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/ Interracial Relationships as Stigma /

by

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Theoretical Introduction

The term stigma refers to an attribute that is deeply discrediting to the individual (Goffman, 1963:3). There are different types of stigma.

First there are physical deformities. Next there are blemishes of individual character seen as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty. Finally there are the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion. These are stigma that can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family (Goffman, 1963:4). Those with handicaps (i.e. blindness, scars, paralysis, etc.) are often thought to be stigmatized. An individual married to someone of another race is also stigmatized. It is almost as if an individual acquires a physical deformity because one spouse is black and the other is white. Interracial marriage does not automatically imply that stigma will occur, but it can be a basis for stigmatization. In this case, the basis for stigma is a social one.

According to Wilkinson (1977) stigmatization is seen as purposive conscious individual or collective actions assigning a defect to, reproaching, scapegoating, and maligning another individual or group. Stigmatizing experiences involve being victim of such customs. The process of stigmatizing the black male combines a calculated orientation to lowering his self-concept and restricting his opportunity to perform productively. A stigmatizing encounter means that the target of this encounter experiences feelings of being discredited (Wilkinson, 1977:146). The context or perception by others gives meaning to the stigma, whether physical or social. The key element is the interaction between the stigmatized and stigmatizing others.

Stigmatization functions to maintain relations between blacks and whites. It validates the political order and is socially, politically, psychologically, and economically functional for whites. Discrediting the black male's identity and character serves to superiorize the social situations of whites.

Wilkinson (1977) also says that black males are exposed to the stigmatizing experience. One method of adapting to a maligned identity by the dominant sector is through marriage to a white female. Most interracial marriages are between a black male and a white female (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1982).

In theory, the stigma falls more heavily upon the white woman who has left her group for another, lesser group, thereby becoming polluted. Quite often the female partner in an interracial marriage is thought to be a domestic servant, a victim of abuse or a prostitute; and the male to be a chauffeur, an attacker or a procurer. These stereotypes were described by couples interviewed by Smith (1966) in his discussion of Negro-white intermarriage.

The loyal spouses of the black partners are obliged to share some of the discredit of the stigmatized persons to whom they are related (Goffman, 1963:30). The white partner shares this discredit by being married to a black. It therefore appears to be more socially acceptable for the black male to participate in the marriage than for the white woman. The black culture is more accepting of interracial marriage (McCary, 1975:341). Intermarriage often opens the way for upward social mobility of the member from the lower status (Cavan and Cavan, 1971). In the United States, a black who marries a white is seen as moving up in the world, whereas a white

marrying a black is lowering his/her status (Cavan and Cavan, 1971), and both are stigmatized.

Most stigmas are not chosen. One who is born with blindness, paralysis, or a physical defect has no choice in the matter. However, a couple who decide to intermarry is choosing a stigma with which they must live. They are, in effect, choosing the stigma as a moral career.

[Goffman (1963:5) states that when we stigmatize someone, we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively reduce his/her life chances.] We tend to impute a wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one. For example, black people are stigmatized because of their color. People label them as thieves, rapists, etc., solely because of their darkness.

Because of the stigma that surrounds black people in a white dominated society, I am very curious as to the stigma that is involved in black-white unions. How does the process of stigmatization occur and when in the relationship was stigma first perceived? Stigma is the reaction by others to an attribute, not intrinsic to that attribute. Perception of the reaction of others is a key part of the stigmatization process. Of course, one can be stigmatized - perceived as having a discrediting attribute that causes people to treat one in a discriminatory fashion and not be aware of it. But in this study, awareness of the reaction of others and learning to anticipate the stigmatizing response is crucial.

Methodology

Little has been done on interracial marriage. Previous research focused primarily on the rate of intermarriage rather than the impact of interracial marriages. Studies by Labov and Jacobs (1986), Cretser (1982),

Heer (1966), and others, primarily analyze vital records to determine the number of interracial marriages. They do not study the effects and consequences of this type of marriage. These effects and consequences are the topic of my inquiry.

In order to find out perceptions of stigma in terms of how others are perceived to react to and treat interracial couples, I conducted semi-structured interviews focusing on the life histories of five interracial relationships. I hope to discover the process of stigmatization through such things as: perceptions of who stigmatizes the couple, why, in what way, how the couples react to stigmatization, how it affects their lives, their children's lives, etc.

Reconstructing the history of the couples' relationships is important, because it presents the couples' experiences and definitions of the situations and how they interpret their experiences. Such a methodology does not pretend to measure the actual attitudes of others, only which behaviors are identified by each member of the couple as significant. Central assumptions of the life history method are that human conduct is to be studied and understood from the perspective of the persons involved (Denzin, 1970:220). Here only one part of the perspective of those involved, the stigmatized couple, is presented and analyzed.

