

## **Compulsory “White” Heterosexuality: The Politics of Racial and Sexual Loyalty\***

*Katerina Deliovsky* McMaster University

### **Résumé**

Je soutiens que l'hétérosexualité « blanche » obligatoire, la pratique étroitement ritualisée et réglementée de canalisation de la sexualité des femmes européennes dans une union monogame avec des hommes de la même race<sup>1</sup>, a été un des principaux moyens de les forcer à exprimer une sexualité féminine « blanche ». Dans la logique de leur sexe, des attentes ethniques et culturelles et, à l'occasion, au-delà des divisions de classe, les femmes européennes sont censées démontrer leur loyauté envers la race blanche et le patriarcat. L'animosité envers les unions inter-raciales, en particulier entre les femmes européennes et les hommes africains, confirme les attentes hétéro-normatives de l'hétérosexualité « blanche » obligatoire. Lorsque les femmes européennes donnent l'impression de remettre ces attentes en question, et sont par conséquent perçues comme déloyales envers la race blanche et le patriarcat, des méthodes coercitives sont employées pour encourager, voire même imposer la norme. Je ne prétends pas que toutes les femmes européennes vivant une union inter-raciale remettent ouvertement en question le patriarcat européen, mais plutôt que leurs actions sont perçues comme une violation de la race blanche, quelle que soit l'intention ou le degré de conscience politique de ces femmes.

### **Abstract**

I argue that compulsory “white” heterosexuality, the highly regulated and ritualized practice of channelling European women’s sexuality toward monogamous unions with men of the same race<sup>2</sup>, is one of the primary ways they are compelled to perform “white” feminine sexuality. Consistent with gender, ethnic and race expectations, and at times across class divisions, European women are expected to demonstrate their loyalty to whiteness and patriarchy. Animus toward interracial unions, particularly between European women and African men, reveal the hidden heteronormative expectations of compulsory “white” heterosexuality. If European women are perceived to challenge these expectations and are therefore seen as disloyal to whiteness and patriarchy, disciplinary regimes are employed to elicit and even coerce compliance. I do not argue that all European women in interracial unions are actively challenging European patriarchal power. Rather, their actions are perceived as a violation of whiteness regardless of the women’s intention or level of politicized consciousness.

---

\* I wish to thank Pamela Sugiman for her critical reflections on earlier drafts of this paper. I would like to thank Ivy Bourgeault and Donna Baines for their suggestions. Thanks to Adisa and Jelani who always ground me. Most of all I wish to thank Tamari Kitossa for his tireless encouragement, support and inspiration.

<sup>1</sup> Bien qu'elle ne soit pas une catégorie biologique, la race constitue néanmoins un critère de l'analyse sociologique.

<sup>2</sup> While race is not a biological category, it nonetheless constitutes a category for sociological analysis.

## Introduction

From labour history to critical race theory, cultural studies, feminist studies and sociology, the critical interrogation of whiteness has grown enormously over the last 15 years<sup>3</sup>. In this burgeoning literature, a variety of interpretations and foci have emerged on what constitutes the study of whiteness. Interpretations have ranged from whiteness being European cultural nationalism (Ani, 1994), the communication of social identity (Nakayama and Martin, 1999), a location of structural advantage and standpoint (Frankenberg, 1993), to white racial representation (Dyer, 1997). While the theorists' interpretations of whiteness may vary it can generally be argued their scholarship attempts to reflect a wider, more radical politic intended to reveal how whiteness is a process of positive racialization embedded within social relations of power and domination. My research on "white" femininity aims to contribute to the debate on this wider and more radical politic of the theoretical articulations of whiteness. This contribution entails rethinking and theorizing how different groups of European women construct identity, access and administer power - and make sense of their everyday lives (Smith, 1999).

Throughout this essay, I use the terms African and European to denote cultural groups that would otherwise be called "black" and "white." I believe such terms do not accurately reflect cultural genealogy and geographic ancestry. In addition, these terms are laden with such ideological heaviness they cannot be used without reinscribing their concomitant ideology; therefore, to avoid reification I place them in quotations to signal their problematic and socially constructed nature<sup>4</sup>. The other instances in which "black" and "white" occur, they are quotations from academic references or direct quotations from my research participants.

With a few notable exceptions<sup>5</sup>, race in mainstream feminist theory has been theorized from the standpoint of women stigmatized by race. Nakayama & Krizek state that, "in light of the influential political position of whiteness, it is surprising that critical scholars have not yet scrutinized the center in the ways they have been probing the margins (1999: 91). Likewise, European feminist scholars in their attempts to "restore women to history" and probe the margins have, in many instances, reinscribed the power relations of racism. As Dorothy Smith states, this retheorization "has merely rewritten the boundaries. The center still remains; the standpoint within ruling is stably if invisibly present" (1999: 43). Paradoxically because they are on the margins of European male power, the centrality of European women within the racial drama of "white" domination has fallen outside the scope of feminist sociological investigation. If however, as Hazel Carby states, "everyone in the social order has been constructed in our political imagination as a racialized subject," (1992: 3) then how have European women been racialized? Furthermore, how

---

<sup>3</sup> This investigation, however, is not a new topic. Scholars such as W.E.B Dubois (1962), Frantz Fanon (1967), Joel Kovel (1971) and Ida B. Wells (1991) have explored and theorized "whiteness" long before this current vogue.

