘an unconscious means of shielding themselves and those they love from negative racial stereotyping’ (p. 28). Killian (2012) reinforces this claim when he maintains that, in order to protect loved ones from hostile and inhumane treatment that denies them a sense of security and even legitimacy as a couple, interracial couples develop what he terms ‘survival strategies’ to counter these attacks (p. 128). The reasons why interracial couples devise these strategies is to combat responses ‘to casual conditions of white supremacy, ideologies of racial purity and intense emotions towards racial mixing, “miscegenation” and mongrelisation”’ says Killian (p. 128). Third, Karis (2003) maintains that the assertion that race does not matter in the home is because it possibly ‘does not matter in the stereotypical ways that society assumes’ (p. 29).

Of particular significance to this study were the various strategies that interviewees employed in order to respond to incidents involving racism and prejudice. In their discussions on individual and family identity, many of the couples in this study tried to manage race-related challenges by either centralising or decentralising the significance of race in their lives (Killian, 2012). One way in which couples decentralised the issue of race was

through the act of referring to themselves as 'just a normal couple'. Similar to both Karis (2003) and Killian's (2012) findings, some couples in this study chose to minimise their cultural and racial differences, focusing instead on the parallels between themselves and other same-race couples. For example, one Aboriginal male stressed that he 'didn't see Darleen as a white person or myself as a black person'. Instead he maintained that 'we're just hubby and wife'. Other interviewees voiced their concern about being placed under umbrella terms and expressed anger when asked if they identified themselves as interracial or saw themselves differently. Paul, a white male, assertively pronounced that he 'detested the label interracial' and preferred to describe his interracial relationship as 'a potpourri of humanity'. In explaining his dislike of being 'pigeonholed', Paul stated that:

We're just people, that's all we are. Just ordinary people trying to survive like everybody else. Trying to raise our kids so that they don't do drugs [and] don't steal. That's what it's always been about. It's about the kids and being a family. And you've got to get over it. We're just Paul and Kat, don't label it.

For Paul, the Aboriginal woman that he loves is from his group, whom he refers to as 'just ordinary people'. He also states that, 'If you take away the skin colour, we are all muscle and bone and bleed ... we're just like every normal couple'. Interestingly, Paul's partner Kat disagreed with this analysis. According to Kat, 'You can't put us under the label of being normal because normal couples don't go through what we do'. She further elaborates:

When you look at other couples going through the issues like trying to pay the bills, trying to put food on the table, trying to get a job, that's normal! But normal couples who are white don't go through the racism of a family [like ours]; they don't go through trying to protect your kids from being beat up because they're black. Also ... the put-downs in newspapers and on TV about black issues ... affect the way I see and feel on a daily basis. Everything bad being said about blackfellas [come from] stereotypes, and you automatically think 'am I being stereotyped again'? So, we're not, I don't think ... [we are a normal couple].

In investigating the racial realities of interracial relationships in the United States, Yancey (2003) established that not only do black and white relationships experience racism but, more significantly, they experience it in ways unique to those in same-race partner relationships. Whereas Foeman and Nance (2002) maintain that blacks partnered

with whites often have their racial identity challenged by other blacks, Yancey and Yancy (2007) point out that white partners also undergo a similar ritual. Karis (2003) and Luke (1994) also confer with this finding when discussing the social positioning of white women in relationships with black men. The difference, as stated by Foeman and Nance (2002), is that because blacks have traditionally been the group most restricted by race; it is neither contradictory nor surprising that they bring mixed feelings to their relationship. Whilst blacks are therefore conscious of their minority status, it is virtually impossible for them not to 'see' race. In contrast, Rosenblatt et al (1995) maintain that whites are also marked with 'race' and, as a direct result, experience forms of racism by association with their black partner. Frankenberg (1993) and Karis (2003; 2004) refer to this as 'rebound racism' or racism that bounces back onto them because of their involvement with a black partner. As examined in the previous section, the stigma associated with being Aboriginal in this country influences and affects their white partner too. Just as it affected Nell, a white woman in love with a black man, the stories that Paul tells indicates that white men also feel its sting. In outlining his reasons for insisting that they are 'like any normal couple', could this be Paul's way of trying to 'backtalk' negative racial stereotypes that boomerangs back onto him (Karis, 2003, p. 27)?

