THE GAP BETWEEN *WHITES* AND *WHITENESS*

Interracial Intimacy and Racial Literacy[1]

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Abstract

How do White members of Black-White interracial families negotiate the meanings of *race*, and particularly *Whiteness*? Inspired by W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of *double consciousness*, this article argues that interracial intimacy is a microlevel political site where White people can acquire a critical analytical lens that we conceptualize as *racial literacy*. This article fills a gap in the empirical and theoretical literature on race and Whiteness by including gay, lesbian, and heterosexual families on both sides of the Atlantic. Drawing on two ethnographic research projects involving one hundred and twenty-one interracial families in the United Kingdom and the eastern United States, we provide an analysis of how White people learn to translate racial codes, decipher racial structures, and manage the racial climate in their communities. We draw on "racial consciousness" interviews conducted with one hundred and one heterosexual families and twenty gay and lesbian families to present seven portraits that illuminate three dimensions of racial literacy: double consciousness, negotiation of local racial meanings, and seeing routine forms of everyday racism.

Keywords: Race, Racism, Racial Literacy, Social Theory, Interracial Families, Gay and Lesbian, Whiteness, Britain

INTRODUCTION

Interracial intimacy, particularly involving heterosexual marriage, has been analyzed as a barometer of enduring racism and as a key measure of movements toward racial equality (Frankenberg 1993; Hamberger and Hewstone, 1997; McDowell 1971; McNamara et al., 1999; Telles 1993; Twine 1999a). Sociologists have employed interracial intimacy as an analytical lens to examine everyday racism and the persistence of racial boundaries (Merton 1941; Drake and Cayton, 1945; Frankenberg

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1997; Porterfield 1978; Dalmage 2000; Childs 2005). Despite the wealth of literature on racism and antiracism, sociological analyses of race remain relatively silent on the ways that interracial relationships can be sites of sociopolitical knowledge and catalysts for transformations in racial consciousness that may catapult White members of interracial couples toward a more nuanced analysis of race and Whiteness. In this article, we argue that same-sex and heterosexual interracial intimacy is a microlevel political site where racial literacy projects are developed, interpreted, and negotiated by individuals in committed relationships.

Sociologists devoted to race have produced few empirical studies of gay, lesbian, or heterosexual families that provide a rigorous analysis of interracial intimacy as a dynamic site where *White* members of interracial families learn to develop a critical analysis of how racism operates in their lives. In other words, how do White members of interracial families learn to distinguish between their Whiteness and White supremacy as a racial project, an ideology, a line of vision, and a position of structural advantage, which are always enacted through the matrix of class, gender, generation, sexuality, and locality?

Writing of the continuities and changes in the post-civil rights era in the United States, Howard Winant (1998) identifies a crisis in the meanings of *race* and *racism*. Winant argues that in the contemporary United States there is a lack of consensus on the meaning and contours of racism. Racism has many faces. Its plasticity and mutability generate disagreements and debates on where racism ends and begins. Like an outlaw, racism can hide out and return in different guises. This has generated a number of problematics for members of interracial couples, as well as race theorists. In this article we focus primarily on White members of interracial families whom we classify as having developed "racial literacy" (Twine 2004).[2] The following analysis privileges a subset of Whites involved in interracial relationships who struggle daily to distinguish between the meaning of *racism* and their Whiteness in their private and public lives. Yet we recognize that intimate relationships with Blacks neither guarantee nor are sufficient to catapult one across the chasm of what some theorists refer to as *color blindness*, and what we term *racism evasion*, into racial literacy projects.[3]

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: RACIAL FORMATION AND WHITENESS STUDIES

Racial formation theory was developed by Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986) to reconcile two opposing positions on race: the notion that race is a fixed and essential condition that individuals possess, and the view that race is a mere illusion. Omi and Winant offer racial formation theory as a way to "disrupt and reframe the rigid and bipolar manner in which they are posed and debated, and to transcend the presumably irreconcilable relationships between them" (Omi and Winant, 1994, p. 54). According to Omi and Winant, racial formation can be defined as "a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized" (1994, p. 56). Omi and Winant argue that racial formation occurs at the microlevel and the macrolevel. Describing the presence of race as a macrosystem, they draw upon the work of Herbert Gintis and Samuel Bowles (1981) to argue:

> A social structure may be understood as a series of "sites." We conceive of a site as a region of social life with a coherent set of constitutive social relations—the *structure* of the site. Thus in the advanced capitalist social formation, the liberal

> democratic states, the capitalist economy, and the patriarchal family may be considered sites in that each may be characterized by a distinct set of "rules of the game" for participation in practices (cited in Omi and Winant, 1986, p. 67).

Interracial families, like nation-states, can be viewed as sites where competing racial projects are negotiated. Racial meanings are created, contested, and transformed in interracial families, as they are in political organizations and state-led political projects.[4] Despite the importance of the family as an intermediate institution, interracial families have not been systematically studied by sociologists as racial "sites" where racial projects are constituted and negotiated. Furthermore, in research on White identity formation, interracial families have been neglected in microcultural analyses. The microcultural projects that we analyze here do not necessarily begin as "political" projects; nevertheless, they may act as a catalyst for shifts in the ability of family members to recognize and analyze racial projects and racial meanings.

Whiteness studies is a subfield of critical racial studies in which *Whiteness* is interrogated as an ostensibly neutral, empty, or invisible social category, and examined as a location of structural advantage (Haney-Lopez 1996; Harris 1993; Roediger 1991); a "standpoint"; a psychological wage (Du Bois 1935 [1976]); a cultural identity (Hartigan 1997, 1999; Twine 1996); and a focus of competing racial projects (Winant 1997). Scholars in this area address the racial thinking and racial logics employed by Whites as they negotiate their relationship to dominant racial structures and ideologies and develop microlevel racial and ethnic projects (Dalmage 2000; Gallagher 2003; Hartigan 1997, 1999). While transformations of the meanings attached to Whiteness in the context of interracial partnerships have been thoughtfully explored in the genre of memoir (Lazarre 1996; McBride 1996; Reddy 1996), sociologists have rarely examined the ways that Whites negotiate racism and racial meanings as members of transracial families (Childs 2005; Dalmage 2000; Frankenberg 1993; Rothman 2005; Twine 1996, 1999b, 2004).

In her groundbreaking book *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (1993), Ruth Frankenberg interviews thirty White women about how "race structures their lives." In contrast to previous studies of interraciality, Frankenberg focuses clearly on the racial consciousness of the White member of the interracial family or couple. She argues that White women in primary relationships with people of color develop an acute awareness of the symbolic and material dimensions of racism. She suggests that, as intimates of Black men or women, White women experience "rebound racism" through encounters that are secondhand and diffuse, but still painful. Racial pressures, she notes, also create tensions inside the relationship, as White partners struggle with their position *vis-à-vis* U.S. racism. Significantly, Frankenberg demonstrates that, through interracial intimacy, White women find themselves "in changed positions in the racial order, albeit on contingent and provisional terms" (1993, p. 135). However, she does not offer an analysis of how White partners perceive and respond to this shifting racial location.