Emphasis on the perspective of those potentially stigmatized, rather than "objective" measures of the conduct of others, is important because of the process described by Charles Cooley called the looking-glass self. This is a process of developing self-feelings as a result of imagining how others view us. This process consists of what I think you see, what I think you think, and how I, therefore, feel about myself (Cooley, 1964:185). By interviewing these mixed couples, I will be able to discover how these

people perceive the stigma that has occurred and may still be occurring as a result of their relationship.

Sampling

Because there is not systematic listing of interracial couples, I have to use other sampling means to identify respondents. The sampling procedure I used is based on snowball sampling, or the "significant other" method described by Denzin (1970:93).

One method of choosing a relevant sample in a relatively closed system is to use the questions in the interview for sampling purposes to identify other respondents. For example, in a study of political attitudes in a New England community, Trow (Coleman, 1958:29) used a snowball sampling approach by first interviewing a small sample of persons, then asking these persons who their best friends are, interviewing these friends, then asking them their friends, interviewing these, and so on. In this way, the sampling plan follows the relations in the community. This sampling technique can be likened to a good reporter who tracks down "leads" from one person to another (Coleman, 1958:29). The difference is that snowball sampling in survey research is similar to the same scientific sampling procedures as ordinary samples. Where the population in ordinary samples is a population of individuals, here it is two populations: one of individuals and one of relations among individuals.

Snowball sampling is a good way to do my sampling for several reasons. First, only 1.3 percent of all marriages (or married couples) are racially mixed (Leslie, 1982). No systematic lists are kept, and no organizations have been formed by such couples. Snowball sampling allowed me to discover other couples from the few I already know. Sampling by referral increased

the response rate of those chosen in the sample, since an interpersonal linkage immediately established rapport. Every person I asked agreed to be interviewed.

Snowball sampling has increased in use, particularly in community studies and by researchers who conduct observational research. Whether the snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique or probabilistic, it is conducted in stages. In the first stage a few persons having the desired characteristics are identified and interviewed. These persons are used as informants (usually significant others who are friends, relatives, or acquaintances of the researcher) to then identify others to be included in the sample (Bailey, 1978:100). The second stage consists of interviewing these persons, who will then lead to still more persons who can be interviewed in the third stage, and so on. The term "snowball" comes from the analogy of a snowball, which begins small but becomes bigger and bigger as it rolls downhill (Bailey, 1978:100). Although my sample will be small and unbounded (most snowball sampling techniques require sampling until those named have already been named), the technique is still appropriate.

As a result, I did not use a random sample when selecting black-white interracial couples, but a nonprobabilistic sample. Nonprobability sampling is satisfactory, because I am doing an exploratory study. By interviewing two black-white couples I already knew in the Kansas City area, those couples informed me of other couples who I interviewed. In turn, those interviews helped me discover other couples. All interviews were couples who live in Kansas City.

For the study I am conducting, I want only to look at relationships between black male and white female partners. The main reason is that black-white relationships are looked down upon even more than other types of mixed relationships, such as white-Mexican, white-Philipino, etc. This

might be due to the contrasting skin color between the white partner and the dark partner, or the tradition of anti-Negro sentiment in this country, stemming from slavery and reconstruction. Further, anti-miscegenation activity has been aimed against black male relations with white females, ignoring white males' sexual exploitation of black females.

Interview Situations

Since interracial relationships can be a sensitive area, I interviewed the couples in their homes so that they would feel comfortable. I had questions written out to be used only as a guide. They were designed to elicit the process of establishing the "deviant" relationship and of learning others' responses to it. I took notes by hand as well as used a tape recorder. This prevented respondents from being misquoted and allowed for free flowing conversation with the couples, since I was not burdened by constant writing and little eye contact. I allowed as much time as was necessary for each interview. They last from 45 minutes to almost two hours. Through these interviews I was able to find out how these couples perceive the stigmatization that has occurred and may still be occurring as a result of their relationship.

Five interracial couples were interviewed. I will refer to all five as couples even though number one is living together and not legally married and number four is now divorced. All five consisted of white women and their black husbands. I will refer to them as couple one, couple two, three, four, and five. I told each couple that their names would not be used and that I would send them a copy of my final report. I took notes by hand. I referred to tape if a direct quote was needed or if clarification was necessary as I wrote up my results. All the couples consented to being

taped, but the taped answers were used only as a back-up to gaps or questions in my written notes.

The interviews took place in the couples' kitchens. This was not planned. However, they all felt as if this would be a comfortable spot to talk. I used questions previously prepared as a guide and encouraged extra comments. I addressed each individual with each question so as to get each person's experiences and feelings. All the couples seemed very open and honest. Couple number three is divorced, so I was able only to talk to the woman. All five couples presently live in the Greater Kansas City area. On an appearance scale, all those interviewed were either fairly attractive or very attractive. All were well groomed and seemed to be intelligent, strong individuals.