In an attempt to survive within a social context that views interracial relationships as 'abnormal', Paul's assertion of normalcy speaks to the need to be seen as individuals rather than a racial stereotype. As a member of the white camp, it hurts Paul to witness the discrimination his partner and children go through because of their blackness. Wanting to correct racial wrongs forces Paul to rethink his vision of whiteness and himself as a white man. According to Killian (2003) this realignment of racial vision is akin to a 'double consciousness — hav[ing] a sense of who they are and what their life is really about, and at the same time ... are aware of the ways in which larger society views them (pp. 15-16). As the intimate partner of an Aboriginal woman and the father of two biracial children, Paul is conscious of how race and racism structures his life. When describing how he thinks about race Paul is cognisant of his privileged position at 'the top of the food chain'. By commenting that 'we are like the sharks in the ocean', Paul is ridiculing social structures that continue to preserve the idea of white hegemony. His attack of 'whites as the superior race and everybody else as labourers' rationalises the reasons as to why he

thinks his family and, by extension, Aboriginal people, experience racial and social inequality. According to Paul, societal perceptions of Aboriginal people are influenced by the media, which he refers to as 'the most evil, misused weapon ever been devised by man'. 'Instead of showing what Aboriginality is truly about', Paul maintains that the various media outlets 'just show all the negative stuff'. In commenting on how the media portrays Aboriginal people as unclean, lazy, dole-bludgers who 'get free electricity and free car payments', it cannot be assumed that Paul is blind to the damaging racial assumptions made about Aboriginal people. Neither is he blind to the structural workings of racism. As a recipient of 'rebound racism' himself, Paul has learnt to perceive structures that were previously invisible to him.

Farmer (2004) argues that 'social inequalities are at the heart of structural violence' (p. 320). Therefore, structural violence is a powerful metaphor for taken for granted assumptions and arrangements that are 'built into the functioning of systems and applied to whole classes of people' (p.320). In refusing to be labelled under the umbrella of 'interracial', Paul is rejecting the very system upon which 'whole classes of people' are racially classified. Because black-white relationships are bound by entrenched racial paradigms that govern how they are viewed by others, Paul likes to distance himself from insensitive attitudes, labels and systems that legitimise its existence. One way of doing this is to resist the very notion that race defines an identity. Instead of conforming to rigid classificatory systems that separate groups because of their racial differences, Paul offsets such thinking by communicating the strengths that contribute to his interracial happiness. In referring to the attributes that keep them together, Paul maintains that 'despite our different upbringings, Kat is the glue that binds the family together'. He further insists that 'whatever our weakness, the other supplies, so that we become one unit. I just can't see us other than one unit, so whatever my weakness is, that's her strength, whatever her weakness is, that's my strength and that's how we bond'. According to Paul:

Her weaknesses were that she lacked faith in herself, really badly. My strength is I am over confident; I have a lot of faith in myself. It took five years of constantly telling her that she is not the image others judge her to be. [I had to tell her that] she is not hopeless, she is not thick, she's intuitive, and she's smart ... all those things that you say to your wife, the person you love. Once she started to believe it, she just rocked ahead.

As a way of 'shielding' themselves from negative racial stereotyping, both Paul and Kat turn to each other (Karis, 2003). They transcend difference by insulating themselves from outside interference. According to Foeman and Nance (2002), this is a common strategy that couples employ to 'buffer' themselves from potentially threatening situations (p. 244). One way in which they do this is through the act of 'screening' people (Hill and Thomas, 2000). Recognising the increasing impact of racial issues in his life, Paul had to make some decisions. Unbeknown to Kat, 'I was very, very selective about who I allowed in my home. I didn't want Kat to have any hardship' says Paul. Amazingly, Kat's response to this was 'I didn't know. I didn't know Paul was having any problems. I didn't know there were issues because he kept it from me'. The reason why Paul hid the discrimination that 'rebounded' onto him from Kat was because he did not want to 'expose her to the arseholes that I dealt with on a daily basis'. In hindsight, Paul realises that what he did 'may have been a really stupid thing to do because it restricted Kat from making her own decisions about people and that was a bad thing because it took a long time [for her] to become confident'. By admitting that his 'overprotectiveness ... slowed her development' Paul is revealing the powerful forces at work that make family identity formation particularly challenging.