Building upon Frankenberg's theoretical foundation and expanding her analysis to another national context (U.K.), we examine the ways that White[5] members of Black-White interracial couples rethink, revise, and rework the meanings of race and racism by utilizing Twine's concept of "racial literacy" (Twine 1999a, 2004).[6] Drawing upon her longitudinal ethnography of British interracial families, Twine (2004) delineated one dimension of racial literacy as it operates among White mothers and fathers who were members of heterosexual couples or extended families organized around heterosexuality.

Racial literacy is a set of practices. It can best be characterized as a "reading practice"—a *way of perceiving and responding to the racial climate and racial structures individuals encounter*. The analytical criteria that we employ to evaluate the presence of racial literacy are drawn from a longitudinal ethnography of British interracial families conducted by Twine (2004, 2006, 2007), and include the following: 1) a recognition of the symbolic and material value of Whiteness; 2) the definition of *racism* as a current social problem rather than a historical legacy; 3) an understanding that racial identities are *learned* and an outcome of social practices; 4) the possession of racial grammar and a vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of race, racism, and antiracism; 5) the ability to translate (interpret) racial codes and racialized practices; and 6) an analysis of the ways that racism is mediated by class inequalities, gender hierarchies, and heteronormativity.

Racial literacy is an everyday practice—an analytic stance that facilitates ongoing self-education and enables members of interracial families to translate racial codes, decipher racial structures, and manage the racial climate in their local and national communities. Yet racial literacy does not operate exclusively among either transracial parents or members of interracial families. It is a form of literacy that can be acquired by Black and non-Black members of diverse racial and ethnic origin as well as nonparents (Twine 2007).[7] Members of interracial families and couples varied in the degree of racial literacy that they possessed. Racial literacy can generate a particular sociopolitical vision through an ongoing dialogue about the meaning and value of race with one's self and one's family members, friends, and peers.

When sociologists consider interracial intimacy only as a social problem, we neglect its potential as a dynamic site where racial meanings are produced and transformed. In this article, we extend Twine's conceptual umbrella by providing an analysis of how racial literacy operates among Black and White members of same-sex and heterosexual couples.[8] We will examine three practices that enable White members of interracial families to develop a critical racial frame: developing "double consciousness," negotiating localized meanings of *Whiteness*, and recognizing everyday racism.

METHODS

The data for this article are drawn from two ethnographic research projects conducted by the authors with White and Black members of 121 interracial families living in the United Kingdom and the eastern United States.[9] Between 1995 and 2004, Twine conducted participant observation and collected "racial consciousness biographies" from heterosexual parents who belonged to Black-White interracial families in London and Leicester.[10] Twine conducted 118 interviews with White and Black members of eighty-one interracial families. This British sample includes White birth mothers of children of African descent; the mothers were single, married, divorced, or widowed between the ages of twenty-eight and seventy years when they were recruited into the longitudinal study. These women were parenting children fathered by a Black man of English, Caribbean, or U.S. origin. The British sample also included fourteen White fathers, seventeen Black fathers, and twelve Black sisters-in-law. Their relationships lasted from several months to more than thirty years. This article draws on the interviews (ranging from 120 to 300 minutes in length) with the White members of interracial families who offered "racial consciousness biographies."

In a separate project, during 2004 and 2005, Steinbugler conducted eighty in-depth interviews (lasting from one to three hours) with forty Black-White fami-

lies living in the metropolitan regions surrounding New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. This U.S. sample included ten lesbian couples, ten gay couples, ten Black woman-White man couples, and ten White woman-Black man couples.[11] Members of these couples were between the ages of twenty-two and sixty-five years of age and had been together between one and twenty-eight years.

To consider more deeply how race is negotiated through daily interactions, interviews from both the British and U.S. samples were augmented by extensive participant observation and home visits. Both authors "shadowed" selected families by accompanying them on errands and social events, as well as by spending time with them in the home. Observations took place in grocery stores, doctors' offices, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, neighborhood libraries, churches, high school football games, holiday and graduation parties, parades, kitchens, back porches, and living rooms. The duration of these case studies varied. Steinbugler conducted at least eighteen visits (lasting from two to seven hours) with each of four couples over a period of approximately six weeks.[12] Twine shadowed five families for periods ranging from four to forty-eight hours. Twine's observations included a total of twelve overnights with four different families.[13] The combination of in-depth interviews and ethnographic case studies provides a deeper analysis of the microcultural racial projects that enable couples to negotiate race and racism.

We will focus upon the narratives of White partners from the two samples who developed racial literacy in order to analyze the shifts in racial consciousness and forms of racial thinking. These respondents (ranging in age from twenty-eight to seventy years) represent a subsample of approximately one-fourth of the total number of interviews with White partners in the combined sample. The socioeconomic status of this subsample reflects the larger samples from which they are drawn. While respondents in the U.S. sample were predominantly middle-class, the British sample included women and men from the working poor, the lower-middle class, the middle class, and the upper-middle class. The British participants included artists, dancers, fitness instructors, clerical workers, hair stylists, probation officers, manual laborers, teachers, homemakers, social workers, lawyers, and welfare-rights activists.

"DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS" AND DOUBLE VISION: WHITE ANTIRACISTS AS "OUTSIDERS WITHIN"

Our research demonstrates that White women and men involved in intimate interracial relationships can develop "racial literacy" and acquire a form of double vision that enables them to perceive and develop various forms of everyday racism. Their intimate bonds with Black or African Caribbean women and men can give them access to experiences that, at times, position them as "insider others" or "honorary Blacks." Witnessing everyday racism recasts their vision of Whiteness and themselves as White people. This realignment of their racial vision is akin to Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness." At the turn of the twentieth century, Du Bois wrote:

> The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others . . . . One ever feels his two-ness (Du Bois 1903 [1986], p. 8).

In her earlier writings on Black feminist thought, Patricia Hill Collins (1986) also suggests a feeling of "two-ness" when she describes the "outsider within" status that has historically provided Black women with unique insights into White society. Because many Black women have been positioned "inside" White families as domestic servants, "these women have seen White elites, both actual and aspiring, from perspectives largely obscured from their Black spouses and from these groups themselves" (Collins 1986, p. 14). Their intimate location—social and physical—has enabled Black women to see into two worlds. White respondents who have developed racial literacy share a similar standpoint.

Tricia: A Portrait of an "Outsider Within"

Tricia, a thirty-nine-year-old, White heterosexual woman who teaches at a local university, has two children between the ages of four and seven years. A petite blonde with narrow shoulders and shoulder-length hair, Tricia speaks quickly with sentences often punctuated by laughter. Born in St. Louis, she grew up working-class in a small town in Virginia that she characterizes as "conservative" and "extremely racist." Her husband Zachary, a commercial airline pilot, is a tall Black man with a round face framed by wire-rimmed glasses. Thirteen years ago, Tricia was introduced to Zachary by his sister, through a blind date at an office Christmas party. They have been together ever since.

