Ethnic and Racial Studies

Emotional segregation: A content analysis of institutional racism in US films, 1980-2001

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Emotional segregation: A content analysis of institutional racism in US films, 1980–2001

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to empirically demonstrate a concept, known as "emotional segregation" through a systematic analysis of US films. Emotional segregation is defined as an institutionalized process, whereby European Americans are unable to see people of colour as emotional equals or as capable of sharing the same human emotions and experiences. This concept was inspired by Charles C. Stember's (1976) study of sexual racism and Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) work on sexualized racism. In order to examine the existence of emotional segregation in the United States, a content analysis was conducted of forty US films chosen from a stratified random sample. Differences were found in media portrayals of inter- and intra-racial relationships involving African Americans and European Americans. Future research on emotional segregation is suggested to assess how this phenomenon creates emotional barriers among ethnic groups.

Introduction

Social scientists have argued that despite a decline in racist attitudes, much opposition to interracial intimacy remains (Qian 1997; Knox *et al*. 2000; Romano 2003). Historically, African Americans have been the most rejected racialized group with regard to all forms of interracial integration and intimacy. Studies on residential integration reveal that African Americans are substantially more isolated from 'whites'[1] than from Asians or Hispanics (Farley and Frey 1994). Similar to Gunnar Myrdal's (1962) rank order of discrimination, Bobo and Zubrinsky's (1996) study of 1,869 respondents from the

Los Angeles County Social Survey revealed a definite rank order of race preference in terms of integration, with African Americans occupying the bottom of the hierarchy as the least desired neighbours. They discovered that 'white' objection to residential integration with African Americans was 12 per cent higher than their objection to integration with Asians and that African Americans were also most rejected by Asians and Hispanics (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996). This evidence illustrates the uniqueness of African Americans as the most rejected racialized minority in the United States, a group with which 'whites' express the most ambivalence in terms of interracial intimacy. Therefore, the focus of this article lies with an empirical investigation of institutionalized racism surrounding interracial sexuality between African Americans and 'whites'.

The purpose of this study is to examine systematically the portrayals of intra- vs. interracial relationships between 'blacks' and 'whites' within the US media as a means of illustrating the concept of emotional segregation. Many studies examine the negative portrayals of interracial relationships in various forms of media (Lemon 1977; Scott 1984; Auletta and Hammerback 1985; Pescosolido, Grauerholz, and Milkie 1997; Williams 2001), but few systematically compare and contrast media portrayals of intimate relationships between African American and 'white' men and women. Still, the literature on interracial relationships in the media suggests that there is a difference between portrayals of African Americans and portrayals of 'whites', which supports the need for further examinations of these relationships. In what follows, I shall discuss the historical significance of 'black'/'white' intimacies and why these intimacies remain taboo. I shall then conceptualize emotional segregation within the present research. After presenting my hypotheses and methodology, I shall discuss the results of my study and offer suggestions for future research.

Research problem

Among the first sociologists to investigate interracial sexuality was Charles C. Stember who, in 1976, wrote a book called *Sexual Racism: The Emotional Barrier to an Integrated Society*. In his book, Stember argued that most of the theories concerning emotions or sexuality were micro-level psychological theories that did not promote a sociological understanding of sexuality and racism (Stember 1976). For example, he criticized the frustration-aggression theory for focusing too narrowly on the relationship between social conditions and racial hostility rather than investigating the role sexuality played in racism.

Stember reviewed two variants of the frustration-aggression theory. The first of these variants proposed that frustration and aggression stemmed from certain conditions in a particular society, namely the post-Civil War South, which psychoanalysts defined as a society suffering from 'vast chronic frustration' that inevitably led to aggression towards minorities (1976, p. 67). The second variant of this theory viewed frustration and aggression as universal phenomena. Consistent with this variant, social psychologists speculated that under the right social conditions, where people were prevented from achieving their goals, latent aggression within individuals could be activated. According to this view, minorities were seen as the source of frustration in the US South towards whom aggression was directed (Stember 1976). Within this analysis of 'vast chronic frustration' and minority scapegoats as frustrating agents, there is little or no discussion of 'black'/'white' sexuality and how concern, fear, or uneasiness with this sexuality played a role in frustration or aggression. Neither of these variants of the frustration-aggression theory approach sexuality or sexual racism as conceived by Stember.