Descriptions of the Couples

Couple one is 19 (black male) and 22 (white female). They are not married but live together and have been in their relationship for over a year. Both are extremely attractive and well dressed. They are contemplating marriage to each other in the future. Both are from middle class families and met while working together at a YMCA as camp counselors. They live in a white, urban, well to do area of the city. He presently is a college student and still works at the YMCA. She is currently looking for full-time employment while substitute teaching, bartending, and working as a store clerk. This interview lasted approximately one hour.

Couple two is 33 (black male) and 35 (white female). This couple has been married for about five years and dated for two years before the marriage. Both are good-looking and were nicely dressed. They are middle class and met while teaching at a high school. They now live in a white,

urban, middle class neighborhood. The female has three children from a previous marriage to a white man and the male has one child from a black female. This couple are raising her three children together. She is in school administration and he is a warehouse manager for a large corporation. This interview lasted approximately one hour and 45 minutes.

Couple three is 47 (black male) and 43 (white female). They have been divorced for four years, so I was only able to interview the female. They were married for 12 years and have two children ages 10 and 13 who live with their mother. She is an attractive woman, well dressed, and a science teacher. She is middle class and lives in a mixed, urban, middle class area. She met her husband when they worked together for a community action program. This interview lasted approximately one hour.

Couple four is 39 (black male) and 32 (white female). Both were married previously, he to a Spanish woman who passed away, and she to a black man from whom she is now divorced. They are raising his two children from his previous marriage. They met at work (factory work) seven years ago. They dated for about six months, lived together six years, and have been married for one and one half years. Both are fairly attractive and still work for the same company. They live in a white, urban, middle-working class neighborhood. This interview lasted approximately one hour and 15 minutes.

Couple five is 37 (black male) and 35 (white female). They have been married for 14 years and have one child who is 13 and are expecting another in five months. The man is very tall, dark, and muscular, whereas his wife is light, blond, and petite. They make a very attractive couple. The man is a physical education teacher at a middle school, as well as a driver education instructor, coach, and swim instructor. His wife is employed as the director of sales and marketing for a public facility. They live in a

mixed neighborhood with a variety of incomes ranging from lower to middle incomes. This interview lasted approximately one hour and 45 minutes.

Four of the five couples are in their thirties and forties. Only couple number one are younger, ages 19 and 22. All five males are black and the females are white. This sample ranged from one couple who live together and are thinking about marriage, to three married couples, to one couple that was married for 12 years and have been divorced for four years.

Early Contact

Four of the five couples grew up in an all white or all black neighborhood. Each member of couple one grew up in mixed neighborhoods of whites, blacks, and Mexicans. Three of the couples grew up in relatively rural areas, whereas the other two couples grew up in the city. Both couples one and two grew up in Kansas City. The woman in three grew up in Kirksville, Missouri. The man in four grew up in Norborne, Missouri and his wife was raised in New Hampshire and Maine. The man in five was raised in Chicago and his wife came from Sioux City, Iowa.

Four of the five women never had contact with black children when they were growing up. Most of them had their first contact and subsequent friendship with a black female when they attended college. Woman one, who did have contact with black children when she was young, recalls playing in the park with them and making friends.

Three of the four black men grew up around both black and white children and learned at an early age to get along with both. They mentioned sports as one of the ways that whites and blacks were brought together. They felt as if this was a good experience which transmits the attitude that "people are people," regardless of their color. Male one did not realize he was a different color than his white friends until he got older. He

remembers asking a friend if he was white because he did not know the difference between black and white.

Both partners in couple one had close relationships with children of the opposite race, and man two had a close white friend. This was not true for the other couples. They had acquaintances rather than friends of the other race while they were growing up.

Parental Attitude

Both partners in the first interview have very open-minded, non-prejudiced parents. Both were encouraged to interact with people of the other race, and in effect, both have. Number four also had parents who were not prejudiced, but the other couples had either one or both parents who were prejudiced. In fact, two of the five women and one of the men had fathers who would not attend the wedding. All the mothers who were able to attend, did so. Even though some mothers did not approve or were hesitant at first, they eventually supported their child's decision, unlike the fathers. Throughout the dating process, several of the fathers made the relationship very hard. They did this by disapproving, not letting them date, trying to separate them, punish them, etc. Even though prejudice is often thought of as something learned at home, none of the people whose father's were prejudiced are now prejudiced. In one case, the woman said her father was not prejudiced, but her husband said that he feels her father is against him.

Three of the four couples in their thirties and forties mentioned that when they were growing up, prejudice was relatively common. Even though at that time they perceived it was normatively inappropriate prejudice, many people were prejudiced and acted accordingly.

Beginning the Relationship

Four of the five couples met while working at the same job. The other couple (five) met at college. This makes sense, since most of the individuals involved were sheltered from the opposite race, one of the few places where blacks and whites can get to know each other is at the workplace. All of the relationships began as a friendship which evolved into love. All the couples dated between one and two years before getting married, except number four who dated about six months, lived together for six years, and then got married.