Tricia attended a historically Black state university when she was in her twenties. Describing her experiences as a social work student, she says, "I was used to being the only White girl, or only White person in almost all social settings. All my girlfriends were Black and Latina. And my favorite places to go were the Black clubs." Tricia is comfortable in all-Black settings and has integrated herself into Black social networks. This distinguishes her from White women who are married to Black men but remain immersed in exclusively or predominantly White social networks.

At the same time, Tricia experiences moments of social exclusion as a White person involved in political projects. "I [now] realize that when I go to certain rallies or demos or whatever . . . the way I'm looked at or just the way I'm not welcomed that [Black people] are wondering, 'What is this White girl doing [here]?'" These experiences have motivated Tricia to become more conscious of how race (and racism) structures her life. In Tricia's case, racial literacy can be measured by her ability to perceive herself as racialized. When describing how she thinks about race, Tricia exhibits "racism cognizance"—a dimension of the type of consciousness that characterizes antiracist activists who are working to develop and spread racial literacy. Tricia explains:

> I guess that it is true that being White is important because when I think about going in spaces by myself, then that hidden type of oppression that I have makes me conscious of the fact that I'm White. . . . I'm cognizant of it all the time, all the time and more so than a White person who's not interracially committed. . . . And I wouldn't say as much as a Black person who moves around society even in a Black relationship . . . But there's like a dual consciousness for me too.

Here, Tricia describes what Du Bois has theorized as "double consciousness." She observes that as the intimate partner of a Black man and as the mother of two Black daughters, she possesses a heightened awareness of her Whiteness, and how it affects her ability to negotiate social environments and to garner material resources for her family. This cognizance is constant, even when she is not with her husband or daughters, whose presence signifies her interracial identity to others.

Vivian: A White Mother in Black Britain

Vivian, a forty-six-year-old, White and British welfare-rights consultant, is the single mother of a seven-year-old daughter. Vivian stands five feet six inches tall and wears her Black hair short. She has intense dark brown eyes and a delicate face. Shortly before her thirty-ninth birthday she gave birth to her only child, a daughter whom she is raising as a single parent in a working-class, inner-city neighborhood at the heart of the African Caribbean and Bangladeshi Muslim communities of Leicester.

Vivian and her daughter live in a Victorian terraced home that shares walls on each side and sits on a street whose affordable housing has been a magnet for successive waves of immigrants—first from eastern Europe, then from the Caribbean, and now from East and West Africa, and South Asia. Vivian has never married and like other single mothers that Twine met in this community, she has established a strong network of Black male and female friends who constitute her support system. She considers them to be part of her "extended family." Her best friend, whom she characterizes as an "African Caribbean" woman, is the godmother of her daughter. She regularly vacations with her Black female friends and relies on them as symbolic co-mothers (Twine 1999a). Although Vivian would be classified as a "lone mother" by social services, she is less isolated and more integrated into a caring network of Black women and men than are many of the interracially married women who participated in this study.

Upon moving to Leicester shortly after the 1981 race riots, Vivian immediately became involved in the *Black voluntary sector*. At one point in the late 1980s, she was the sole White member of a Black women's organization that provided cultural events and services to Black and South Asian inner-city residents. After recognizing that, despite her tertiary education, she had learned little about the experiences of Black people in Britain; she began to actively search for and read books about the histories of British Blacks and Asians. Vivian engaged in what could best be described as an "antiracist campaign" to educate herself about the experiences of ethnic minorities. She did this work *prior* to becoming intimately involved with a Black man and giving birth to her daughter.

Vivian has worked very hard to understand racism as a complex structure in which she is always embedded and implicated. She has learned to separate her Whiteness from this larger structure of racism, in part, through active involvement in community antiracist projects and ongoing discussions with her Black colleagues and friends. When asked to describe her perspective as the White parent of a child of African Caribbean ancestry, Vivian talked about how her vision had changed. Vivian argues that she now sees the world from the perspective of her daughter, whom she describes as "Black" and of "mixed race." Vivian brings up the issue of racism as she describes the decisions that she has made to remain in this neighborhood even though it is an economically impoverished zone. She exhibits a form of "double consciousness," a dual-racial vision that enables her to move between perceiving her Whiteness or her position as a White, university-educated woman with certain structural advantages over Black mothers in specific institutional settings, while also experiencing herself as a member of a Black extended family because of how her daughter is socially classified and perceived *by Whites*.

When asked how British Whites view her daughter, Vivian responded without hesitation:

> They'll see her as "Black". . . . If they look at her and think of her in terms of her origins, they will probably think of her as mixed race, but the way they will treat

> her, and the way that [a person of salient African ancestry] will be treated in the society where the cultural norms are White—she will be treated as a Black person—in the sense that [my daughter is] likely to suffer the same kind of discrimination and stereotyping.

Like Tricia, Vivian has labored to acquire racial literacy. She also possesses a form of double vision, which has enabled her, at times, to "perceive the world through Black eyes." Vivian has concluded that her relationship to her birth daughter of Black Jamaican paternity confers some advantages upon her while also simultaneously excluding her from respectability and social acceptance by some segments of the local White community. Her nuanced analysis of everyday racism allows her to employ her Whiteness strategically in schools, in order to secure her daughter's access to specific educational resources and social capital, while also allowing her to distance herself from White people whom she fears will harm her daughter. Vivian is acutely aware that her Whiteness and middle-class, professional status confer advantages upon her, as compared to Black women of the same class position who are parenting multiracial children.

> I've tried hard to kind of create good relationships with the school and her teacher. . . . I realize that I also want to pave the way for her. I'm very conscious of the fact that if there is an issue [the school personnel] will deal with me as a White person. . . . I may have access into sort of institutional society as a White person that a Black parent wouldn't have. Do you follow me? And obviously, I will use that to her advantage. A Black mother of a Black child or a mixed-race child would have a very different experience in that respect because if there's an issue at school or something she wasn't happy with then she will immediately encounter some sort of racial stereotyping or—you know—a list of cultural expectations which won't be directed at me.

Like Tricia and other racially literate, White transracial mothers, Vivian understands that her Whiteness is mediated by her gender *and* her educational capital. As a university-educated professional, she has learned to utilize her Whiteness strategically to minimize the racial discrimination that her daughter might encounter at school, particularly with White teachers, as a child who is perceived as mixed race but treated as Black. One could argue that purposefully deploying her racial privilege in such a manner does not disrupt the broader system that rewards Whiteness. Vivian interprets these small acts as part of a larger process of subversion in which she attempts to use her White skin to reallocate resources to her child of African descent. We view Vivian's acts as a form of racial literacy because they reflect her awareness that her Whiteness, like her class and her university education, is a source of capital that can be employed to mitigate the blows of anti-Black racism directed at her daughter.