Stember's (1976) review of sociological theory revealed that much of it pointed to fear or 'white' aversion to the physical features of African Americans as the motivating factor behind racial hostility. Since Stember's time, fear has continued to be one of the main focuses in sociological work (e.g., Espiritu 2000; Feagin, Vera, and Batur 2001). Stember, however, argued that sexuality (i.e., sexual jealousy) was the cause of racial hostility. According to Stember, a 'white' woman, whether she is seen as ugly or pretty, poor or rich, is a sexual conquest for African American men – a sexual conquest that 'white' men can never experience, given that they did not experience the same history of subordination as African American men nor were they forbidden to touch 'white' women. Even if a 'white' man engaged in sexual relations with a 'white' woman of a higher social status, Stember argued, his sexual excitement would not equal that which the African American man would experience. Stember proposed that because of this antagonism, 'white' men attempted to prevent interracial intimacies between African American men and 'white' women, and that these attempts were illustrations of sexual racism. What Stember did not adequately address were the structural factors that might have motivated the sexual jealousy behind racial hostility.

However, understanding racism as a systemic, institutionalized problem is difficult in US society, because systemic racism is seldom, if ever discussed. US citizens tend to offer individualistic explanations for racism; therefore, they are inclined to dismiss the subtle nature of racism and the existence of structural barriers to equality (Kluegel 1990). For this reason, it is important to study subtle forms of racism

in US society and to address racism surrounding interracial sexuality as a covert and institutionalized problem.

Of particular concern in this article is the institutionalization of emotions surrounding 'black'/'white' interracial sexuality. Feagin, Vera, and Batur (2001) point to the importance of understanding emotions when they speak of a breakdown in empathy between African Americans and 'whites', and Joel Kovel (1984) deals with emotions in his discussion of irrational 'white' fear of African Americans. Perhaps the agent driving these fears Kovel (1984) speaks of and the breakdown in empathy that Feagin, Vera, and Batur (2001) discuss is the inability of 'whites' to see African Americans as emotional equals – as human beings capable of experiencing intimacy and expressing human feelings. The classification of African Americans as the racial 'other', robs them of human status and may create an emotional barrier between African Americans and 'whites'. This emotional barrier, referred to in this study as 'emotional segregation', may offer insight to overcoming racism and racial inequality.

Emotional segregation is defined in this article as an institutionalized process, whereby racially oppressed and racially dominant groups are unable to see one another as emotional equals or as capable of sharing the same human emotions and experiences. To understand what is meant by 'emotional equal', and to make this concept of emotional segregation clearer, it is helpful to distinguish between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy is more passive than empathy and requires less emotional energy. Empathy is a more active feeling. Feeling sorry for someone (sympathy) is not the same as understanding and internalizing the emotions another person feels (empathy). Hence, emotional segregation refers to the lack of empathy that exists between African Americans and 'whites', which is supported by institutional structures and a history of systemic racism in the United States.

Sharon Rush (2006) has also recently been working on emotional segregation, which she defines as 'the societal sanctioning of disrespect for people in violation of the democratic principle that all people are created equally'. Rush focuses on children's emotional response to the teachings of Huckleberry Finn in public schools. Rush's analysis of emotional segregation is developed within a legal perspective. She criticizes legal harm models that do not offer adequate remedies to emotional segregation, as she sets out to develop a new legal theory. Our work is similar in that we both recognize the role of institutions in creating emotional segregation. However, Rush's goal is to understand how literary works used in elementary schools, such as *Huckleberry Finn*, encourage emotional segregation between 'whites' and 'blacks' in the classroom. Emotional

segregation, as explored in this study is located within a systemic racist ideology in the United States. As such, my concept of emotional segregation can be seen as a reason why works such as *Huckleberry Finn* are written. It is my contention that these books, which according to Rush may segregate 'white' and 'black' children by eliciting different emotional responses, exist because 'whites' and 'blacks' have faced structural barriers throughout history that prevented them from sharing empathetic bonds – a situation that continues to be supported by racist institutions.

The unique history of miscegenation in the US reveals a pathological form of endogamy, which I contend is fuelled by its unique system of emotional segregation. The problematic nature of 'black'/'white' relationships can be located historically within laws surrounding interracial marriage. After the end of slavery when former slaves of mixed blood could petition for inheritance and property rights of their fathers, miscegenation was criminalized (Williams 2001). Anti-miscegenation laws, in fact, may have marked the beginnings of emotional segregation in its institutionalized form, because intimate relationships between 'white' men and African American women were legally acceptable prior to the end of slavery. It was only after this time when intimate relationships between African Americans and 'whites' could potentially be based on equality that miscegenation became illegal. Additionally, anti-miscegenation statutes were primarily concerned with the purity of the 'white' race, as 'whites' could only marry other 'whites' but non-'whites' could marry other non-'whites' (Applebaum 1964). Romano (2003) concludes that this double standard allowed for the maintenance of whiteness as a space of 'privilege and purity'. This perspective offers additional insight into why interracial intimacies remain taboo.