In avoiding close contact with people who are racist 'arseholes', Paul falls in line with the findings of Rosenblatt et al (1993) who suggest that some interracial couples defend against racism by 'sorting out associates' (p.173). Although this defence mechanism can be construed as a negative attempt to isolate themselves from the racial realities of everyday living, I suggest that it instead acts as one of the coping strategies couples engage in to deal with the unique pressures of interracial coupling. Considering the overt racial discrimination both he and his family have endured, this strategy to normalise their relationship represents a conscious effort to recast their 'transgression' in a more favourable light. In this context, Paul's desire to construct his 'just ordinary' marriage as normal is a coping response in reaction to society's attempt to pathologise them as deviants. Whilst he neglected to confer with his wife as to how to deal with encroaching racism in their life, it is a strategy he undertook to 'protect' her nevertheless.

As a direct result of his affiliation with an Aboriginal woman, Paul has had to endure personal and systemic racism that has changed his whole racial outlook. While this experience has made him more sensitive to the racism his wife and children face, it has also forced him to think about his identity as a white man. According to Cook (2003), this action within itself is something most whites typically do not spend a great deal of time considering. He states: 'For most Whites, to think about what it means to be White is itself a radical move' (p. 248). For Paul, white privilege had previously permitted him to move through social situations without considering the impact of his racial identity. Kat confirmed this when she stated that 'Paul told me this story about calling this black guy on the other [footy] team a name to taunt him, hoping to get the black guy off guard so that he [Paul] could win the game'. In telling this story, Kat is observing the damaging effects of white privilege. Aligning it with something 'whitefellas use as a weapon' Kat is questioning the impact of structural racism, something she has experienced firsthand.

In observing how his wife is 'treated with utter and complete contempt' from 'associates' of his own race, Paul has no choice but to confront his whiteness. When asked to describe how he has changed since being married to an Aboriginal woman, Paul states that he is 'ashamed' of cultural practices he engaged in prior to meeting Kat. Referring to the incident Kat mentioned earlier, Paul openly confesses that he 'used to sledge [an Aboriginal competitor] something chronic and I would, I would call him names that I am ashamed of now'. In assessing his own behaviour patterns, Paul is demonstrating what Killian (2003) refers to as a 'double consciousness'. The surprise of experiencing unanticipated racism that rebounds back onto him because of his affiliation with a black woman, forces Paul to 'see' that some of the social practices he previously engaged in actually constitute what Frankenberg (1993) refers to as 'routine racism'. In facing up to assumptions he has held his whole life about race, Paul has undergone a shift from an 'epistemology of ignorance' to one of mindful consciousness (Karis, 2003, p. 35).

Darlene experienced a similar awakening. Before meeting Nate, Darlene tended to believe that individuals are judged by their character and that racial differences were essentially unimportant. Having 'lived with a racist father' Darlene was determined she was 'never going to treat people like the way my father spoke of treating them'. In spite of her father 'being dead-set against blacks', Darlene has had three relationships with

black men. Whilst Darlene has two children to a 'Mauritian and Papua New Guinean', Darlene stated that it's really only until she met her current husband, who happens to be Aboriginal, that she has become 'more aware' of the importance of race. Despite entering her relationship with Nate with the posture that 'I don't think like a white, I just see people', Darlene has been forced to reconceptualise specific racial issues. Being in an interracial relationship has affected her attitude toward racial discrimination because 'I'm blown away by it all because you know, having believed that we were all equal and then to see this happening and it's happening to my husband because he's black ... it's a real eye-opener for me'. Darlene indicates that simply being in a relationship with an Aboriginal man forces her to rethink about the prevalence of racial discrimination and how essential it is to deal with this social dysfunction. Whereas previously she did not notice the effects of living in a racialised society, now through 'hearing racist remarks', Darlene maintains that 'it's taken the blinders off, for sure'.