<sup>4</sup> See Kitossa (2005) Chapter Five for greater elaboration of these points.

<sup>5</sup> See Frankenberg (1993); Frye (1992); and Moon (1999).

are they living and experiencing this racialization? These questions are important to ask because they seek to establish that European women too are raced. Significantly, this acknowledgement allows for the critical elaboration of the conditions that bring this positive racialization into focus.

This paper explores several of the conditions that bring this racialization into focus. These conditions revolve around the demands and rewards for racial and sexual loyalty that are reflected in gendered and racialized landscapes of whiteness in European Canadian women's lives. The term sexual loyalty does not, in this context, refer to monogamous sexual fidelity but rather to "compulsory heterosexuality," a concept developed by Adrienne Rich (1980). Although Rich's concept is not problem free, it provocatively argues that "compulsory heterosexuality" is a force that compels women to believe that sexual orientation toward men is an inevitable and desirable pursuit and outcome (1980: 12). In other words, women's sexual desires may not be "naturally" driven by biology but culturally and socially scripted. In this context, heterosexuality is seen as a political institution that has been "imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force..." (Rich, 1980: 20). "Compulsory heterosexuality," therefore, keeps women imprisoned by a variety of forces including the institutionalization of heterosexuality through marriage, physical and psychological violence as well as "false consciousness" (Rich, 1980: 20). As such, Rich argues it is a "lie [that] keeps numberless women psychologically trapped, trying to fit mind, spirit and sexuality into a prescribed script because they cannot look beyond the parameters of the acceptable" (1980: 29).

According to Rich, the propagation of this lie, however, is multi-layered. This lie of compulsory heterosexuality is articulated from popular culture through to the social sciences. Rich argues that a romantic imperative found in popular culture asserts that women are irresistibly and inevitably drawn to men even when that attraction is psychologically damaging or even tragic. Romance novels such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* or the very popular *Harlequin Series* reflect what Rich calls "an organic imperative" of compulsory heterosexuality (1980: 29). Furthermore, "compulsory heterosexuality" has been propagated in the Western tradition of the social sciences by theorizing that marriage and intimacy between the opposite sexes is normal, functional and that, "women need men as social and economic protectors, for adult sexuality, and for psychological completion" (1980: 29)

While I find Rich's fundamental assertion persuasive, I suggest that not only are Western notions of heterosexuality politically organized to compel women's attraction to the opposite sex, but of equal importance is that this compulsion is toward the same race. For example, indicating this unacceptability, African men have been traditionally constructed as animalistic and sexually aggressive whereas Chinese men have been constructed as

effeminate and needing stimulants such as opium to revitalize their insufficient sexual masculinity (Valverde, 1998: 83) Both were regulated (among other men), although to varying degrees, from having intimate relationships with European women. In fact, interracial relationships were prohibited and illegal in some states in America and prohibited by custom in Canada. In this context when Rich argues that compulsory heterosexuality is a means of assuring male rights which male's rights is she referring to? Given the racial characteristics of competitive masculinity in North America, Rich has extrapolated, simplified and universalized the power position of middle-class European men. Rich's reference to the literary tradition of romantic fiction also ignores the fact that the female and male romantic characters in these novels are of European descent. If we incorporate these overlooked points when analyzing romance novels, for example, we would observe that there is an ideological imperative (romantic and otherwise) not only to keep the unions "heterosexual" but also to ensure European male rights of physical, economic and emotional access to all women. Within the social relations of the European group, heterosexuality is not only compulsory and patriarchally determined but I suggest it is mandated to be 'white' as well<sup>6</sup>.

Historically, European's women's sexuality was regulated and controlled for the reproduction of whiteness and European wealth accumulation. As such, European women were denied the same rights and freedoms of mate selection as European males (Martinot, 2003). This control and regulation was necessary because the racialization of production and reproduction was essential to the project of empire<sup>7</sup>. In the United States, for example, "Black" bodies were needed for the reproduction of a slave labour population and African women were "breeders" of this population. Whereas, "white" bodies were needed for the reproduction of European domination and European women were the "reproducers" of that population<sup>8</sup>. In addition to Aboriginal women whose lands and people had been conquered, it became paramount to control the reproductive capacity of Aboriginal, African and European women. Purity of race, essential for "white" empire and settler colonies, could only be reproduced within all European unions. Thus, as an ideological and in some cases legal mechanism of control (anti-miscegenation), European women's attraction to non-European, non-Christian men was constructed as scandalous and immoral. This construction was fabricated largely because such unsanctioned attractions confounded European men's property rights and patriarchal privilege (African people and European women were both objects of property within relations of colonial and imperial production). Considering that European women's sexuality was controlled for the reproduction of whiteness and wealth accumulation, how does this historical legacy shape contemporary gender sexual relations? More specifically, given Rich's argument, how is

---

<sup>6</sup> I argue that while compulsory heterosexuality in the West crosses all racial/cultural categories, compulsory "white" heterosexuality does not. This mandate for a compulsory "white" heterosexuality is specific to European women.