Peer and Kin Approval of the Relationship

Couple one seems to have the most accepting friends and relatives. Both sets of parents encourage and feel good about their childrens' relationship. The only objection the woman's mother has is their age difference, which has nothing to do with skin color. Couple four also had parental approval, only to a lesser degree. Both sets of parents were accepting of the union, but the man's father was a little hesitant. The other three couples encountered several problems with parental acceptance. Woman two said that her husband never took her to his parents house in order to avoid any confrontations. Man two had asked his father, who was a minister, to officiate at their wedding. He not only refused to officiate, but did not attend the ceremony. Women three and five both had considerable problems with their fathers' acceptance. Neither father approved of their relationship and neither attended the wedding. As mentioned earlier, some mothers did not approve at first but finally accepted their children's

choice and stood by their side, unlike the fathers who disapproved and remained disapproving. Even though some couples said friends disapproved, this did not bother them as much as parental disapproval. Many of the couples stated that if friends and other relatives did not approve, "...it was their problem, not ours."

All the couples were warned by some member of their families not to intermarry. Woman one has been told by her mother that she must think about the children being black. Her mother urged her to deal with the problems of raising black children before getting married. This was taken more as advice rather than a warning, whereas man two was warned not to intermarry by his father, uncle, and co-workers. His uncle told him he would be making a mistake and if they had children it would ruin the black race. Woman three was warned against intermarriage by her father, mother, and brother. Her father totally disapproved, whereas the mother was merely concerned, saying there would be a lot of problems in a marriage of this sort. Her brother said if she married a black, she would break up the family. The father of woman four warned her of the problems that would occur in their relationship but did not disapprove. Woman five was warned by her father (he did not attend the wedding), her school administration, and her sister. Her husband was on athletic scholarship and the administration did not approve of their relationship and tried to cancel his scholarship. Her sister wrote her a letter trying to dissuade her from marrying a black man.

Several couples were told they should not have children, but obviously the couples did as they chose. Three of the four married couples have children.

When asked if they needed extra time to decide to marry a person of a different race, three couples firmly said no and the other two said that yes they did need more time, especially because of parental disapproval.

The Wedding and Coping with the Marriage

All the couples announced their engagements by word of mouth, telephone calls, and letters. None formally announced it in the paper. Also, none of the women were given bridal showers. All the weddings were very small, except that of couple four. They had a fairly large wedding with a large reception afterwards. The couples knew there would be some people who would not attend their wedding but invited everyone anyway. They felt that if the person did not want to attend, it was his or her choice.

None of the couples felt that their marriage has been difficult because of color differences. Woman two said since they are both strong personality types, they are able to get through any problems that have to do with racial differences, as well as normal marital problems. Woman three said that the only problems occur when friends disapprove, but, "I don't hang around with them so it doesn't really matter." Couple four said their marriage has not been difficult, but sometimes they become frustrated when they try to get things done, such as painting their house.

When asked if they would marry their spouse again if they had it all to do over, couple two said that yes, they would, but the husband wished he had been older. Woman three (divorced) said she would not marry her spouse again, but it has nothing to do with race. Couples one, four, and five said they would definitely marry their spouse again.

When we discussed what kind of mate would be ideal for their child, all the couples said they did not care what race their child married. They just wanted their child to marry someone who is a warm, special, loving human being who will make their child happy.

Occupations

In all of the five couples, both the males and females are employed. Two of the five women have either lost or turned down job offers because of being married to a black man. Woman two coached girls' high school basketball and her husband attended games. Since she coached in a suburban, all white school district, many of the parents objected to her black husband's presence at games, and she was dismissed. Woman five turned down a job. She felt as if she could not accept a promotion because her family would have to move to an area that was very prejudiced and unaccepting of blacks.

The woman who lost her coaching job feels somewhat constrained in that she never knows when having a black husband is going to negatively affect her. She points out that negative things rarely happen and many good things have happened so there really is no problem. Her husband mentioned that people he works with joke him by saying, "Bring your wife around here more often and you'll get another promotion." Another couple had similar feelings about being constrained. Woman five mentioned that there are not constraints "...on a day to day basis, but there are subtle prejudices which hinder one's spouse in terms of his career."

All the couples said they do not feel constrained to not publicly display affection. Woman one said, "I forget what color he is - I don't think about him as being black but am reminded when a black woman begins to stare at him. Of course I don't know whether it is because he is black or if it's because he's good looking."

Current Social Activities

All the couples go out together and do such things as eat out, see movies, visit friends, play sports, attend concerts, and a variety of other things. Almost all the couples feel comfortable together in public. Man two mentioned that he feels most comfortable in racially mixed settings. The couples were in agreement that they often get stared at, people gasp, have looks of disbelief, shock, etc.