Though disputed as early as the 1800s, laws against interracial marriage were not repealed until the late 1960s, and as discussed above, researchers continue to find lower 'white' acceptance of intimate 'black'/'white' relationships than of other forms of social integration. In fact, US citizens in Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina have struggled to maintain symbolic bans on interracial marriage, despite the repeal of anti-miscegenation laws (Romano 2003). Studies of sexuality may help to unravel this institutionalized emotional segregation, given that interracial sexual relationships tend to elicit the strongest negative emotions from 'whites' (Myrdal 1962). As noted above, Charles Stember (1976) was one of the first sociologists to understand emotions and sexuality as they pertain to racism. Stember introduced a controversial idea, known as sexual racism, which he defined as 'the sexual rejection of the racial minority, the conscious attempt on the part of the majority to prevent

interracial cohabitation' (Stember 1976, p. ix). He believed that this rejection and prevention of interracial intimacy created an emotional barrier between racialized groups, which inhibited complete racial integration of US society.

Collins (2000) further formulates a concept, known as 'sexualized racism', which closely resembles Stember's (1976) sexual racism. She contends that the objectification of African American women as the 'other' interferes with their relationships with 'white' and African American men. Though she never mentions Stember, Collins inadvertently expands his work through an exploration of female sexuality. However, where Stember's purpose in exploring sexual racism is to propose an explanation of racial hostility, Collins explores 'sexualized racism' to illustrate it as an institutionalized aspect of US society – an inherently racist society, where definitions of 'normal' and 'deviant' are taken for granted. According to Collins, in a heterosexist society, such as the US, the sexual meanings attached to being gay or lesbian are deviant. She contends that African American female sexuality is viewed in US society as abnormal or pathological heterosexuality. In our 'racially charged' society, Collins argues, African American females face a different form of heterosexism than gay or lesbian people and that is 'sexualized racism'. The visibility of the 'black' body itself, she explains, signals sexual deviancy. She also contends that laws, which promoted racial segregation, such as those against interracial marriage, prevented African Americans and 'whites' from seeing each other as friends, neighbours, or more importantly, as legal sexual partners.

Collins' (2000) work more closely resembles the concept of emotional segregation as defined in this study than Stember's sexual racism. However, she does not empirically examine her concept of sexualized racism and her focus is more on the objectification of 'black' women rather than the institutionalized emotional segregation that may be the driving force behind this objectification. Collins argues that 'whites' and 'blacks' have historically been discouraged from intimacy due in part to the labelling of 'black' sexuality as deviant. I argue that this 'sexualized racism' is framed within the context of emotional segregation. I further contend that in a situation, where 'whites' cannot empathize with African Americans and do not see them as emotional equals, various ideologies, such as heterosexism and 'sexualized racism' develop. The stigmatization of 'black' bodies and 'black' sexuality may result from the emotional segregation between 'blacks' and 'whites', which in turn, may be reinforced by these stigmas.

Literature review

As stated above, the purpose of this study is to examine the existence of emotional segregation in the US media. Unlike Stember (1976), this study does not claim, that 'whites' consciously prevent interracial intimacies. Rather, the information presented will illustrate emotional segregation as an institutionalized ideology operating in the US media that at least reinforces emotional barriers between African Americans and 'whites'. Such an examination of emotional segregation will broaden Stember's work, which failed to address sexual racism's institutionalized nature and the work of Collins (2000) that did not include a systematic study of sexualized racism in the media.

Analyses of popular films point to problematic portrayals of interracial communication and interactions. For instance, McPhail (1996) concludes that Spike Lee's depictions of interracial relationships are highly negative, based merely on sex, and work to reinforce racial stereotypes. Similarly Paulin (1997) concludes that the interracial relationship in Spike Lee's film 'Jungle Fever' was negatively portrayed and unsuccessful. She argued that the title of the film itself revealed Lee's intention of portraying relationships between African Americans and 'whites' as a sickness or an irrational love. Such negative, short-lived, and unsuccessful relationships between African Americans and 'whites' in films, supports the concept of emotional segregation. Given this research I present the following:

> *Hypothesis One: Relationships involving 'whites' will more often be successful than African American or interracial relationships.*
> *Hypothesis Two: Relationships involving 'whites' will be longer lasting than African American or interracial relationships.*

Following Paulin's (1997) findings, Collins' (2000) conceptualization of sexualized racism, and Stember's argument that African American men are stigmatized as inhuman to prevent interracial intimacies, I establish the following:

> *Hypothesis Three: African American couples will reach sexual intimacy rather than emotional intimacy.*
> *Hypothesis Four: African American men will be depicted as less emotionally supportive than 'white' men in their relationships with women.*

Also important to these portrayals of intimacy is the number of times characters are alone together and actually engage in intimate interactions, as stated in the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis Five: 'White' couples will be alone together more often than will African American or interracial couples.