<sup>7</sup> See Stoler (1989) and Ware (1992).

<sup>8</sup> See Davis (1983) and hooks (1981).

compulsory “white” heterosexuality currently articulated in the everyday lives of European women?

### Research Sample

My exploration of these questions is based on twenty-four in-depth interviews with women of European descent living in Southern Ontario and gathered between 2002 to 2003. The twenty-four research participants included women from two groups: twelve women of Western European ancestry and twelve women of Eastern and Southern European ancestry. I grouped the women into these ancestral geographic/ethnic locations because they approximate the internal hierarchy of whiteness between Europeans. Their ages ranged from seventeen to seventy across both groups. Within these two groups were women of various socio-economic categories such as poor working class, immigrant working class, upper working class, middle class and middle class professional. Nine of the women were involved with men of African descent and two identified themselves as lesbians.

Based on my critical interpretation of their narratives, I suggest European women are called upon to perform “white” femininity through a commitment to racial and sexual loyalty. The idea of performing “white” femininity calls attention to that fact that being “white” is not necessarily a biological condition<sup>9</sup> but, as Marilyn Frye argues “it is being a member of a certain social/political category, a category that is persistently maintained by those people who are, in their own and each other’s perception, most questionably in it” (1992: 14). Inextricably bound to the desire to belong, this membership in some ways compulsory since if one is “white,” then one is a,

*member of a continuously and politically constituted group which holds itself together by rituals of unity and exclusion, which develops in its member certain styles and attitude useful in the exploitation of others, which demands and rewards fraternal loyalty... (Frye, 150).*

As such, if European women do not demonstrate a (fraternal) loyalty, disciplinary regimes at the individual and collective level are utilized to enforce compliance. The enforcement of compliance frequently begins with the family; however, it is also reinforced in external social relations.

### Compulsory “White” Heterosexuality

Dreama Moon in “White Enculturation and Bourgeois Ideology” argues that for many European women the home is often a site of gender and racial indoctrination where dominant notions of European femininity are reinscribed (1999: 181). It is a space where women are taught to acquiesce to dominant ideologies around gender, race, ethnicity, class and sexuality. This enculturation process, Moon argues, is often contradictory because it

---

<sup>9</sup> Being of European descent certainly does help in being considered “white;” however, the Japanese, for example, have been considered honorary “whites,” as have Arabs and Puerto-Rican Caucasians.

can contain both opposition and acceptance of dominant ideologies. While the home can be an anti-hegemonic space, more frequently, it reproduces dominant ideologies. The enculturation process for Moon is racialized within the cultural space of the European home because "the patriarchal production of 'good girls' within the family is inextricably linked to the racist production of 'good white girls'" (1999: 181). In other words what it means to be a "good girl" within European family relations is often times connected with issues of a compulsory "white" heterosexuality and racial solidarity.

Many of the research participants' narratives spoke directly to the social and familial concern for "compulsory heterosexuality." For example, Susanne, a 19 year old university student of Italian Catholic heritage, commented on her parent's reaction to her mate selection: "[my parents] want me to marry an Italian and someone in my own religion...so get married, then have kids...have a nice job. They just want the best for me—the ideal life." The "best and ideal life", however, is one that conforms to a bourgeois class and European ethnic heteronormativity found in the narratives of other research participants as well. Natasha, a 22 year old university student of Polish Catholic descent commented: "you marry Polish and someone of the same religion. They also discourage divorce." I asked Natasha whether the primary issue for her family was that she marries a Pole, a Catholic or if both were equally important. She replied "I think being Catholic. I think [being] Polish is a bonus because my family lives in Poland and communicating with them would be a lot easier." Reflecting on my argument of a compulsory "white" heterosexuality, I asked how she would anticipate her family's reaction if her love interest was Catholic but of African descent? She responded emphatically,

*They think it is wrong. You should stick to your own kind. [Even if he is Catholic] they would find something else to complain about—"oh he doesn't speak Polish." And if he did speak Polish then they would find something else. They would find something wrong with him because he is not white.*

Both women's narratives exemplify bourgeois and heteronormative expectations that were embedded within the discourses of nation, race and religion. Susanne, of Italian and Catholic background similarly explained that although her boyfriend is French, her father "always hints [for me to] bring home a nice Italian boy but if [I] never did it would not be an issue." When I asked how her parents' would react if her involvement were with a man of colour she commented that, while she did not think her parents would disown her, they "would be really disappointed." Antonia, a 26 year old woman of Italian descent, also stated that her family would take issue with her dating someone from a different cultural group, specifically a man of African descent. She said,

*My parents, my father and grandmother especially [would have a problem with interracial dating] because of their cultural background...my father is just a*

*little bit of a racist...he had made a comment to my sister and myself that if we ever came home with a black guy he would do something. I don't know exactly what that something would be but it wouldn't be pleasant.*