They mentioned that they noticed this more in the early stages of their relationship, whereas now they do not really pay much attention to whether or not others are looking. Several of the couples like to watch other people react to them being together. Woman two said she likes it when people look at them. "I'm not afraid to be different." Men two, four, and five mentioned that they feel as if they are being stared at. Man two said that blacks look at him as if to say, "Who do you think you are, being together with a white woman?" He thinks that whites look at other whites in mixed relationships with disgust. Man five mentioned that he gets stared at a lot, but he is not sure if it is always because he is black, but perhaps because he is large (tall and muscular).

Coping in Society

When asked if either of the couple feels "normal" and the other not so normal, woman two said, "We live in a white society, and my husband and I live in a white neighborhood, so he really isn't in his own environment." Her husband stated, "I feel like the odd man out." For example, even though he is helping to raise her children and is performing the father role, other parents do not approach him to discuss the children, but go to his wife. He feels that if he were white they would also come to him. Man four says that he feels less normal because he receives more of the stares when they are

together. Woman five said that early in the marriage she felt like the oddball. "People assume things about a white woman when she is with a black man. They assume you are loose, stupid, and many other things."

When asked if they felt isolated, several of the couples said they did not, but man two said, "Sometimes I feel like I'd like to get away and be with black people." Woman three said that she sometimes felt isolated, but it was mostly because her husband was very active and involved with work. Man four said, "We don't allow ourselves to be isolated."

When asked if there was anything they felt they had to give up because of their relationship, they all said that they have given up nothing. They do what they want to do. But woman three stated that it was harder for them to go to her hometown because it is a small and somewhat prejudiced area. Couple two said, "Because of our relationship, we've done more than if we hadn't married someone of a different race." They said they have met more people, joined more sport teams, and participated in a lot of other activities. Woman two especially feels that her husband has brought his culture to her life and feels more fulfilled and enriched. This was mentioned also by both partners in one, three, and five. Woman two feels that she was somewhat "ignorant" of blacks until she was able to share her husband's lifestyle. She feels her life became more meaningful because of the experience.

In terms of friendship, the couples said that their friends encompass white-white couples, black-black couples, and mixed couples. Couple five stated, "We have an array of friends and that creates a nice balance."

Asked about whether or not either member of the couple try to cover up or conceal information about themselves or their spouse, woman one said that she does not usually come right out and tell her friends that her boyfriend is black because she wants to avoid a situation that is not worth fighting

about. Her partner says it is easier for him in that he does not feel the need to cover up his or her color. The father of man one interracially dated when younger and instilled in his son the idea that it is fine to interracially date. Couples two and four said they in no way conceal information about themselves or their spouse, whereas couples three and five said that the white person did the inquiry when they apartment hunted. They felt this would allow them to get the apartment easier, without any trouble.

Public Acceptance of the Spouse

When asked how friends act when they discover the spouse is a different color, there were many reactions. Couple one said their friends are usually accepting, but woman one had quite a problem with a friend who asked her to be a bridesmaid. Since the bride-to-be's father was prejudiced, woman one could not bring her boyfriend to the rehearsal dinner or wedding. Obviously she was upset, but felt she had to honor her friend's wishes, since it was her wedding. Man two mentioned that his friends and co-workers often say, "I did not know your wife was white." Woman three said that though some of her friends were surprised, they were usually accepting of the relationship. Woman four said that often her friends were shocked, so she tries to tell them before they actually meet face to face. Her husband said, "Our friends don't usually react in any certain way in our presence," but his wife disagreed. She notices that their friends are often surprised. Woman five said that often times friends were shocked, and her husband said that at times he has avoided telling a friend his wife was white because he knew the person would have trouble dealing with it.

The couples said they really have not had any problems with their bosses' acceptance of the relationship. Unfortunately though, several of

the couples have had frustrating experiences with people with whom they do business. Couple two mentioned, "Some of the people we do business with would flip if they knew my spouse was a different color." Woman four had a bad experience with a painter who refused to paint their house because he found out her husband was black. They also had trouble with getting a reception hall for their wedding party. When the owner found out she was marrying a black, he raised the price of the hall and made them clean up after the party. Both times the white woman already had agreements with these parties, then when the painter or the hall owner found out her husband was black they responded in a punitive manner.

Managing the Stigma

Several of the couples feel that their marriage really is no different than any other marriage. Couple four and five both said that all married couples experience the same struggles, regardless of the race of partner. Couple two and three both disagreed. Man two said that their marriage is very different, because he is raising three white children. This makes his marriage very obvious to all. Woman three said that because of having to raise mixed children, she has concerns about their identity. To insure that they will be treated well by both races she has exposed them to both the black and the white culture. The other couples who have children also said that they expose their children to black and white culture and feel that their children are special. Couple five said, "Our child has the best of both worlds. He can fit in with blacks and whites."

Two of the partners feel they must be self-conscious or calculating about the impression they are making. Woman one said when she meets his friends and relatives, she tries extra hard to be friendly and kind. But

she mentioned that she would probably be this way with others, but more so since his friends and relatives are mostly black. Woman three felt that since people are always looking a little more closely at her and her husband than other couples, she tends to overcompensate. She says she does this only when outside her circle of friends.