Auletta and Hammerback (1985) developed a relational model for interracial interactions on television as a means of analysing relationships found between the lead characters of eight television shows on three major networks. The sample was taken from all series shows on prime-time or family viewing time and watched for a week. Of the fifty series airing at the time of the research, only eight shows contained interracial communication between African American and 'white' lead characters. The model developed by Auletta and Hammerback to analyse interracial communication between lead characters in television shows was known as the IDI model, and dealt with three aspects of relationships: independence, dependence, and interdependence.

In terms of interpersonal encounters, Auletta and Hammerback (1985) found that six of the eight shows contained independent interracial communication. This meant that the characters were self-directed, critical of others, and not willing to communicate or share their feelings with each other. Interestingly, they also found that 'whites' were much more interdependent with each other than were African Americans, although the latter group tried to be interdependent with 'whites'. 'Whites' usually responded to these attempts made by African Americans with critical, defensive, independent behaviour. Also, the show that contained the most dialogue between African Americans, exhibited only low to moderate interdependent communication between lead characters. The authors conclude that the type of interracial communication found in their sample of eight shows inhibits close friendships from forming between African American and 'white' characters.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from content analyses of other forms of media. Pescosolido, Grauerholz, and Milkie (1997), for example, conducted a content analysis of the representations of African Americans and interracial interactions between African Americans and 'whites' in children's literature between 1937 and 1993. They counted and analysed the portrayals of African Americans and the interactions between African Americans and 'whites'.

During most of the time periods, Pescosolido, Grauerholz, and Milkie (1997) note that portrayals of African Americans concern 'safe' and 'distant' images of Africans, rather than portrayals of African Americans. Also, intimate interactions between African American and 'white' children were rare. Many times when African Americans were included in the literature, they simply replaced 'whites'. In most cases, African Americans were not central characters, and interracial relationships were not central themes in stories.

When African Americans and 'whites' were pictured together, it was usually among a crowd or group of people engaged in some sort of activity, which the authors called 'surface contact'. The authors also pointed out that the examination of adult relationships were a neglected issue in the research. They contend that representations of African American adults as central characters, particularly African American men were not as common as representations of 'white' adults or men of colour.

Following Auletta and Hammerback's (1985) findings regarding unsuccessful communication between African Americans and 'whites,' as well as Pescosolido, Grauerholz, and Milkie's (1997) findings on centrality and intimate interracial contact, I hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis Six: Relationships involving 'whites' will more often be a central theme of the film than will African American or interracial relationships.*

Given Auletta and Hammerback's (1985) finding of greater inter-dependence between 'white' characters than between 'black' characters or interracial interactions, I contend:

> *Hypothesis Seven: Relationships involving 'whites' will reach intimacy quicker than will African American or interracial relationships.*
> *Hypothesis Eight: 'White' couples will engage in more interactions (as outlined in Appendix A) than will African American or interracial couples.*

Another study that examined the nature of inter- and intra-racial relationships between African Americans and 'whites' concerned issues of dominance and submissiveness. Lemon (1977) studied the 'inter-sex' and 'inter-race' patterns of dominance between African American and 'white' men and women. She found that African Americans were less likely than 'whites' to be of a high status in prime-time crime dramas. Likewise, Greenberg and Atkin (1982) discovered that only one-third of African American men on television had an occupation while one-half of 'white' men did. Also, Cummings (1988) noted that African American men in comedies, such as 'Amos 'n Andy' were never shown working. Similarly, Means Coleman (2000) argued that African Americans were often depicted as the underclass or working poor in television sitcoms. Given this historical trend, I present:

> *Hypothesis Nine: African American men will be depicted as less financially supportive than 'white' men in their relationships with women.*

Methods

To empirically demonstrate the existence of emotional segregation in the United States, forty films containing interracial relationships between African Americans and 'whites', relationships between 'whites', and relationships between African Americans were content analysed. These films were obtained from a stratified random sample of *Leonard Maltin's 2001 Movie and Video Guide*. This guide does not include every film made in the United States from 1980–2001; therefore, the sample may not be representative of, or generalizable to all US films. However, this guide is noted by *USA Today* as one of the most comprehensive works of its kind, consisting of over 20,000 film reviews, and is praised by the *New York Times* for including a wide range of films from blockbusters to 'little-known sleepers' and 'rarities'. Also, the systematic sampling procedure described below helped to eliminate researcher bias in the selection of films.