In essence, the parents of these women would not have an "issue" as long as the women's partners were European. I believe Susanne, Natasha and Antonia's narratives illustrate the successful transmission of dominant ideologies of race, gender, and ethnicity. This successful transmission does not necessarily indicate that these women will conform to dominant ideologies but rather that they clearly understand the expectations and repercussions if they do not. The desired and, in many ways, expected conduct of these women has been defined for them. And this is how dominant ideologies work—they can seduce, solicit, induce and win consent. Natasha stated that "I always had the notion in my head that I would marry someone Polish and Catholic so that it doesn't create conflict later [with my family] and with the children." This notion was later confirmed for Natasha by the negative reactions of family members to the inter-ethnic/religious marriage between her Polish Catholic cousin and her Macedonian Orthodox fiancée. When seeing her family's negative reaction to her cousin's marriage, Natasha noted, "I have to be very careful with my choices."

Gina, a 40 year old Macedonian Canadian Woman, learned the expectations of compulsory "white" heterosexuality and the rules of European ethnic nationalism too late. She explained that her choice to marry and have children with an African Jamaican man was viewed with abhorrence. She admits that "it took me a while to figure out that I had broken one of the cardinal rules of White and Macedonian society. If you are a white woman you do not marry a black man and have children with him." She added that,

*when I married a black man all hell broke loose in my life. My family would ask 'how could you do this to us? As if loving a black man was doing something to them.*

Unbeknownst to Gina, she ostensibly did something to her family, as too did Sera, by becoming romantically involved with an African man. Sera stated for example, "As far as my parents are concerned I've hurt them. They [don't see how they] have hurt me." The parents' perception of injury derives from the fact that as immigrants whose families came to Canada to "have a better life" and possibly move up the socio-economic ladder, their daughters did not conform to one of the rules of "white" supremacy or European ethnic nationalism; marry someone of your own race/ethnicity. Gina relates that when she broke the "cardinal rule of white and Macedonian society" she was "seen as a white slut." In recognition of this point Ruth Frankenberg states that "the range of possible meanings for "white" femininity is transformed in interracial contexts and in the face of such violations "white families question their daughters' membership in their natal families and

communities" (1993: 136).

In these narratives, racial exogamy seemed to imply contamination and repudiation of the natal family and their aspirations. Britney for example, pointed out that although her parents did not approve of her interracial relationships she was a "good girl" until she decided to have a baby. At that point her parents insisted she abort for no other reason than the father was African Trinidadian. It is striking that at least three-quarter of my research participants with African partners were confronted with parental demands to have abortions. It seems that stereotypical images of African men were inextricably bound with the parents' heteronormative and ethnic expectations. Donna, for example, a 39-year-old woman of Czechoslovakian descent also married to an African Jamaican man recalls that when she was a young girl, "my mom and dad sat me down and made it very, very clear that I should never and would never date a black man. It was forbidden and I should and would be with a Czech." When I asked Donna why she believed African men were seen as inappropriate mate choices she replied,

*Well it has a lot to do with how the black man is perceived...He is the lowest form of human. He takes and sells drug...they expect that he will abandon his wife and children. So, to invite such a lowlife into the family is an unforgivable disgrace.*

Wondering if class played a mediating factor in her family's response, I asked if the African man in question was, for example, a physician if their response would be different. Donna replied "In their minds he would still be black." Mirroring Donna's response, Sera describes her father's response when she defended her boyfriend's social image as "hardworking and clean" rather than a "drug dealer, criminal." Her father replied, "But he is still black. How are we gonna get the nigger not to be a nigger?" For these families then, particularly the fathers, animus toward these unions subordinated all other factors, such as class, to the centrality of race. In addition, while the mothers in these families shared similar racist sentiments as the fathers, the women in particular appeared more willing to either work through or overlook their daughters' "transgressions," especially if a child was involved.

These responses reveal that a commitment to racial and sexual loyalty is conflated with being a "good white girl." As Moon states, "in order to achieve and maintain 'good (white) girl' status, white women must be willing to be, if not actively engaged, at least complicitous with the reproduction of white supremacy" (1999: 182). European women who do not conform to or are complicit in the reproduction of whiteness are disciplined for being traitors to their gender and race. One such disciplinary strategy, as I noted above, is labelling such women "white sluts." Further revealing the anxious relationships between heteronormativity, race and gender, Donna suggests "I think the only thing worse than



being with a black man was to be a lesbian." Speaking to this issue of heteronormativity, Lilly, Anglo-Celtic in background, spoke of the "tyranny" of being a lesbian in a heterosexual world. As a result of heterosexism, life as a lesbian was so problematic for Lilly she remained in the "closet" for most of her adult life. It was only in her mid-thirties that she became openly lesbian and even then it was only to close friends and family. She states "I keep my sexual identity private. People get all weird with you and I don't want it affecting my professional life."