Some of the couples said people make false assumptions about them. However, they did not define this as a problem, because people who feel this way are no longer their friends.

None of the couples have been involved in any type of support group to deal with their special relationship.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

There are several implications to be drawn from these five life histories. Stigma was found to exist in many shapes and forms in each of the five black-white relationships, affecting not just the white partner but also the black partner. The stigma was perceived when the couple began to date, first from friends and family. As the relationship lengthened and became more serious, stigma affected the couple in business, work situations, and affected their life chances.

These couples became aware early in their relationship they were being stigmatized. It was obvious because of the stares and comments made by strangers, friends, and relatives. Since the couples were often able to anticipate the stigmatizing response, they would often try to avoid it. For example, all of the couples delayed introducing their partner to their parents to avoid being stigmatized even further. Because the males are black and visibly darker skinned than their partners, they often felt as if

they received more of the stares and comments, whereas the women did not feel the stigma in public to the same extent as the men.

It is obvious that black-white couples' life chances are affected. These couples have a lot more extra problems in their life than do the normal couple. One woman lost a job because she was married to a black man and another woman had to turn down a job promotion. Articles have focused on job availability, employment, and unemployment of the different races (DiPrete, 1981), but few, if any, have looked at the job prospects for members of interracial couples.

Couples were warned by friends and family not to date, not to intermarry, and especially not to have children. Since parental disapproval was evident, some of the support networks which usually exist within a family have been broken in the couples I studied. According to the study done by Gaudin and Davis (1985) on social networks of black and white rural families, it was shown that the networks of the black families were significantly smaller than whites and more kin dominated. Hays and Mendel (1973), and McAdoo (1978) say strong, supportive kinship networks have been reported consistently as a characteristic strength of black families. If these statements are true, then how strong are the social networks of interracially married couples? One can not be sure without further study, but in the five couples interviewed couples two, three, and five experienced a lack of support from friends and especially family. Because of this lack of support from strangers, friends, and family, I noticed a strong sense of solidarity between husband and wife. Rather than crumbling to the pressures of the stigmatizers, they have become strong and secure in their relationship. But the total dependence on the spouse for support can ultimately be too much pressure.

Even though most of the couples were proud of their relationship and usually did not hide the fact, there were times they found it beneficial to conceal one of the partner's race. Couples three and five both had the white woman take care of the apartment rental to avoid discrimination. Several of the couples mentioned concealing their race by letting the white partner take care of other business matters as well. The black partner felt he would have fewer problems if the white person took care of the business.

The couples tried as little as possible to conceal information about themselves, but stigma influenced the couples to the extent that none of them formally announced their engagements.

Though the couples said the interracial union does not cause any problems within their marriage, it is clear that there are many problems they must deal with that occur in their every day activities. These may not directly affect the marriage but do produce obstacles in their lifestyles. Because of these obstacles, one would think there would be many divorces among interracial couples. There have been numerous articles (Cutright, 1971; and Heiss, 1972) on marital stability within white families and within black families but few analyzing the stability of racially mixed families. The couples I interviewed all appear to have strong, solid relationships, even though they constantly face extra pressures because of their relationship. However, woman four previously was married to a black man and woman three is now divorced from her first husband.

There is considerable literature on unmarried cohabitation as a lifestyle choice (Trost, 1979; Yllo, 1978; and Lyness, 1978). Lyness, Lipetz, and Davis (1972) discuss the alternative of marriage or living together. But the implications of interracial unmarried cohabitation have not been explored. One of the five couples I interviewed is living together. It is hard to determine how many people choose this option, but

would be beneficial to know this, because interracial couples who live together also must deal with stigmatization and its effects. Indeed, it could discourage them from becoming legally married.

Several of the couples faced many crises when dating. Their parents often made it very hard for them to maintain a relationship. According to Leslie, Huston, and Johnson (1986), young adults monitor the information they provide their parents about their dating relationship. This was done by several of the couples, who often did not involve their parents in the dating relationship until necessary. Leslie, Huston, and Johnson (1986) go on to say that parents are more likely to support relationships in which their offspring are highly involved. This did not happen to the mixed couples I interviewed. The more involved the couple were, the less supportive the parents became in several cases. The parents who did not approve early on in the dating relationship approved even less as the relationship became serious, as was shown by the fathers of man two, woman three, and woman five whose fathers did not attend their weddings. Obviously prejudice against blacks and possibly fear that the stigma their daughter is receiving will be passed on to them is the impetus behind this behavior.

Even though several of the women really had no experience with blacks until high school or college, they were able to come into contact with blacks at work or school and then began a relationship. Contrary to "popular wisdom" on black-white unions, all five women interviewed were attractive, intelligent, and capable. Literature in the past (Smith, 1966) found that the white woman was viewed as marrying downward when marrying a black and that she was categorized as unintelligent, reliant, loose, and many other negative things. All five women interviewed were strong, outgoing women who are in control of their lives.