Using the movie guide, a total of 2,944 films were labelled according to the relationship involved in them.[2] Of these, 1,047 contained a relationship involving a 'white' man and woman, fifty-four contained a relationship involving an African American man and woman, seventeen contained a relationship involving an African American man and a 'white' woman, nineteen contained a relationship involving an African American woman and 'white' man, and 1,807 were 'other'[3] films. Eight films were then randomly selected from each of these five categories for a total sample of forty films.

In addition to the author, one other independent coder was recruited. After a ten-hour training period, the second coder analysed ten randomly selected films (25 per cent) of the original sample. Percent agreement (PA) and Scott's *pi* (Pi) were used to compute inter-coder and test-retest reliability for the dichotomous variables (success and centrality). However, the other variables (intimacy, duration, and the interactions) were interval/ratio, and therefore; required the use of Pearson *r-squared* (r^2) to assess reliability. Pearson *r-squared* was chosen over Pearson *r*, because the former takes into account shared variance between coders (Neuendorf 2002). Neuendorf (2002) also recommends *Lin's concordance correlation coefficient* as an alternative to *r*. Unlike *r*, *Lin* takes systematic coding errors into account and is robust on sample sizes as small as ten pairs (Neuendorf 2002). The *r-squared* and *Lin* for the interval/ratio variables were calculated using Stata 7.0. Cutoff figures for acceptable reliability varies, however, a general rule of thumb has been proposed by Banerjee *et al*. (1999). The criteria suggested are as follows: .75 and above indicates excellent agreement; .40 to .75 signifies moderate agreement, and below .40 illustrates poor agreement.

Four main variables were used to explore the main relationship in the film: success (PA =.90; Pi =.73), duration (r^2 & Lin =.99), centrality (PA & Pi =.99), and the racial make-up of the relationship. Though success and centrality were dichotomous variables, coded as either 'yes' or 'no' ('0' or '1'), the qualitative comparisons of relationships allowed for an analysis of what was involved in this success and centrality, testing for hypotheses one, two, and six. The racial composition of the relationship (the independent variable) referred to the following categories: 'black' male/'white' female (BM/WF), 'white' male/'black' female (WM/BF), 'white' male/'white' female (WW), and 'black' male/'black' female (BB). This variable was predicted to directly affect the success, centrality, duration, and interactions of the relationship. Relationships were defined as successful if they had reached some degree of intimacy that was still present at the end of the film. Intimacy (r^2 & Lin =.99) was coded if the couple were married and/or when the characters confided personal thoughts to each other. In terms of measuring these variables, a coding sheet was used that allowed for the analysis of such interactions as embraces, kisses, touches, etc. Embraces were either 'formal' (r^2 = .99; Lin =.99), 'friendly' (r^2 =.92; Lin =.95), 'warm' (r^2 =.55; Lin = .74), or 'sexual' (r^2 =.97; Lin =.95). Touches were similarly categorized as 'formal' (r^2 =.99; Lin =.99), 'friendly' (r^2 =.88; Lin =.93), 'warm' (r^2 =.97; Lin =.98), or 'sexual' (r^2 =.98; Lin =.99). The types of kisses between the characters were coded as 'cheek' (r^2 =.96; Lin = .97), 'lips-peck' (r^2 =.70; Lin =.81), 'lips-full' (r^2 =.63; Lin =.76), or 'lips-sexual' (r^2 =.97; Lin =.98). The distance between the characters when they stood or sat by each other was also noted, as were the number of times the characters were alone together – allowing for an assessment of hypothesis five (See Appendix A). These quantitative codes were also used to address hypothesis eight, that 'white' couples would engage in more interactions than African American or interracial couples. The variable 'Alone' yielded an r^2 of .89 and a Lin of .92. Distance was coded as 'distant' (r^2 =.53; Lin =.67), 'professional' (r^2 =.94; Lin =.97), 'close but not touching' (r^2 =.92; Lin =.94), or 'intimate' (r^2 =.95; Lin =.97). Test-retest reliability was also assessed, yielding an acceptable .75 or higher for all dichotomous and interval/ratio variables. However, the r^2 was .60 for 'warm' embraces; .62 for 'lips-peck'; and .63 for 'lips-full.'

Validity is a common problem with most content analyses, especially when a single researcher develops the codes as was done here (Bernard 1995). There may also be content validity issues, with the above codes, because they may not have tapped all the dimensions of film relationships. Also, because no systematic studies of the media have been conducted to assess emotional segregation in US society, there is

no way to confirm that portrayals of film relationships are a valid measure of this phenomenon.