Leslie: A Portrait of Queer Transracial Motherhood

A White woman with straight, reddish-brown hair just long enough to tuck behind her ears, Leslie looks as if she is in her mid-twenties. Only at the occasional angle, when the tiny crinkles around her eyes are revealed, do her thirty-seven years become apparent. With a Ph.D. in psychology, Leslie describes herself as "passionate," "overly responsible," "intellectual," and "kind of insecure." She met her partner Sylvia, a tall, thin Black woman with brown dreadlocks, at a queer student conference

seven years ago. They live together in a one-bedroom apartment in a predominantly Black neighborhood in New York City.

Like Tricia and Vivian, Leslie has begun to develop racial literacy as she anticipates becoming the transracial mother of what she calls "a child of color." She is now engaged in a microcultural project to educate herself as a White woman who will be caring for a child not likely to be perceived as White.

> I mean I think it's going to be um, challenging you know . . . there are ways in which [motherhood] calls for me to be able to like hold both perspectives as much as possible. Like I mean obviously I am a White person and that's my life experience, but to also be thinking all the time about how is, how is whatever is happening affecting my child as a child of color.

Leslie explains that she's always been someone who's been attuned to other people's feelings and opinions, but since she became involved with Sylvia, her racial awareness has become "more sophisticated." She also notes that being gay adds "a layer of sensitivity," further necessitating a careful reading of the dynamics of social spaces.

Five months after Steinbugler recruited Leslie and Sylvia into her research study, Sylvia became pregnant through alternative insemination. Because queer couples who create families—whether through adoption or through alternative insemination—like single heterosexual women, understand that they have choices in their decision to select sperm, they are more likely to be conscious of their active role in the sociobiological production of racial differences. Leslie and Sylvia had long discussions about this before deciding whether to choose a Black or a White sperm donor. In these conversations they considered the possible difficulties of growing up classified as a biracial child of two lesbians. In coming to a decision, therefore, they weighed anticipation of the stigma associated not only with being "mixed race," but with having queer parentage. Leslie explains this process:

> I think at the beginning it was just an assumption. . . . It's kind of like as the conversation progressed, you know, I started to ask Sylvia like, "Well is that what we should do? Or would it be better for the child to be, to be just Black and not be biracial?" Because of, you know, the racial politics. Like is it going to be two problems to be both biracial and a child of lesbians? . . . Or would it be harder to be the Black child of a Black lesbian and a White lesbian?

Ultimately, they decided to use the sperm from a self-identified White man because they "felt like it was important that the baby be both races." Leslie's navigation of these issues of race, sexuality, and identity with her partner reflects the ways in which her double consciousness as a White partner and a White mother of a Black child is mediated by her heightened awareness of heteronormativity. She understands that the family she creates with Sylvia will be "queered" not only by its interraciality, but also by its transgression of heterosexual norms.

RACE AND SPACE: THE LOCAL MEANINGS OF WHITENESS

In his ethnographic study of three neighborhoods among poor and working-class White residents of Detroit, a Black metropolis in the midwestern United States, John Hartigan, Jr. (1997, 1999), argues that White racial identities are heterogeneous, contingent, and mediated by local racial geographies of social space. Elabo-

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rating on Omi and Winant (1986), Hartigan argues that a multiplicity of racial formations exists, each deriving from social, economic, and political forces that are distinctly localized. In some U.S. cities where Whites have lost their majority status, Hartigan argues that "the contours of Whiteness have rapidly mutated and [been] reformulated" (1997, p. 183). These cities provide a local context in which the meanings of *Whiteness* and *Blackness* diverge from what are commonly assumed to be the dynamics of racial politics in the United States. According to Hartigan, the most important difference is that "Whiteness, here, is rarely an unmarked or normative condition. In fact, Whiteness is often read as being out of place in this 'Black metropolis'" (1997, p. 185).

In what follows, we draw on discussions with Whites who have made a decision to reside in cities and/or neighborhoods where Whites do not constitute a majority, but instead belong to a racially marked ethnic minority in which their Whiteness is refracted through the lenses of multiethnic communities. In these particular local spaces, developing racial literacy requires them to negotiate the shifting and multiple meanings attached to their Whiteness.

Maureen and Leslie: Navigating Local Geographies of Race

Maureen, the thirty-year-old White partner of a Black lesbian, works as a consultant in Washington, D.C. She and her partner do not have children. Like the women in England who self-identified as antiracist, Maureen remarked:

> I'm one of those White people who believes that all White people are racist. I really do. I believe that. I believe that the power that you know—White privilege gives us. . . . If you have an intimate relationship with somebody [of color] you always gotta check yourself.

Maureen thus displays an acute awareness of the nuanced ways in which racism is an embedded structure—a matrix in which we all operate. It is the ground upon which we build the houses in which we lead our intimate lives. Her analysis of how her Whiteness is both an asset and a liability reflects another crucial dimension of racial literacy. She understands how her social position is interpreted and navigated in particular locales and that it intersects with her sexuality as a White lesbian in a committed partnership with a Black woman. Maureen reported altering her behavior in response to the racial and political demographics of her residential community.[14] Speaking of her predominantly Black residential neighborhood, she explained, "I don't hold her hand in this neighborhood. I noticed that the other day. And I actually think it's more a race thing here than it is a gay thing. . . . I don't want anyone to think I'm stealing a good Black person." Later in this same conversation she described how "so much space is segregated," and, as a White woman living in a Black residential neighborhood in Washington, D.C., a segregated southern city, their treatment in public spaces and the quality and type of service that they receive in restaurants, stores, and public transportation varies depending upon who solicits the service and where it is solicited.

> We use our multiracial relationship to our advantage. Like there's a thrift store across the street and this table I want. I went there last night and the price on it is like $95. And I'm sure they gave me a higher price. . . . When we need to catch a cab, I always hail it. . . . This vegan soul food restaurant here—if I go order I get shit for service. She goes to order, we get the food faster.

Maureen's comment that she and her partner utilize their interraciality to access cheaper furniture and faster service was made in a joking manner, but reflects a concrete awareness that the meaning of her Whiteness is variable and does not embody a fixed social value.

Leslie, the White lesbian mother discussed above, shares a similar awareness of the ways in which her social position as a White woman provides her with varying degrees of social currency in different geographic and demographic contexts. Like Maureen, Leslie lives in a neighborhood where she is unlikely to encounter another White person in the seven blocks she walks to and from the subway station each day.[15] She is very conscious of how she is racially marked, and admits that if she had not been involved with a Black woman, she probably wouldn't have altered her perspective.

> For a long time [I've] been someone who's been interested in racial identity and thinking about who I am as a White person and how to contribute to change, you know, and how to work against racism and stuff like that. And I was doing all that before I met [Sylvia]. . . . Would I have continued to develop myself and think about these things if I weren't with her? And I don't know . . . I don't know if it would be the same. Um, you know if I weren't with Sylvia I don't know that I ever would have lived in a predominantly Black neighborhood and that has certainly um, given me so much to think about in terms of what it feels like to be the only person of your race somewhere on a very consistent basis. You know I think most White people don't have that experience ever . . . or if they do it's in a situation where they're so comfortable and so well represented that it doesn't matter.