The disciplinary measures were similar for the women who identified as lesbian and for the women in interracial relationships with African men. Their experiences ranged from loss of material privilege such as being denied work promotions to a loss of psychological privilege resulting from degradation and stigmatization. These similarities lie in how heterosexuality or heteronormativity in the West has been articulated as an institution in the service of 'white' patriarchy and family values. Through a complex series of institutions and social, cultural and religious values European women are expected to conform to the accepted conditions of reproduction through 'white' heterosexuality marriage, motherhood and the associated values of love and romance<sup>10</sup> (See Rich, 1979). Furthermore, heterosexuality has become a precondition of a division of labour based on sex, whereby the various tasks performed by men and woman are supposed to compliment each other. As a result, the heterosexual family has been constructed as natural and a reciprocal dependence between females and males. All other sexual relationships that fall outside the boundaries of what is "natural" and "normal" (i.e. heterosexual) are regulated to the realm of the deviant and to be policed and monitored. Interracial marriages, while still reviled in many instances, are now none-the-less legal heterosexual arrangements. The regulation (legal and social) of heterosexual marriage, childbearing and sexuality all point to how women are controlled and regulated in service of men. Consequently, relations between men and women are political and in this sense indicative of hierarchy. Sexual relations between women (and sexual relations between men) then, are potentially subversive of that hierarchy and in this way lesbian same sex relations differ. As a result some of the most virulent forms of overt discrimination are directed toward lesbian women (and gay men).

In the context of the visual stigma of blackness and its symbolic transference onto the women, several research participants involved with African men spoke of the techniques of punishment directed toward them. Britney said,

*When they know you are with a black man and you did not marry a white man then you lose the privileges you could have gained. Promotions don't come as easily. People's opinions change. They look at you as a trampy woman.*

---

<sup>10</sup> This is not to argue that other groups of women are not affected by heteronormativity /heterosexuality but that in the reproduction of whiteness European women play a specific role.

Betty, a 55-year-old middle class professional of English descent, came to a similar realization after several years with Courtney, her Bajan Canadian husband. She explained "at work I am a white<sup>11</sup> person. I never talk about my family. I don't bring it up because I don't want to be dealing with their stereotypes. They get all twitchy with you." Similarly, Lilly hid her sexual identity at work. She said, "You know, I need to eat. I need a roof over my head. So I don't broadcast it." In Lilly's case the disciplinary regimes of gender and heteronormativity created a tension between her existential concerns and her sexual identity. Others were equally strategic. For instance, Sera would go apartment hunting without her partner because she once experienced the denial of housing when a superintendent met her African Jamaican partner. These responses suggest that in order to reap the full benefits of "white" womanhood European women must conform to the rules of compulsory "white" heterosexuality thus, signalling their "good white girl" status.

### **"White" Women as "trope"**

The narratives of my research participants suggest several key issues. One issue is that European women's cultural currency or what Frankenberg calls a "trope" (1997: 11) lies in their union to European men. A trope, Frankenberg argues, is an image 'that constructs versions of femaleness and maleness divided by race, nationality or peoplehood, depending on which mode of naming difference predominates in a given moment or place' (1999: 11). The trope of "white woman" functions to define the acceptable conduct of her race, gender and, to some degree, ethnicity and class. Frankenberg explains that a European woman,

*is advantaged only conditionally on her acceptance of the terms of the contract. This includes especially her sexual practices, for the trope-ical family is strictly heterosexual and monoracial in its coupling (with the exception that White Man whom may have unofficial liaisons with Woman of Colour, with or without her consent). (1997: 11)*

The narratives of those women in lesbian and interracial relationships with men of African descent speak to this concept of "white woman as a trope." Considering the disciplinary regimes encountered by the European women, the most significant heterosexual union is that to European men (most preferable a middle-to-upper class man). It is within this union that European women can presumably access the best of the privileges and benefits of a "white" capitalist patriarchy. This is made possible by the normalization of "white" heterosexuality through the institution of marriage, as well, the disciplinary measures experienced by those who do not fit nor conform to the model. In North American society the "preferred" marriage model is the European middle class heterosexual couple who are presumed to have or will plan to have children. Speaking to this perception, Gina states,

---

<sup>11</sup> For Betty, being a "white" person entails a union to a person of the same "race." Interracial unions to African men disturb and question European women's "white" membership. Thus, while Betty may be European by birth her "white" membership, to do some degree, is contingent on her conforming to the rules of compulsory "white" heterosexuality.