However, steps were taken during the development of the coding sheet to establish components that would capture important aspects of film relationships. The coding scheme was developed after examining past studies of media relationships and observing relationships in films not included in the sample to gain an understanding of the types of interactions film couples engaged in and to note examples for the definitions of different types of touches, kisses, embraces, and distance. After each component of the coding sheet was defined, other social scientists were asked to critique the codes. These suggestions were incorporated into the coding and led to the development of a final coding scheme. This scheme was then pre-tested on eight films outside of the sample to further assess its effectiveness in coding film relationships.

In addition to these quantitative components, qualitative descriptions of themes were also included in the coding to address hypotheses three, four, six and nine. The main themes noted were sexual and emotional intimacy, measured by conversational content, film plot, and problems faced by characters. Also, notes were taken on occupational status, the development of the relationship and the way in which the relationship ended (See Appendix A).

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive cross tabulations of success and centrality. Hypothesis one predicted that relationships involving 'whites' would more often be successful than relationships between African Americans or interracial relationships. Hypothesis six predicted that relationships between 'whites' would be central more often than the other relationships. Consistent with hypothesis one, all the relationships involving 'whites' were successful compared to only 38 per cent of the interracial relationships involving an African American

Table 1. *Percentage of successful and central relationships*

	BB (n = 8)	WW (n = 8)	BM/WF (n = 8)	WM/BF (n = 8)	OTHER (n = 8)
Success	75	100	38	88	75
Non-Success	25	0	62	12	25
Central	63	88	50	50	50
Non-Central	37	12	50	50	50

Note: percentages sum vertically to 100 within each relationship category for success and centrality.

man and a 'white' woman. However, 88 per cent of the interracial relationships between a 'white' man and an African American woman and 75 per cent of the African American relationships were successful. Seventy-five per cent of the 'other' relationships were successful; of these, 40 per cent involved a 'white' man and a 'white' woman and another 20 per cent involved a 'white' man and a Japanese woman (See Table 1).

Consistent with hypothesis six, half the interracial relationships were central, compared to 88 per cent of the 'white' relationships and 63 per cent of the African American relationships. Of the relationships described as 'other', 50 per cent were central, none of which involved an African American man (See Table 1). In fact, all but one of these 'other' relationships that were central involved a 'white' man.

Table 2 presents the results relating to hypotheses two and seven. Hypothesis two postulated that relationships between 'whites' would have the greatest duration, and hypothesis seven predicted that 'whites' would reach intimacy the quickest. In support of hypothesis two, the longest lasting relationships were those between 'whites'. followed by African American relationships and finally the interracial relationships (See Table 2). Hypothesis seven, that 'white' couples would reach intimacy quicker than either African American or interracial couples, was only partially supported. 'White' couples reached intimacy quicker than interracial couples, but later than African American couples (See Table 2).

Table 3 presents the total number of interactions within the relationships. Hypothesis eight predicted that 'whites' would engage in more interactions than any of the other couples. Looking at the types of interactions (i.e., alone, kisses, embraces, touches, distance), we see that 'whites' have a higher average than any of the other couples. The interracial couples engaged least often in these interactions (See Table 3). Table 4 presents the percentage of interactions by relationship category. Hypothesis three predicted that African Americans would reach sexual rather than emotional intimacy. In terms of the types of interactions, 'white' couples and African American couples engaged more often in 'warm' embraces and touches than 'friendly' or 'sexual' embraces and touches. On the other hand, relationships involving African American men had more than twice the percentage of 'sexual' embraces and touches than relationships involving 'white' men. In addition, 'white' couples engaged in more 'warm' touches and embraces than interracial or African American couples. This implies support for hypothesis three that African Americans would reach sexual rather than emotional intimacy.

Interracial couples involving African American men and 'white' women engaged most often in sexual embraces, touches and kisses. Relationships involving African American men had more 'sexual'

Table 2. *Average length of duration and intimacy in percent*

	BB (n = 916)	WW (n = 917)	BM/WF (n = 885)	WM/BF (n = 920)	OTHER (n = 885)
Duration					
Avg. Percent of film completed	53	72	43	41	32
Intimacy					
Avg. Percent of film completed	16	25	42	50	31

Note: duration = average percent of film completed after intimacy was reached. This was calculated by summing the total duration of all relationships within a given category and dividing that number by the total duration of all films in that category. E.g., the total duration of all relationships within the BB category was 490 minutes and the total duration of all films in the BB category was 916. Therefore, on average, relationships involving African American couples lasted for 53 per cent of the film (490/916). Intimacy = average percent of film completed by the time intimacy was reached. This was calculated by summing the total length of time that passed before intimacy was reached in a given category and dividing this number by the total duration of all films in that category. E.g., The WW relationships as a whole took 229 minutes to reach intimacy and the total duration of all films in this category was 917 minutes. Therefore, on average, 'white' couples reached intimacy when 25 per cent of the film was completed (229/917).