Because the street where Leslie and Sylvia live is only a few blocks from a major boulevard that both symbolically and physically separates their predominantly Black neighborhood from an Orthodox Jewish neighborhood, Leslie is aware that she appears visibly "out of place." Yet Leslie recognizes that her position as part of a small minority of White people in her Brooklyn neighborhood is partially offset by the power that comes with her access to forms of economic, social, and symbolic resources that are associated with being classified as White in the United States.

As Hartigan asserts, Whites' social-class status mediates how their race is read in neighborhoods where their Whiteness is visibly marked. Like other respondents who have cultivated racial literacy, Leslie and Maureen are aware that interpretations of their Whiteness vary across social spaces. Unlike Hartigan's respondents, however, Leslie and Maureen's class position magnifies the privilege signified by their Whiteness. Leslie, who comes from a working-class family, possesses a doctorate and holds a position in administration at a local university. Maureen grew up in an affluent household and works for a women's health lobby on Capitol Hill. Both women have lived in their respective neighborhoods for less than five years. The professional clothing they wear each morning as they walk through their neighborhoods toward the bus or subway, combined with their recent tenure in their neighborhoods, conveys their economic and spatial mobility. In contrast to the working-class White residents Hartigan studied, whose socioeconomic status degraded their claims to Whiteness, moving into predominantly Black neighborhoods as thirty-something professionals likely accentuated Leslie and Maureen's perceived access to the symbolic and material resources of Whiteness.

LIFTING THE WHITE VEIL: LEARNING TO SEE EVERYDAY RACISM

During the past decade, sociologists and social psychologists have paid more attention to the conditions under which a White antiracist identity develops. In her research, Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997) describes the stages that White people pass through as they learn to understand the meaning of *Whiteness* in the context of racism and racial hierarchies, and acquire a critical analysis of the ways that racism structures their lives. Tatum's analysis of the early stages of developing an awareness of racism mirrors several themes addressed in memoirs written by White women who become romantically involved with Black men (Lazarre 1996; Reddy 1996). Tatum draws on social psychology to explain how Whites rearticulate the meaning of race in their lives. According to Tatum, "For Whites, there are two major developmental tasks in this process, the abandonment of individual racism and the recognition of and opposition to institutional and cultural racism. These tasks occur in six stages" (Tatum 1997, p. 94). Tatum describes the second stage of this process, called "disintegration":

> Disintegration is marked by a growing awareness of racism and White privilege as a result of personal encounters in which the social significance of race is made visible. For some White people, disintegration occurs when they develop a close friendship or romantic relationship with a person of color. The White person then sees firsthand how racism can operate (Tatum 1997, p. 96).

This situation has been described in eloquent and moving language by Jane Lazarre (1996) and Maureen Reddy (1996). Both authors are in long-term heterosexual marriages with Black men with whom they raised children. Various forms of everyday racism became visible to them, and they were able to perceive subtle forms of racism that had previously been invisible and unremarkable to them. We advance this theory, yet also depart from it, by providing a nuanced analysis of how White members of interracial couples reconstitute a sense of self that enables them to move between different analytical positions.

In Britain we find an example of how class-inflected meanings of *Whiteness* shape mundane experiences in the public sphere and can alter the racial consciousness of White members of interracial families. Among the British respondents, there was a pattern in which close to half of the White transracial birth mothers perceived as middle-class in public spaces reported social encounters in which they were not perceived as the biological parents of their birth children of visible African ancestry. This reflects beliefs about what "type" or class of White woman would enter into a sexual relationship with a Black man and give birth to a child of color.

Diana, a blonde woman with hazel eyes and a cherubic face, is a twenty-eight-year-old social worker, who lives in a middle-class neighborhood of semidetached and detached homes (homes that share either one wall or no walls with other homes) in Leicester. It is rare to encounter a Black or Asian person when walking or driving through her neighborhood of manicured lawns. She has been married for four years to Colin, the upwardly mobile son of Black immigrants from Guyana. As university-educated professionals and homeowners, she and her husband are firmly ensconced in the middle class. They met at the residential children's home that Colin manages. Diana, the daughter of a stay-at-home mother and a father employed by the British military, grew up on military bases in Cyprus, Spain, and Northern Ireland. Diana conveyed a routine experience that reveals a particular dimension of racial literacy—the ability to decode events that racialize her and to recycle racial ideologies that

privilege middle-class Whites and position her as "outside" of her biological family of reproduction.

> [The bank teller] said to me—she must have been about nineteen or twenty—"Let me see your baby." I was carrying him in this thing. "Oh, he's so cute. He's so cute. What's his name?"
>
> I said, "Zuri."
>
> "Oh, that's unusual. That's so unusual. Where's it from?"
>
> I said, "Oh, it's an African name."
>
> [The bank teller] says "Oh, right. That's a really nice name." She carried on. She was sorting my money out.
>
> And then she said to me, "You must have really wanted him."
>
> I said, "Yeah."
>
> And then she said, "To go all the way to Africa and get him."
>
> Francine, she was sincere and I just sort of looked at her. And then she clicked. And then she was really embarrassed. . . .
>
> "Oh my God," she said, "Is he *yours*?"
>
> And I said, "Yeah, he is."

In this exchange, Diana describes an interaction in which she was assumed to be an adoptive mother who obtained her child in Africa, rather than the biological mother of a son whom she had carried for nine months. The White bank teller does not interpret her intimate relationship with her son as evidence of a committed heterosexual relationship with a Black man because, in the minds of some of the local Whites, she does not resemble the type of White woman whom they assume would choose to become intimately involved with a Black man. This is particularly frustrating for women such as Diana who have endured difficult pregnancies, given birth, and are the primary caretakers of their children, taking them to and from school and spending most of the day with them. Diana argued that not being perceived as the birth mother of her sons is an assault on her maternal identity—especially because she invests so much energy to socialize them as Black children. Diana's description of this misrecognition echoed that of other mothers who expressed feeling erased and excluded because they feel that their Whiteness symbolically excluded them from their families of reproduction in public spaces where others resisted seeing them as members of a biological family unit.

In the case of mothers like Diana, they have come to define their invisibility as the transracial birth mothers of their children as a form of what one of them termed *secondhand racism*. This secondhand racism denies that a "respectable," middle-class, professional White woman could have acquired a Brown child through a sexual relationship (Twine 2007). The assumption that Diana is an adoptive mother enables some White (and Black) people in their community to maintain their belief that she has not transgressed racial or gender conventions for middle-class heterosexual women and that she remains respectable.

White women with children of visible and recognizable African ancestry in the U.K. sample reported that they received negative comments daily and that other Whites denigrated them and called into question their respectability, sexuality, and

morality.[16] Thus White women such as Diana, who appear in public with their brown-skinned children of color and are socially coded as middle-class and respectable, are perceived as belonging to families that have incorporated a child of color through adoption. Diana's experiences, like those of the other transracial mothers interviewed, suggest that there are members of the local community who embrace racial logics that position attractive and mentally stable, middle-class women as unlikely or unwilling to voluntarily engage in sexual activity that would have led to pregnancy by a Black man. Thus, transracial sexual intimacy must be denied or rendered invisible in order to sustain the fiction that most interracial families are the consequence of casual, commercial, or coercive sexual activities.