Foeman and Nance (2002) theorise that, due to the effects of living in a racialised society, black partners experience a sense of guilt for exposing their white partner to negative or threatening remarks from larger society. In her work on identity development, O'Donoghue (2004) posits that white women who become aware of racial injustice also share a similar sense of guilt and, as result, they tend 'to retreat into the white world' (p. 79). She further postulates that dissonance is followed by resistance and immersion, in which white women begin to question their racism or become angry at others for the existence of racism. This racial awakening causes some white women to 'undergo a form of racial self-hatred' (p. 79). In referring to the discrimination case she is supporting her husband through, Darlene indicates that the process of having to face up to the existence of racism has made her ashamed to be white. Talking about a letter she sent to the Human Rights Commission, she comments that 'And even in the letter that I sent ... I [stated that] I look around sometimes and I hang my head in shame and I think I'm ashamed to be white because of what's been done [to my husband]'. Whilst Nate independently went through a similar discrimination case previously and won, this is Darlene's first experience of undergoing such a formalised procedure. As a result, it has caused her to question the narrow perceptions of white supremacy. Insisting that she 'loves Nate' and therefore 'doesn't care what skin colour he is', this elation has also

caused her to query the actions of other whites who 'do care about the colour of one's skin'. Acknowledging her own complicity in terms of 'living in denial' because 'that's how you're brought up', Darlene wishes that other white people 'could live and experience what I have experienced'.

Throughout her relationship with Nate, Darlene has experienced a lot. Darlene herself maintains that her and Nate have 'had two separations in the last 14 months, because ... because of my lack of understanding'. What Darlene is referring to here are the mixed emotions she feels about having to rethink her new racial location as the spouse of a stigmatised man. Given the disadvantaged position black people hold in society, Yancey and Yancy (2007) point out that this is a thinking process most white people entering a relationship with a black person go through. Even when whites do undergo premarital racial preparation, Yancey and Yancy (2007) maintain that they are still likely to 'have a difficult time understanding the effects of being linked to a black until they *are* so linked (p. 208)'. It is this very link that Darlene had a difficult time adjusting to. The biggest adjustment Darlene has found difficult to grasp is that her husband 'is not angry with me'. Whereas previously she gave little conscious thought to racial concerns, now she 'sees it all the time'. This new awareness has enabled her to face racial tension inside her relationship. This tension has been, at times, 'hard [to endure] and frightening'. But, as Darlene declares, she 'got through it and so has he'. In relaying the source of this tension, Darlene stated:

Because ... I got very aggressive at one stage because I'd had enough! I would say, I've heard enough Nate, you're overloading. Stop it! It's too much for me to take on board Nate, please stop. I would say to him I understand your plight but, you know, I'm new to this. You've had this all your life, I'm new at this ... I've got a lot of catching up to do here mate so let me catch up. So it's had its moments. But, we get through it now a lot easier than we did.

Conscious of the ways in which society perceive them, Darlene and Nate (like Paul and Kat) also turn to each other. The reason why Darlene and Nate 'got through it' is because of their love for each other. As Darlene states, whilst they 'had a lot of blowups and ... bust-ups, love brings us back together each and every time. And now, I guess ... we have got a [deeper] connection'. Another reason why they have been able to build a 'connection' is because they both realise the need to engage in thoughtful negotiations

when it comes to dealing with their differences. According to Foeman and Nance (1999), this is an important coping strategy. In order for a relationship to blossom, they maintain that 'partners must develop sensitivity to a sometimes uncomfortable alternate perspective' (p. 550). Both Darlene and Nate have had to make sacrifices in order for their marriage to work. Both have had to explain their thinking and perspective to each other. More importantly, Darlene has learnt 'to sit back and listen to what [Nate] is saying'. Through listening to her partner, Darlene has become more aware of racial issues. Whereas before she thought Nate was 'just paranoid because he is black', Darlene confesses that 'maybe I was [paranoid] too'. Though Darlene found her 'introduction' to racial issues 'daunting' at first, now she realises that 'it's not about me, it's about what happens out there', meaning within larger society. Because of her love for Nate, Darlene demonstrates the importance of taking seriously the experiences of her spouse. According to Killian (2003), this is an important survival strategy interracial couples employ to 'navigate around difference' (p.16).