kisses than those involving 'white' men. This again implied support for hypothesis three, since African American couples engaged in more 'sexual' kisses than in the other types of kisses. There was very little difference between the couples in terms of distance and all couples received more 'close' codes than 'distant', 'professional', or 'intimate' codes. Also, African American couples and 'white' couples had the same percentage of 'intimate' distance (See Table 4). Referring back to Table 3, 'white' couples were shown alone together more often on average than either the interracial or African American couples, in support of hypothesis five. Additionally, within the 'other' category, interracial couples were alone together the least often (See Table 3).

The patterns in the quantitative data reveal a racialized and gendered hierarchy of whiteness such that in most cases, if a 'white' man is in the relationship it is more likely to be successful and central. A similar pattern is revealed with 'warm' versus 'sexual' codes. The qualitative evidence assessing hypotheses three and four, that African American couples would reach sexual intimacy rather than emotional intimacy, and that African American men would be depicted as less emotionally supportive than 'white' men reaffirms the patterns in the quantitative data. Much of the conversational content between African American characters focused on sex. In fact, 38 per cent of the films involving African American couples were based on sexual themes. For example, the film, 'Booty Call' was based on the

Table 3. *Number of Interactions by Relationship Category (Means and standard deviations)*

Variables	BB		WW		BM/WF		WM/BF		OTHER	
	Mean	(S.D.)	Mean	(S.D.)	Mean	(S.D.)	Mean	(S.D.)	Mean	(S.D.)
Alone	12	(9)	18	(13)	11	(7)	11	(6)	6	(5)
Embraces	7	(7)	9	(12)	3	(3)	7	(6)	3	(2)
Kisses	34	(18)	43	(13)	14	(9)	12	(7)	25	(15)
Touches	68	(27)	105	(81)	35	(10)	57	(42)	65	(35)
Distance	91	(66)	143	(87)	65	(38)	105	(50)	73	(48)
Total Interactions	199	(148)	300	(242)	116	(109)	178	(186)	164	(135)

Table 4. *Percentage of interactions by relationship category*

	BB	WW	BM/WF	WM/BF	OTHER
Embraces					
Friendly	11	6	0	17	43
Warm	53	77	40	72	43
Sexual	36	17	60	11	14
Touches					
Formal	15	19	33	43	23
Friendly	31	24	15	20	27
Warm	36	52	24	36	44
Sexual	18	5	28	1	6
Kisses					
Cheek	30	35	21	45	17
Lips	19	10	24	17	15
Lips-full	10	21	9	9	29
Lips-sexual	41	34	47	30	38
Distance					
Distant	5	8	8	12	7
Professional	17	18	31	23	18
Close	47	43	42	41	45
Intimate	31	31	19	24	30

Note: percentages sum vertically to 100 within relationship category for each type of interaction.

continued attempts of two African American men to have sex with their girlfriends. In the first scene of this film, the men make a bet that they will have sex with their girlfriends before sunrise. This is important, especially to the main character, Rashawn, because he has been dating his girlfriend, Nikki for seven weeks, which is the longest either Nikki or Rashawn have waited to have sex in any relationship. When Bunz, Rashawn's friend, hears that they have not yet had sex, he exclaims, 'You haven't tagged that ass yet?'

The conversations about sex continue throughout the film. Bunz goes on a first date with Nikki's friend, Listie, and gets upset when she orders lobster. He tells her that if he has to pay for lobster, he expects sex from her that night and proceeds to talk about the size of his penis. Also, Bunz asks a man in the restaurant to put out his cigarette because it is irritating the women. Bunz appeals to the man by saying if he does not put the cigarette out Bunz will not 'get any ass tonight'. Later that night, the two couples go to Nikki's apartment and again the conversation centres on sex. The rest of the film involves Bunz and Rashawn running back and forth to stores trying to find the different forms of protection that their girlfriends want. At one point, Rashawn gets shot during a store robbery and they all end up in hospital. Bunz

and Listie have sex in a hospital room, where a patient is sleeping, and in the last scene of the film, Listie ties Bunz up in her bed and has a whip in her hand.