Glenn: A White Heterosexual Father

Glenn is the thirty-seven-year-old father of two daughters of African Caribbean heritage. He has striking blue eyes and wears his head completely shaved. Trained as an accountant, he is the finance director at a large firm in the East Midlands of England. A native of Birmingham, Glenn lives with his wife Carmen, a Black woman of Jamaican origin, and their two daughters in a three-bedroom Victorian home located in a predominantly White, middle-class community within a five-minute walk from Victoria Park and the University of Leicester. Glenn and Carmen have been married for three years. Carmen immigrated to England as a child in the 1960s. They have a two-year-old daughter and a daughter from Carmen's previous relationship with a Black man.

When asked to describe how he had changed after being married to a Black woman, Glenn cited his increased awareness of "everyday racism" and a shift in consciousness. He has now redefined some of his previous cultural practices as "racist."

> Now having spent time with [my wife], I realize that I am a bit [racist] in terms of . . . preconceptions and ideas that you have [about Black people]. . . . There were jokes about the length of a Black man's penis. . . . My attitude then was, "Well, I'd quite like somebody to make a joke about . . . how big mine was." And [my wife] sort of explained to me . . . , and once it had been explained to me, I thought, "You're right." I used to tell jokes like that, but I've avoided those now. . . . As soon as somebody starts to tell a joke that's got any mention of the race of whatever of the person, I tend to frown. And then afterwards I dissect the joke.

Here we see that Glenn has learned from his wife to analyze and critique cultural practices that he previously took for granted. The social practice of telling jokes about the genitalia of Black men was routine among his circle of White friends. His wife has taught him how to deconstruct these jokes and to understand why they are dehumanizing and degrading to Black people. Now Glenn is no longer able to listen to these jokes with "White ears." He has acquired a form of racial literacy that enables him to evaluate routine practices that constitute a form of everyday racism.

Describing how his discussions with his wife have altered his understandings of what *race* and *racism* mean, Glenn also argued that the type of Whites in his social network has radically changed. Although his friendship network remained predominantly White, he argued that their social practices and racial ethics distinguished them from his previous circle of White friends. In describing his friendship network today, Glenn explained:

> Going back twenty years to when I was seventeen, there would certainly be an element within my social circle and people that I met regularly who were racially prejudiced. . . . I've moved out of those circles now, and those circles still exist, but they're somebody else's circle, but I don't have any people in my immediate contact that have any problem with [racism in] regards [to] their racial ethics.

Glenn's intimate life and his definitions of racism have changed. He has radically altered his social network. He has shifted from a predominantly White, working-class network to a more middle-class and multiracial world that includes his Black in-laws and the Black Caribbean friends and colleagues of his wife, who is a Black English woman of Jamaican parentage. His assessment of his own behavior has shifted because he has adopted a different analytical lens and now analyzes many of his social interactions from the perspective of his dark-skinned, Jamaican-British wife.

Kathleen: Blind Spots and Racial Innocence

What distinguished White members of interracial families who acquired racial literacy from the majority—those who did not? Thus far we have focused exclusively on White transracial parents who had acquired racial literacy. We will now introduce a British case to provide an example of an individual who did not achieve racial literacy. We identified several patterns distinguishing Whites who acquired racial literacy from those who did not.

Kathleen O'Connell, the daughter of an upper-middle-class family in Ireland, is the fifty-six-year-old mother of six children and the grandmother of seven. Prior to immigrating to England, she trained for three years as a nurse in Dublin. During this period, her parents financed her education, paid for all of her books and supplies, and gave her an allowance. Like other student nurses in training, she lived in a nurse's home, a building that was attached to the hospital. As an unmarried woman living in what amounted to a dormitory, she was under constant surveillance and supervision. Kathleen wanted to get away from this strict and rigidly structured life and chose to immigrate to England in 1959 with a group of childhood friends. It was during this period that she met the man whom she later married.

Kathleen described her life as a series of tragedies in which she was a victim. What is striking about Kathleen, as compared to other White women who have acquired racial literacy, is her inability to analyze her position in a racialized class structure and her insistence on her *racial innocence*. As a young woman who grew up in what she describes as a "very upper-middle-class family" on her mother's side, she had access to forms of cultural and educational capital that were not available to many of her working-class peers. When Kathleen described how she met the father of her six children, a Black immigrant from Barbados, she claimed to have had no prior exposure to racist ideologies about Blacks of African, American, or Caribbean origin. In her words:

> At that time I didn't have any feelings about racism. I didn't really know what it meant. I met this person. I thought he was very nice. He was different, but he wasn't the first Black person that I had met or anything because throughout our travels we met quite a lot of Black people. . . . There was one party I remember when we were on our travels and we met some lads that belonged to the Air Force—I think they were pilots or something—and they invited us to a party. We

went to a party and a couple of Black guys were there as well and they were pilots as well. And I remember getting on the floor and dancing with them.

According to Kathleen, the period when she met her husband was a time of *racial innocence*. She described herself, her mother, and her maternal grandmother as *non-racist*. When asked about how she met her husband, she emphasized her color blindness. She met her husband, who had recently emigrated from Barbados, at a seaside hotel where they were both employed. She was employed as a chambermaid, and they both lived in rooms reserved for staff at this same hotel. They began going to the cinema, reading books in his room, and within six months of dating him, Kathleen became pregnant and ended up in a home for unwed mothers.

How did Kathleen conceptualize the role of race and racism in *her* decisions and in the larger structures she navigated? This is one of the evaluative criteria that we employed in evaluating Kathleen's racial literacy and her racial consciousness. It is significant that Kathleen lived in a mother-and-baby home run by nuns that did not admit Black and Asian Indian women. She never commented on the exclusion of women of color from this home. Kathleen minimized the role of race and racism when describing the early years of her relationships, her pregnancy, and the pressures her family placed upon her to put her children up for adoption. After giving birth to her first son in 1961, Kathleen wrote to her family and expressed her desire to return home. Her mother responded promptly and informed her that she could return home to Ireland only if she put her child up for adoption.

Kathleen lived in the mother-and-baby home for six months before the father of her child came and brought her and their first child back to Leicester, where they lived in an attic room in a Victorian house and shared the kitchen and bathroom with four other families. In October of 1962, Kathleen gave birth to her second child, another son. Three months later, Kathleen became pregnant with her third child, a daughter. In Kathleen's analysis of her life, she did not become aware of racism until her children began attending school. In contrast to White transracial mothers who developed racial literacy, Kathleen adopted a color-blind perspective and did not anticipate racism being a problem or preparing her children to cope until long after they were subjected to routine racial discrimination. What distinguishes Kathleen from Vivian, Diana, and other mothers who acquired racial literacy, is her lack of an analysis of how she may have benefited from her position in a racial structure and, specifically, from her Whiteness. As an unwed mother, her Whiteness and middle-class origins were a resource that provided her with access to support services for unmarried pregnant mothers that Black or Asian women in the same situation were denied. When asked how she paid the fees for this private, Catholic, unwed-mothers home, she could not recall who or how the fees were paid for the home in which she and her newborn baby lived for seven months. Kathleen also seemed unable to shift lenses and place her *racial* position at the center of analysis. She did not address, challenge, or discuss with her Irish family the racism that her children confronted in Ireland when they returned home with her for annual holidays.