Interestingly, for many couples in this study, the white partner had to learn quite a bit about the perspectives of their Aboriginal partner. Despite the discrimination procedures that he is going through, Nate described having to teach Darlene that just because she is white, 'doesn't mean that she needs to feel obligated ... or feel blame or responsibility [for what he is going through] because she is white'. Darlene, on the other hand, infers that she now considers herself more educated about social injustice issues. Whilst she was initially 'closed off' about 'blacks in society', Nate and his family have taught her the importance of knowing history from a black perspective. This has empowered her to be 'more understanding of what's going on'.

Kirra, the black partner in her relationship, also explained having to educate her partner about the dehumanising effects of racial stereotyping. Whereas previously, Scott liked to tell racial jokes because he thought they 'were funny', now he is more mindful of what he says. Instead of telling 'nasty jokes', Kirra maintains that Scott has undergone a shift from family jokester to family protector. When he hears negative comments being spoken about Aboriginal people, Kirra says that he now likes to pull people up. Recounting a scene at a family barbeque with her relatives, Kirra highlights this transformation in Scott:

Sometimes, cousins ... might say derogatory names, like Abos or Boongs or Coons or whatever and it just cuts me, you know. Those words! And, you know, I just look at them. Most of them know [how it upsets me] ... and Scott would be like 'Whoops! What did you just say?'

Whereas Nate and Kirra were specific in demonstrating what they each taught their partners, others described the need to educate their partner more generally. Kat had to explain to her partner the significance of the kinship system and why Aboriginal people include extended family 'as family too'. Ana suggested to her white partner that he 'read up' about Aboriginal history and take note of how Aboriginal people choose to identify themselves, instead of perceiving 'us as one big mob'. While this was certainly the only instance of someone asking a partner to actively 'read up' on Aboriginal issues, the theme of needing to educate his or her partner about different issues such as racial stereotyping, the importance and value of the extended kinship system and social justice issues was a recurring theme across all interviews.

Similar to the work of Killian (2007) and Foeman and Nance (2002), this study found that black partners are more socially aware than their white partners. However, unlike the claim made by Killian (2007) that white partners remark that their black partners are 'hypersensitive', the narratives as described in this study indicate the opposite. In effect, what these narratives show is that having to undergo forms of discrimination in society actually increases couples' sense of commitment to each other. In having to confront their own white privilege and ignorance about specific racial issues, white partners learnt to 'see' structures that were previously invisible to them. The experience of having to endure discrimination firsthand has given them personalised insights into the myriad of ways in which race and racism can and continues to manifest itself in society. The reiteration of themselves as 'just ordinary' or 'normal' is a strategic strategy to combat entrenched racial paradigms that control how their interracial relationship is viewed in society. Despite having to deal with tension inside the relationship, most couples identified communicating their emotions and insecurities to their partner as a source of strength. Therefore, they reject the notion that race exists in a private setting because it really is insignificant.

LIMITATIONS

I am black and I have never realised that more than I do now! Throughout this master's journey, my blackness has always been at the forefront of my mind. In fact, the initial reason I embarked upon this journey in the first place was because I genuinely wanted to know if other blacks faced similar or different experiences to me. As a black woman involved with a white man, I specifically wanted to know how other black woman are perceived by their partner's family. I also wanted to know why they chose to venture beyond their own race. Was it a classic case of jungle fever or not? And what about their biracial children, did they identify as black too, or did they embrace both cultures? These questions triggered my interest in this subject. This interest weighed heavily on my mind throughout the whole process. From designing the interview questions and undertaking the interviews themselves to analysing the data and writing up my findings, I was continually processing my racial identity in terms of this interest. In the beginning stages of my thesis, I created my interview schedule. I read over it and thought the questions made sense. After interviewing two couples independently and conjointly, I started seeing assumptions in my questions. Why did I think couples would respond differently when asked how they dealt with racial and cultural differences? Why did I think couples would experience reactions from their own families? I was starting to become obsessed with assumptions I had made as a researcher and a black woman.