*By social standards I don't think my life would be considered a total success story...I have a house, a car, a husband and children. But my partner is Jamaican... My relationship is not what is constructed as an icon of a successful straight relationship. My husband and I are not the symbols of success.*

Those who do not represent this model of success, such as Gina, as well as single women past childbearing age, single mothers, lesbians etc., can experience (and often times do) a diminished quality of life in psychological and economic terms. At times, these women compartmentalize and conceal those parts of themselves that betray their non-conformity. Lilly, for example, concealed her sexual orientation and was a "straight" person at work while, Betty concealed her interracial relationship and was a "white" person at work. What these experiences reveal is that European women's race and sexuality are channelled not only toward monogamous marriage to a man but also one that is of the same race. This is evident in the ways these women's choices are circumscribed by the possible stigmatization they suffer and the loss of cultural capital, material access and resources. For example, several of the research participants found themselves homeless when their parent's learned of their interracial relationships. Sera, in particular, said "I got caught and then thrown out. They wouldn't even let me back in the house to get any of my clothes. They said 'give me the house keys... give me everything.'" As gendered and raced beings, there appears to be a narrowly defined parameter available for women's sexual and personal self-actualization outside the ideological monogamous union to a European male. Having said this though, while race and gender played a determining role in their experiences, class in some cases, had a mediating effect. Donna explained,

*When I became pregnant I had to leave my parent's house. So there I was pregnant and unemployed and scared out of my mind. How was I to survive? Well, I managed to find an apartment with the little savings I had...but things became better because my boyfriend and I got married. Through incredibly hard work, determination and a little luck we went to university and found good jobs.*

Donna's situation, though initially vulnerable, improved as she and her partner attended university and gradually moved up the socio-economic ladder. This vertical movement altered the social responses they encountered in part because university life acted as a shield against overt racism. In addition, she explained, "I did notice though when my husband and I became property owners that there was a slightly different reaction—less disgust directed at us. So, I think there are advantages of class but I have yet to reap the full benefits of them." And Donna may never reap the full benefits of her new class location because her involvement with a man who carries the permanent stigma of blackness, regardless of his class status, negates full access to "white" middle class privilege.

My argument is not that all European women equally experience overt anti-interracial animus. They experience a variety of responses dependent on factors such as age, class, ethnicity, family history, residential locale and psychological make-up. Middle class European women involved with middle class African men, for example, buffered by "white" middle class respectability, may not be dealt the full blow of anti-interracial animus as would working class European women. Rather, regardless of class position I suggest that anti-interracial animus directed toward African men and European women arises because the stigma of blackness that African men embody is symbolically transferred onto European women<sup>12</sup>. In the context of the meanings imputed to such unions in Canadian society, the "fraternal loyalty" of such European women is called into question. As Frankenberg argues, European women are advantaged only provisionally on their acceptance of the terms of the contract which dictate heterosexual and monoracial unions (1997: 11).

When these women make choices outside the terms of compulsory "white" heterosexuality there are strategies for "putting her back in her place." On a metaphorical level putting her back in her place suggests there is a specific symbolic feminine place where she must be confined. This symbolic place—subordination to European masculinity—condones and even promotes verbal and physical aggression toward these women. Donna, Gina, Mariska and Sera for example, were verbally and physically attacked by men in their families when they learned of their interracial relationships. Donna believed the motivating factor for this violence lay in exercising a (sexual) freedom of choice usually reserved for (European) men. In another example, Gina believed the violence was a result of her not following "the patriarchal rules of conduct." Having failed or "overstepped these boundaries" as Gina states, "life became very challenging." The physical aggression and the threats appeared to hinge on the breaking of social/cultural expectations that were contingent on race, gender and ethnic conventions. The "choices" available to these women suggest that the highest ideal of loyalty is to patriarchy and whiteness.

### **European Ethnic Nationalism**

A prominent issue for exploration in compulsory "white" heterosexuality is the violent character of European ethnic nationalism. The women who were explicitly instructed by family members not to date interracially tended to be of Eastern and Southern European descent (this instruction crossed class boundaries). Gina was told she must marry a Macedonian. Donna was told she must marry a Czech. Diplomatically, Sera was told she should marry an Italian man. The narratives of the women who were of Western European descent, however, did not appear to have the same restrictions put on their choice of dating partners. Denise, for example, who is a mixture of English and Irish said, "my parents never defined for me who I can date." While this may suggest that Southern and Eastern Europeans are more racist and less liberal than Western Europeans, I do not believe this is

---

<sup>12</sup> See Deliofsky (2002); Kitossa (2005, Chapter Five); and Frankenberg (1993).

the case. Rather we need to look at the family's responses in the broader historical context of ethnicity, immigration and the struggle for inclusion into whiteness<sup>13</sup>.

The rights and privileges of whiteness that were arrogated to Anglo-Saxons were not initially accorded to other Europeans. Immigrants from Europe, particularly the Celts, Slavs, Jews and Mediterraneans, were seen as inferior to the Anglo-Saxon race and therefore more difficult to assimilate. The Slavs were perceived as backwards and unintelligent; the Irish and Italians were seen as criminogenic (Weinfeld and Wilkinson, 1999) and Jews were seen as seditious. Donna's narrative speaks to the legacy of these perceptions. She believed that she was "not really" seen as "white" because of her Slovak background. "When I was a child," she recalls, "we were seen as stupid, backward, peasants..."