An issue which many of the couples were warned about was the decision to have children. Joyce Ladner (1977) discusses the effect interracial marriage has on the children produced, but hers is one of the few books on this subject. All the married couples I interviewed have children, despite warnings from others. All the couples are very happy they have them, and do not feel their children are at any disadvantage. In fact some feel their children have the advantage of belonging to two cultures.

There are certain limitations contained within my study. Since I only sampled in the Kansas City area, my findings may be somewhat limited to the midwest. With my results I am not able to generalize to areas of the United States such as New Orleans or other southern cities, because there it is more acceptable for a black man to marry upward by marrying a lighter skinned wife.

After completing the interviews I realized that there are many more questions I could have asked the couples, and I could have confirmed respondents' answers to the questions had I interviewed the couples more than once. But I have continued a relationship with three of the couples, therefore am able to informally speak with them about other concerns of the stigmatization they perceive is occurring in their lives. The involvement I have with these couples is very important as we have been able to continue beyond the formal interviewing process, and have become friends. This mutual commitment involves me with them beyond simply using them to do a study.

There are many unanswered questions concerning interracial marriage and the stigma that surrounds it. Further research might also look at the "stigmatizers" rather than those who are being stigmatized. As previously mentioned, there are many gaps in the literature on interracial marriages between blacks and whites. Rather than continue to focus on the rate of

interracial marriage, the impact of interracial marriage needs to be explored. Also, black-white couples who live together must deal with stigmatization and therefore need to be studied.

Those who decide to intermarry have to deal with many issues. As time passes the decision to interracially marry will hopefully be less traumatic and will have less stigma attached to it. The interviews have shown that even in 1986, after two decades of civil rights legislation and integration, there is stigma involved in the lives of all five couples interviewed, a stigma imposed by strangers, friends, and relatives.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Sensitizing Concepts for the Interview

What was your first significant interaction with a person of a different race, and was this person male or female?

Were you merely an acquaintance, friend, etc.? How did your parents and friends respond to this interaction?

Did your parents hold prejudices towards the other race (white or black)?

How did you know they were prejudiced? Did you share your parents' beliefs?

Do you now hold your parents' beliefs?

What kind of a community did you live in when growing up? (urban, rural, white, black, etc.)

How did you two happen to meet, and how old were you?

How did the relationship begin? As friends, a romance, etc.?

How long did you date?

Did your parents approve: friends approve: other relatives?

Was skin color a factor in their approval?

Do you go out often and when you do what do you do?

Are you comfortable together in public?

Do you feel constrained not to publicly display affection to each other?

Were you warned not to intermarry? If so by whom?

Did you feel you needed extra time to decide whether to marry a person of a different color?

How did you announce your engagement? Did anyone object to having both your pictures in the paper? Who had wedding showers for the bride? Who attended? Were there comments about the groom?

Was your wedding small or large ?

Were there certain friends or relatives you felt you couldn't invite? Who did you invite that deliberately did not attend? Did people suggest to you that you shouldn't have children? Did this influence your decision to have children?

Do you both work? What are your occupations?

Have you changed occupations since you established your relationship? Have you ever worked together?

Do you feel as if others look at you when you're together?

Do they look more at the white or black person and are the looks of approval or disapproval?

Who are your friends? Other mixed couples, white couples, black couples, etc.?

Do either of you feel any constraints because of this mixed relationship?

Because of where you live? Where you go? The job you have? Your leisure activities? Were there things you had to give up doing because you were not accepted as an interracial couple?

Do you have any anger built up because of this relationship?

Do you feel like your life is more enriched because of the culture your partner has brought to the relationship?

Do either of you try to cover up your race or conceal information about yourself or your spouse? If black do you try to act "white"? For example when writing letters, making phone calls do you project a false image of yourself?

Do either of you feel at a disadvantage because your partner is a different color?

How do friends act when they discover your spouse is a different color?

Your boss? People with whom you do business?

Do you feel your marriage is different from other couples who are both the same color? In what ways?

Do you spend more time with her or his parents and why?

Do one of you feel "normal" and the other not so normal?

Do either of you feel isolated? From who?

Has your marriage been difficult because of color differences? In what ways?

Would you marry your spouse again if you had it to do over?

What kind of person would be an ideal mate for your child?

Are either of you self-conscious when together, and if not were you ever?

Does either partner feel he is "on" having to be self-conscious and calculating about the impression he is making? In what situations?

Do you feel people make false assumptions about you because of your relationship?

Has the fact that one of you are black ever affected you on the job or in pursuit of a job?

What kind of a community do you live in now?

Is it a white neighborhood, black, etc. and how do your neighbors react to your situation?

Have you ever been involved in any support groups to deal with your special relationship? Why is that? If yes, how was it formed?