Although her daughters varied in their analyses of their mother's understanding of race and racism, in their private conversations, they commented on the racist beliefs that their Irish relatives held about Blacks, while also noting that maternal relatives had "come around and learned to accept us." One of Kathleen's adult daughters reported that her mother did not carefully monitor the behavior of her extended family members, as a result of which, in her words, "I was more exposed to racism than other Black children because of my White family members. Kathleen's

children commented on the routine racism that they were exposed to during family visits to Ireland—visits that did not include their Black father.

During the past three decades, Kathleen has moved from a color-blind position and a place of racial innocence to having mastered the official antiracist policies and discourses she learned as a trained youth and community tutor. It is difficult to evaluate how Kathleen manages her own racialized body because she rarely, if ever, positions herself as White or as possessing forms of racial privilege. Throughout the study, Kathleen placed emphasis upon her gender subordination and her former status as a neglected wife and homemaker who was culturally isolated. She did not turn the analytical lens on her racial position as a member of an interracial family that included Irish women; Black men from Barbados; and British-born, olive-skinned children of multiracial heritage. Kathleen did not reflect on how she negotiated her Whiteness; rather, her former husband's maleness and his sexism were the primary focus of her analysis. Her Catholicism, heterosexuality, and Whiteness were taken for granted. The "structuring structures" or *habitus* in which she raised her children were not analyzed as part of a larger racial project. Kathleen is representative of approximately two-thirds of the White, heterosexual women participants in Twine's study, who found it easier to analyze gender hierarchies and offer a critique of a heterosexual gender system that they embraced for most of their married life, than to develop a critical analysis of race and racism.

Although Kathleen seemed to possess an acute awareness of racism in her community, she did not possess racial literacy or what we term *double vision*. She did not critically reflect upon her own racialization or locate herself in a larger racial structure as a middle-class migrant from Ireland. In contrast to her Black female peers who migrated during the same era (as nurses or student nurses) from the Caribbean, Kathleen did not work in the paid labor force and thus did not have an independent source of income during most of her marriage. Kathleen did not convert her training and education as a student nurse into economic capital. Instead, as a religiously faithful Irish Catholic, she became a full-time homemaker and gave birth to four children within a six-year period.

In contrast to Glenn, the White heterosexual father, and Vivian, the single mother, Kathleen never acknowledged that her racial status and position as a middle-class woman was significant, that it was what Bourdieu (1984) terms a *structuring structure*. Although Kathleen struggled to protect her children from various forms of everyday racism, she displayed a critical lack of self-reflection regarding the ways that she may have participated in racist familial networks and strategically employed her Whiteness in her marriage. In other words, Kathleen distanced herself from the racist thoughts or beliefs held by her family members *in Ireland*. Yet her family members clearly communicated to her that she could only return home if she gave up her children (two at the time) for adoption. It was not until she was pregnant with her third child that her family encouraged her to marry her Black partner and allowed her to bring the children to visit.

MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO RACIAL LITERACY

Why do some White members of interracial families acquire racial literacy while others do not? We have argued that racial literacy represents a critical analytic stance developed through everyday microcultural practices. We have detailed three practices that characterize how White members of interracial families developed double consciousness, negotiated localized meanings of Whiteness, and learned to see every-

day racism. We also provided a detailed portrait of Kathleen, a parent of transracial children who did not acquire racial literacy, in order to illuminate the differences between those who acquire racial literacy and those who do not. We will next identify several conditions that generate trajectories that can propel individuals onto a path that leads to racial literacy.

The above racial-consciousness narratives represent individuals from diverse age cohorts, national origins, class backgrounds, and sexual orientations. These respondents developed their own paths toward seeing Whiteness and White supremacy with a critical lens, and they were motivated by a range of sociopolitical conditions. These conditions were a type of catalyst that transformed their racial consciousness and their public profiles—thus altering their analysis of race and racism. For British women such as Vivian, the turning point involved attending a university and becoming involved in legal work on behalf of recent immigrants from South Asia and the Caribbean. This experience forever changed her political priorities and her social networks, through which she met the father of her child. For others, such as Tricia and Diana, immersion in interracial friendship networks at school, living in a residential community with a significant minority presence, or employment in a multicultural workplaces provided the impetus for this change. As children or adolescents, some White members of interracial families reported having witnessed the anti-Black racism of their parents, siblings, peer group, or teachers. For others, developing a critical analysis of racism was linked to cultivating a political consciousness regarding other social inequalities, including gender, social class, and sexuality (Steinbugler 2007). Those who did not become racially literate learned to articulate a version of the color-blind discourses, choosing not to alter their lifestyle, to reconstitute their friendship networks, or to engage in self-education about contemporary forms of racism. These people clung tenaciously to a White comfort zone.[17]

CONCLUSION: DU BOIS, DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS, AND DOUBLE VISION

We have treated the racial identities of White members of interracial couples as a process of negotiation, rather than a fixed identity. We have attempted to demonstrate that racial literacy is *not* an automatic consequence of being in a committed interracial relationship. Rather, racial literacy is learned. It is an intensive analytical practice that demands an ongoing analysis of how bodies are racialized and resources are distributed across various familial, local, and institutional sites. Interracial intimacy provides the *possibility* of transforming one's sociopolitical vision. But this transformation is not automatic. From our respective samples, only one-fourth of the Whites interviewed acquired some degree of racial literacy. The portraits presented above are representative of one type of White members of interracial families. We chose to focus on those who displayed "racism cognizance," that is, Whites who engaged in racial literacy projects, because we are invested in analyzing how interracial intimacy can be an antiracist catalyst for White members of interracial families.[18]

We found a pattern among White members of interracial families who actively engaged in racial literacy projects. In our respective samples, White respondents whom we classified as *racially literate* learned to closely monitor themselves as they related to other Whites and to members of racial and ethnic minorities. They carefully evaluated their everyday practices and the social processes that threatened to sustain and/or reproduce racial and ethnic hierarchies that denigrated Blacks and distributed various forms of privilege to Whites. They possessed what C. Wright

Mills (1959) called the "sociological imagination." They were aware that they belonged to a particular historical moment and operated in a larger racial (and regional) structure and were always thus implicated in the material and social residues of a postcolonial and post-civil rights world in which the forms that racism assumes are in flux and can *adapt*.