While the status as "free white persons" earned many European ethnic groups entry into North America, they fought to be legitimated as "white" once they arrived. Irish Americans, for example, once ostracized as "white niggers" were key in winning the fight for a ten hour work day and in creating labour unions in nineteenth century America (Ignatiev, 1995). At the same time, however, out of occupational competitiveness they were central in driving and keeping African Americans out of the labour market. Irish Americans, Ignatiev argues in *How the Irish Became White* (1995) fought to distinguish themselves from African Americans with whom they commonly shared neighbourhoods and jobs. They rioted fairly systematically to drive Africans Americans from "their" neighbourhoods in order to define those spaces as "white" zones. James Walker (1985) reports that ethnic and poor Europeans in Canada had similar responses to African Canadians.

Dyer points out that whiteness has been more successful than class in coalescing European people across ethno/cultural boundaries, even at times against the best interest of working class people (1997: 19). Clearly whiteness creates the idea that, "some whites are whiter than others, with the Anglo-Saxons, Germans and Scandinavians usually providing the apex of whiteness under British imperialism, US development and Nazism" (Dyer, 1997: 20). This internal hierarchy of whiteness suggests there is a "white" ladder that Europeans can climb and Dyer argues that it "has produced a dynamic that has enthralled people who have had any chance of participating in it" (1997: 20). Illustrating this complex dynamic, Matthew Frye Jacobson states, "an Irish immigrant in 1877 could be a despised Celt in Boston—a threat to the republic—and yet a solid member of The Order of Caucasians for the Extermination of the Chinaman in San Francisco, gallantly defending U.S. shores from an invasion of 'Mongolians'" (1998: 5). Through participation in racism, "ethnic"

---

13 It appears that Western Europeans are better adept at concealing their commitments to "white" supremacy by what Dreama Moon calls "whitespeak" (1999: 189). While Moon sees "whitespeak" as a bourgeois technique, it certainly has applicability to ethnicity. "Whitespeak" enables Western European parents to avoid the crass verbalization of "white" supremacy but nevertheless perpetuate its core sentiments.

Europeans prove they are like “everybody else” and can climb the “white” ladder by defending whiteness from “black,” “red” and “yellow” invasions.

Having fought for and achieved “white” status it is now to be guarded with tenacity. This history is evident in Donna’s narrative. She explained “[my parents] don’t want to be marked by their immigrant or ethnic status and so to bring a black man into the house just ruins that.” Interracial relationships with African men, thus, can disturb this new earned status. A dramatic demonstration of this point is the case of a Greek Canadian father who conspired to have his future Jamaican son-in-law murdered because he “feared the loss of status” (Lefaive, 1993). Interestingly, while the future son-in-law’s educational status superseded that of the fiancée’s father (he was in university working toward a law degree) this fact was overshadowed by the “fact of blackness” (Fanon, 1967) or what Dubois (1914) calls “unforgivable blackness.”

In Gina and Donna’s case, their parents climb the “white ethnic” ladder by playing by the rules of whiteness and making sure their daughters do not bring “home a nigger” (as they were ordered not to do, but did none the less). The significant point here is that for the once marginalized European ethnic groups, the perpetuation of whiteness dynamically converges with gender, race and sexuality. I am not suggesting that all European ethnic parents who hint that their daughters should date or marry someone of their background are racist. My attempt is to elucidate that in a society that defines social value and access to material resources by ones approximation to whiteness and heterosexuality, the desire for ethnic continuity often times masks one’s commitment to patriarchy, social inequality and white supremacy. This commitment is often revealed in the family’s responses to heterosexual, interracial unions, which range from mild disappointment, rejection and violence.

In closing, compulsory “white” heterosexuality is one of the primary ways European women are compelled to perform “white” feminine sexuality. Consistent with gender and ethnic expectations and at times across class divisions, European women are expected, and at times demanded, to demonstrate their loyalty to whiteness and patriarchy. I argue that this process manifests across class because the demand for compulsory “white” heterosexuality in my research was not a class specific phenomenon but somewhat akin to a caste-like tribalism<sup>14</sup>. Responses to interracial unions, particularly between European women and African men, reveal the hidden heteronormative expectations of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. In this context of compulsory “white” heterosexuality European women can challenge, legitimate or strategically accommodate European male domination. I must make it clear though that I am not arguing that all European women in interracial unions are actively challenging European patriarchal power. Rather, these women’s actions are perceived as a violation of whiteness regardless of their intention or

---

<sup>14</sup> See Martha Hodes (1997) for a historical discussion on the class dimensions of European and African unions in the US.

level of politicized consciousness.

If European women do not "legitimate the status quo," as Gina put it, and are seen as disloyal to whiteness and patriarchy, disciplinary regimes are employed to elicit or coerce compliance. Often, if their failed compliance to heteronormative whiteness is known, their access to the rewards of "white" membership is revoked. This revoking of membership signals that European women's power is defined in limited and hegemonic ways (Rowe and Lindsay, 2003) and contingent upon their actual and symbolic subordination to European masculine proprietorship. In this sense, Rowe and Lindsay (2003) argue that the power European women secure is contingent upon their subordination and their formation as a hegemonic object. In other words, the power European women secure is contingent on their ability to conform to the rules of compulsory "white" heterosexuality. As such, compulsory "white" heterosexuality illustrates that the personal is indeed political. It reflects the recognition of the "personal" as the sphere in which European male domination has some of its deepest ideological and material consequences.