APPENDIX B

3	MALE (M)	FEMALE (F)	MALE (M)	FEMALE (F)	MALE (M)	FEMALE (F)
	<u>COUPLE ONE</u>		<u>COUPLE TWO</u>		<u>COUPLE THREE</u>	
<u>HOW LONG MARRIED TO CURRENT SPOUSE</u>	LIVING TOGETHER (ONE YEAR)		FIVE YEARS		MARRIED 12 YEARS BEFORE DIVORCING FOUR YEARS AGO	
<u>AGE</u>	19	22	33	35	47	43
<u>OCCUPATION</u>	M-COLLEGE STUDENT AND WORKS AT YMCA F-SUBSTITUTE TEACHER, YMCA, STORE CLERK		M-WAREHOUSE MANAGER FOR A LARGE CORPORATION F-SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION		M-HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT F-SCIENCE TEACHER	
<u>PARENTAL APPROVAL</u>	YES	YES	NO	MIXED EMOTIONS	-----	NO
<u>HOW THE COUPLE MET</u>	AT WORK		AT WORK		AT WORK	

34	MALE (M)	FEMALE (F)	MALE (M)	FEMALE (F)	
	<u>COUPLE FOUR</u>		<u>COUPLE FIVE</u>		
<u>HOW LONG MARRIED TO CURRENT SPOUSE</u>	ONE AND ONE HALF YEARS		14 YEARS		
<u>AGE</u>	39	32	37	35	
<u>OCCUPATION</u>	FACTORY WORK		M-PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER DRIVERS EDUCATION TEACHER SWIM INSTRUCTOR F-DIRECTOR OF SALES, MARKETING		
<u>PARENTAL APPROVAL</u>	YES	YES	YES	NO	
<u>HOW THE COUPLE MET</u>	AT WORK		DURING COLLEGE		

	MALE (M)	FEMALE (F)	MALE (M)	FEMALE (F)	MALE (M)	FEMALE (F)
	COUPLE ONE		COUPLE TWO		COUPLE THREE	
WARNINGS NOT TO INTERMARRY	NO		YES-FATHER, UNCLE CO-WORKERS		YES-FATHER, SISTER, OTHERS	
ANNOUNCEMENT OF ENGAGEMENT	DOES NOT APPLY		WORD OF MOUTH, PHONE CALLS		LETTERS, PHONE CALLS, WORD OF MOUTH	
DO OTHERS LOOK AT YOU	THEY DO NOT PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO WHETHER OTHERS LOOK OR NOT		YES-LOOKS OF DISBELIEF, BUT WE DO NOT CARE BECAUSE IT IS AMUSING		YES-PEOPLE LOOK BUT IT IS THEIR PROBLEM	
FRIENDS	WHITES, BLACKS, AND MIXED COUPLES		WHITES, BLACKS, AND MIXED COUPLES		WHITES, BLACKS, AND A FEW MIXED COUPLES	
WOULD YOU REMARRY YOUR SPOUSE IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER	DOES NOT APPLY		NO I'D MARRY AT AN OLDER AGE		NO BUT NOT BECAUSE OF RACE	

3	MALE (M)	FEMALE (F)	MALE (M)	FEMALE (F)	
	<u>COUPLE FOUR</u>		<u>COUPLE FIVE</u>		
<u>WARNINGS NOT TO INTERMARRY</u>	YES FROM MY MOTHER	NO	NO	YES FROM MY FATHER, SISTERS, AND OTHER PEOPLE	
<u>ANNOUNCEMENT OF ENGAGEMENT</u>	WORD OF MOUTH, PHONE CALLS		POSTCARDS, WORD OF MOUTH		
<u>DO OTHERS LOOK AT YOU</u>	YES THEY LOOK MOSTLY AT THE BLACK MAN WITH LOOKS OF SHOCK		WE DO NOT NOTICE MUCH BUT KNOW PEOPLE LOOK		
<u>FRIENDS</u>	WHITES, BLACKS, AND MIXED COUPLES		WHITES, BLACKS, AND MIXED COUPLES		
<u>WOULD YOU REMARRY YOUR SPOUSE IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER</u>	YES	YES	YES	YES	

Interracial Relationships as Stigma

by

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ABSTRACT

People with handicaps are often thought to be stigmatized. Stigma refers to an attribute that is deeply discrediting to the individual (Goffman, 1963). Stigma is the reaction by others to an attribute, not intrinsic to that attribute. Those with handicaps are often thought to be stigmatized, as are individuals who marry outside their race. Because little past research has been done in interracial marriages, I conducted five life histories of couples with a black male and a white female. I tried to determine if they perceive stigma and, if so, how it effects their lives. The respondents were identified through the use of snowball sampling, or "significant other" method. Stigma was found to exist in many shapes and forms in each of the five black-white relationships, affecting both the black and white partner. The stigma was first perceived when the couple began a dating relationship. They were first stigmatized by friends and family. As the relationship lengthened and became more serious, stigma affected the couple in business dealings, work situations, and negatively affected their life chances.