The metaphor of sight has been prominent in both antiracist and feminist writings. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness is helpful in understanding the dual vision and resistance to "constricted eyes" about which Minnie Bruce Pratt (1984) writes. Although Du Bois's concept was generated by his efforts to theorize the complexities and unique position of U.S. Blacks at the turn of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, his insights can be applied to interracial partners or other individuals who transgress or cross over and thus become eyewitnesses to the anti-Black racism that continues to characterize the experiences of the vast majority of working-class and middle-class U.S. and U.K. people of visible African ancestry. Twine has argued that White women and men may acquire a different vision, or forms of literacy that may not be recognized or visible even to their Black family members (Twine 1999a, 2004), and that the acquisition of racial literacy demands an ongoing set of decisions and negotiations in which the White member of interracial couples can choose to actively embrace or to be emotionally, culturally, and/or politically immersed in a world that is either Black or multiracial. In other words, acquiring a critical awareness of the ways that racism and racial ideologies might structure one's intimate life is *not* an automatic consequence of living a transracial life and establishing an intimate relationship with someone who is Black. Indeed, those partners who developed racial literacy were in the minority of White respondents in both the U.S. and the U.K. sample.

By mapping the microcultural dynamics of interraciality, we have illuminated several conditions under which Whites can acquire racial literacy skills which enable them to critically evaluate their social location as racialized subjects. The acquisition of racial literacy enabled our respondents to analyze the contradictory ways that racial logics and racialized practices structure their transracial familial lives. As the intimates of Blacks, they can be considered "insider outsiders" because they regularly witnessed the harmful social and material consequences of routinized racism. As individuals who are socially classified as White, they may also, at times, be privileged and rewarded for their membership in a dominant racial group. Yet their Whiteness is always mediated by their class position, marital status, occupation, sexuality, gender, and immersion in particular local communities. Some of them negotiate this tension by establishing friendships or alliances with Black and South Asian women and men, immersing themselves in multiracial networks, and participating in antiracist groups.

We have argued that interracial relationships can be transformative sociopolitical sites for White members of interracial families. Some Whites become "honorary Blacks" and adopt an analytical lens that they use to detect and decode how race and racism operates in their daily lives. The Whites who acquired racial literacy in our studies were aware of the need to *constantly* negotiate the ambivalence and ambiguities of their transracial lives. Heterosexual mothers such as Vivian and Tricia employed their racial privilege on behalf of their children. They interpreted their actions as strategic and actively subverted the racial hierarchy encountered by their children. Glenn, a White heterosexual male, reconstituted his White male friendship networks and learned to resist participating in symbolic acts of White solidarity that involved recycling racist ideologies in the form of racially scripted jokes.

We found that White members of interracial couples can acquire forms of knowledge that constitute racial literacy and can catapult them into antiracist racial

projects. These racial projects may not be conventional and may appear limited, but they form the ground upon which larger antiracist projects might be built. Our research demonstrates the theoretical insights that can be gained by analyzing the *intimate contexts* that motivate White people to examine and perceive the racial logics and larger racial projects that form the ground upon which they build their social lives. Members of interracial families become candidates for racial literacy projects during those moments when they become conscious of the ruptures or gaps between the realities of their lives and the assumptions made about their White lives by others. They learn to see the dynamic ways that their Whiteness is interpreted, negotiated, and implicated in larger racist and antiracist projects. They learn to perceive structures that had previously been invisible to them—it's as if they had been living behind multiple veils. Like the U.S. Blacks whom Du Bois wrote about at the turn of the twentieth century, non-Blacks can also find themselves in familial networks that require them to move between worlds in which they are sometimes compelled to lift their veils and adopt the lenses of others.

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NOTES

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2. Elsewhere, one of the authors addresses this same issue from the perspective of Black family members (Twine 2007).
3. A significant body of literature on color blindness in the post-Civil Rights United States has emerged but little of this considers other national contexts. For an example of analyses that provide a global perspective see Winant (2001).
4. Twine (2007) provides an analysis of competing racial projects and tensions within British interracial families. She found that in some families there were tensions and cultural struggles between White mothers, their Black partners, and Black sisters-in-law over how the family and its members would assert their racial status and manage racial and ethnic boundaries.
5. The term *White* is employed here as an economical way to describe people of diverse European heritage who may or may not embrace White as their primary identity. The British sample includes women who self-identify as Irish, English, and British, as well as White. We want to make it clear that, although we use the term *White* throughout, we are aware that our respondents do not belong to a culturally homogenous group and that their social experiences and phenotype are varied.
6. Elsewhere, Twine (2004) has argued that several dimensions of racial literacy involve parents arming and educating their children. However, this is only one dimension of racial literacy. In Twine's broader conceptual framework, racial literacy involves ongoing dialogue and intellectual work in *all* of one's relationships, including intraracial and interracial relationships with Black partners, parents, siblings, friends, children, teachers, associates, and co-workers.
7. Twine (2004) initially developed the concept of racial literacy as an analytical frame to theorize how White members of heterosexual interracial families learned to translate

everyday forms of racism to their partners, children, and peers and to develop repertoires to respond to their racialization and racism.

8. Although sexuality is not the central analytical focus of this article, by including gay and lesbian narratives, we attempt to disrupt the implicit assumptions of heterosexuality encoded in the literature on interracial intimacy. For exceptions, see Frankenberg (1993) and Steinbugler (2005). Recent scholarship on queer kinship includes interracial families (Stacey 2004, 2005), though race is not examined explicitly.
9. Our use of the term *family* does not necessarily indicate the presence of children. All eighty-one families in Twine's sample included children, while thirteen of Steinbugler's forty families included children.
10. Leicester is a manufacturing city in the East Midlands of England.
11. Though Twine and Steinbugler interviewed both Black and White members of interracial families, here we draw upon only the interviews with Whites. Both studies are purposeful and relied upon snowball sampling.
12. For three of the four couples Steinbugler shadowed, the period of observation was five to six weeks. In the last case study, the eighteen observations took place over a fourteen-week period.
13. On several occasions Twine slept in the bunk beds of the children who had volunteered to sleep with older siblings in order to accommodate her.
14. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 2.5% of the residents in Maureen's District of Columbia are White, 89.9% are Black, 0.4% are Asian, and 4.5% are of some other race.
15. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, both Leslie and Maureen live on blocks that are less than 3% White.
16. For a more detailed discussion of the ways that White women who are the birth mothers of African-descent children are disciplined see Twine (2001).
17. For an age-specific analysis of the "turning points" in the racial consciousness of non-activist White university students in the United States, see McKinney (2005), who argues that in the autobiographical essays that she analyzes, U.S. Blacks were the "agents of epiphany." In our research, we did not find that Blacks occupied a special role as change agents; rather, there were a number of intersecting factors, including interracial friendships, shifting racial demographics, and immersion in political organizing. In the British cases, Twine found a number of turning points in the racial-consciousness biographies of the White members of interracial couples. These turning points included making a critical decision to pursue specific occupations, immersion in ethnic and minority community networks, participation in antiracist or antifascist political projects, or interracial friendships that launched them onto a trajectory toward a transracial romance and a transformed racial consciousness.
18. Individuals who are not in romantic relationships with Blacks can also acquire racial literacy.

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