Having said this, compulsory "white" heterosexuality cannot simply be defined as the acting out of the desires and power of the omnipotent "white male oppressor." It is a two way process in which both European women and European men are engaged in a continuous struggle to establish the terms of their existence. In other words, racism is not the sole preserve of European men. European women have been both active and complicit in their alignment with a racist patriarchal order. This point cannot be overstated for its everyday implications for European women's lives and for its implications for feminist theory and practice. With these caveats to feminism in mind we can better appreciate the arguments of radical feminists of colour who argue that if feminism is to actualize its goal to liberate women's bodies and minds then feminist theorizing must take seriously the role of race in feminism, history and social relations. Taking race seriously means more than the theorization of race from the standpoint of women stigmatized by race. It means explicating what Dorothy Smith calls the "concealed standpoint" (1999: 43). The concealed standpoint is the "white" standpoint, "the position in the ruling relations that is taken for granted in how we speak and that bounds and constrains how a political economy of women can speak to women" (Smith, 1999: 43). The explication involves making visible the positive "racialness" of European women and its implications for gaining and administering power. This analysis of compulsory "white" heterosexuality aims to make visible how the stability of whiteness as a structural location of privilege is secured and reproduced. Analyzing the elements integral to compulsory "white" heterosexuality aims to help reconceptualize the foundation on which feminist activists participate in liberatory, humane and antiracist work.

## REFERENCES

- Ani, M. 1994. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behaviour*. New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Carby, H. 1992. "Multicultural Wars." In *Black Popular Culture*. Gina Dent (ed.). Seattle: Bay Press, pp. 187-99.
- Davis, A. 1983. *Women, Race and Class*. New York: Vintage books.
- Deliovsky, K. 2002. "Transgressive Whiteness: The Social Construction of White Women involved in Interracial Relationships with Black men." In *Back to the Drawing Board: African Canadian Feminisms*. N. Wane, K. Deliovsky and E. Lawson (eds.). Toronto. Sumach Press, pp. 234-261.
- Dubois. W.E.B. 1962. *Black Reconstruction in America. 1860-1880*. Cleveland: World Publishing Co.
- Dubois, W.E.B. "The Prize Fighter," *Crisis*, August, 1914.
- Dyer, R. 1997. *White*. London: Routledge
- Fanon, F. 1967. *Black Skin White Masks*. New York: Grove Press Inc.
- Frankenberg, R. 1997. *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Frankenberg, R. 1993. *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Frye, M. 1992. *Wilful Virgin: Essays in Feminism, 1976-1992*. California: The Crossing Press.
- Hodes, M. 1997. *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- hooks, b. b 1981. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Boston: South End Press.
- Ignatiev, N. 1995. *How the Irish Became White*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.



- Jacobson, M. F. 1998. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Kitossa, T. 2005. *It's Written on the Body: Malleus Africanus, Crime and Racial Dialectic in Western Ontology*. Ph.D. dissertation, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, Toronto.
- Kovel, J. 1971. *White Racism: A Psychohistory*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Lefave, D. 1993. "Man Wanted Hired Gun to Kill Daughter's Fiance. In *The Hamilton Spectator*, (March 9).
- Martinot, S. 2003. *The Rules of Racialization: Class, Identity, Governance*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Moon, D. 1999. "White Enculturation and Bourgeois Ideology: The Discursive Production of 'Good (White) Girls'." In *Whiteness: The Social Communication of Social Identity*. T. Nakayama and J. Martin (eds.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, pp. 177-197.
- Nakayama, T. and R. L. Krizek. 1999. "Whiteness as a Strategic Rhetoric." In *Whiteness: The Social Communication of Social Identity*. T. Nakayama and J. Martin. (eds.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, pp. 87-108.
- Nakayama, T. and J. Martin. 1999. *Whiteness: The Social Communication of Social Identity*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Rich, A. 1980. *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. Denver: Antelope Publications.
- Rowe, C. A. and S. Lindsay. 2003. "Reckoning Loyalties: White Femininity as 'Crisis'." *Feminist Media Studies*. Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 173-191.
- Smith, D. 1999. *Writing The Social: Critique, Theory, and Investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Stoler, A. 1989. "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Racial and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-Century Colonial Cultures." *American Ethnologist*, Vol.16, No. 4.

- Valverde, M. 1998. "Sexuality." In *New Society: Sociology for the 21st Century*. R.J. Brym (ed.). Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company, pp. 74-102.
- Walker, J. 1985. *Racial Discrimination in Canada: The Black Experience*. Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association No. 41.
- Ware, V. 1992. *Beyond the Pale. White Women, Racism and History*. New York: Verso.
- Weinfeld, M. and L.A. Wilkinson. 1999. "Immigration, Diversity, and Minority Communities." In *Race and Ethnic Relations in Canada*. P.S. Li (ed.). Don Mills: Oxford University Press, pp. 55-86.
- Wells, I.B. 1991. *Selected Works of Ida B. Wells-Barnett*. Compiled and with an Introduction by T. Harris. New York: Oxford University Press