Therefore, one of the biggest limitations in regards to this study is my blackness. Whilst I have endeavoured to analyse these findings objectively, I nevertheless found myself drawn to couples whose families disapproved of their liaison. Keen to know what strategies these couples employed to manage their relationship, I am nervous that readers of this study will say, 'Is she racist!' Whilst I am cognisant of my blackness, I am also conscious that not everyone will agree with my findings. Despite being aware of the possibility of varying readings of the narratives told within this study, I nevertheless hope that the findings will encourage dialogue and further deconstruction of the deeper messages regarding race and race relations in an effort to reveal race-based tensions that exist in Australia. After all, critical analysis of such deeply personal, yet 'forbidden' topics is the only way to challenge racial biases that continue to pervade our society.

A second limitation of this study is in relation to sample size and the generalisability of these findings to interracial couples as a whole. This study was conducted with a small sample in mind to allow each couple's experience to be explored in depth. Although each interview was rich in dialogue, expanding the number and location of participants could only add more insight. A diverse regional sample would confirm that these findings are common through all interracial relationships and not just those specific to North Queensland.

As the exploration of this topic was purposefully broad in nature, these narratives are but snapshots of what clearly are more complex social and cultural dynamics than I have been able to explore. Another limitation is that this study does not encompass all the factors that might be relevant to the decision to engage and stay in an interracial relationship. Therefore, the findings do not provide as much depth as the many themes warrant. For example, whilst these narratives reveal that there is a price to pay for living interracially: threat of injury, loss of social status and family members, verbal harassment, discrimination, denouncement and dismissal as a 'traitor' and possibly a diminished quality of life, I did not want to end this thesis on a note of pessimism. Couples are staying together regardless of the price they are made to pay. There must be a reason for this other than the Mills and Boons version of 'love will conquer all'. Although many of the participants like Darlene espouse that 'love brings us back together each and every time', I felt I never really resolved the issue of what 'brings them back together'. What empowers interracial couples to create the 'we' in their relationship to stand against discrimination is perhaps something that can be explored in future research.

Future Directions

This thesis was an exploratory study of black/white interracial couples' lived experience. It explores how they confront their racial identities, raise biracial children and negotiate racial, gender and class differences. Whilst this study has provided important insights into the myriad of ways in which race and racial identity alter their perspectives in life, there is still more work to be done. The main goal of this study is to highlight the subtle and not so subtle forms of racism that exist in Australia in the hope of provoking discussion and

to move the research in this area forward. In this spirit, findings of this thesis suggest several directions for future research.

One issue I raised in this study was in relation to the identity of biracial children. According to Kenney & Kenney (2012), psychologically preparing their children to embrace a strong sense of self requires interracial parents to be open, honest and willing to discuss and *collectively* address issues of race. As Rolls (2005) has noted, there is an assumption that black parents give priority to the experience of identifying as black. Root (1992) maintains that since interracial relationships 'do not threaten the sanctity of Whiteness', then research on the experiences of biracial children is limited. This is an important area to explore. In my reading, I found nothing from the perspective of biracial children themselves. In light of the fact that biracial children are a rapidly growing segment of Australian society, conversations with biracial children about their identity formation inside and outside the home may provide a different perspective other than that to what is 'assumed'. Rather than restricting conversation to that of parents, it would be useful to explore, first of all, how these biracial individuals identify themselves and if they choose to lean towards one end of the colour spectrum than the other, how does this affect their interactions with others in society? Do they experience the possible backlash of racism as did Nate's children in this study? Further conversations with interracial families would provide deeper insights into the pressures that biracial children may be subjected to. As highlighted by Ana, 'biracial children are the future face of Australia. It is important to understand them'.

Given the rising number of interracial couples in Australia, and the lack of information on the internal dynamics of this population, this effort significantly advances previous understandings about changes that occur to individuals who interracially couple. If interracial relationships were socially acceptable, there would be no thesis to write because they would not be a prominent cultural phenomenon. But in today's society these relationships often uncover deeply entrenched beliefs and racist opinions that simmer under the surface. As Root (2002) highlights, it is one thing to support diversity, but quite another to invite a member of the opposite race home. Because of the unique history of

race relations in this country, relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people provide an exceptionally rich and fruitful subject for further research and analysis.

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