In the films with 'white' couples, there are no graphic sex scenes as there are in the African American films described, and there are few if any discussions about sex – certainly no conversations that include obscene language. The sex scenes in 'white' films only consist of the couple in bed together embracing. These moments are tender and involve intimate conversation. Also, there is an implication during these scenes that 'white' couples are completely naked, although no nudity is shown. This may signify a closer, more intimate moment between the man and woman. African Americans, on the other hand, usually have some kind of clothing on during sex scenes and obscene nudity and fondling is shown. This may send the message that sex for them is more an issue of pleasure rather than an expression of intimacy and love. During a sex scene in 'How U Like Me Now', for example, the African American woman (Val) tells her boyfriend (Thomas) that he is only interested in satisfying himself. Because she is unsatisfied, Thomas states, 'Give me a few minutes and I'll get it up again', at which point he proceeds to masturbate. After Thomas and Val break up, he has sex with a woman he meets at a club. Promptly after they have sex, he kicks her out of his apartment. It is also worth mentioning that Thomas' friend Malcolm tries to pick up women at the club by talking about the size of his penis, similar to the character of Bunz in 'Booty Call'.

In addition, some of the African American relationships, such as those in 'The Color Purple', were quite abusive. The main characters in this film, Celie and Albert share absolutely no emotional intimacy or affection. Celie never calls Albert by his first name and instead calls him 'Mister'. Also, when they first have sex, Celie narrates that she does not cry but just lies there. During these sex scenes, the camera focuses on Celie, who looks very uncomfortable, and on a line of Albert's belts shaking off on the headboard, which may signify his physical abuse of her. Before her marriage to Albert, Celie's father raped her and impregnated her numerous times. Celie's sister, Nettie, comes to live with her because of their father's abuse. Nettie tells Celie, 'I just couldn't keep him off me'.

In contrast, over half of the films involving 'whites' centre on the 'white' man's romantic pursuit of the 'white' woman with whom he is in love. For example, in the movie, 'As Good as It Gets' the main character, Melvin is in love with a waitress named Carol. As the movie and their relationship progress, Melvin is portrayed as an increasingly supportive and sensitive person. In fact, the development of Melvin's character is one of the main themes of the movie. Though he is first portrayed as a cold, self-centred individual, he performs a number of

good deeds that changes the other characters' perceptions of him. For instance, Melvin learns that Carol's son is constantly ill and that she cannot afford quality healthcare. Therefore, he hires his publisher's husband (a top doctor) to take care of Carol's son and covers all the expenses. Also, when Melvin's gay neighbour, Simon, is attacked and left homeless, Melvin allows Simon to stay with him. At one point in the movie, Simon tells Melvin that he loves him and Melvin says, 'I'd be the luckiest guy in the world if that did it for me' and touches Simon on the shoulder. This scene illustrates Melvin's emotional growth and that he has overcome his homophobia, which was apparent early in the movie. He also shares his feelings for Carol with Simon, and at the end of the movie, he goes to Carol's apartment to declare his love for her. They walk together and he tells her she is the greatest woman in the world. As with the other movies involving 'white' couples, Carol and Melvin embrace and kiss towards the end of the movie.

Only two of the films involving African American couples could possibly fit this description – 'Mandela' and 'love jones'. Still, the latter film includes a sex scene that the main characters (Nina and Darius) graphically describe to their friends, once more including a discussion of the man's penis. After Nina's friend asks, 'you f***ed him, didn't you?' Nina responds, 'His dick just spoke to me'. Likewise, Darius' friend asks if Nina 'jacked him up'. Such findings suggest support for hypothesis four that African American relationships are portrayed as more sexually intimate than the other relationships and hypothesis eight that African American men are portrayed as less emotionally supportive than 'white' men.

In terms of financial success, many of the African American men in the films examined either did not have well-paid jobs or did not want to work. For example, one of the main problems the African American couple dealt with in 'How U Like Me Now' was that the man, Thomas, never had enough money to take his girlfriend out. Thomas' friend, Malcolm, drives a taxi and sells condoms for a living; however, he proudly states early in the film that he does not want to work. This seems to be the attitude of Play in 'House Party 3' as well. In this film, Kid tells Play that they are not making enough money as musicians and implies that they should get real jobs. However, Play warns him not to say the 'J' word. On the other hand, 'white' men in films, such as 'Urban Cowboy' and 'Backdraft,' were shown performing hard labour and trying to achieve higher levels of success in their occupations.

Implying support for hypotheses four and nine, African American men in interracial relationships with 'white' women were portrayed as less financially and emotionally supportive than 'white' men. Furthermore, similar to African American relationships, many of these

interracial relationships were based on sex and low levels of intimacy. Some African American men in interracial relationships did have financially rewarding occupations (as did some of the men in African American relationships); however, in these cases, intimacy was still a problem and the relationship usually did not progress beyond friend-ship.

In contrast, only one of the interracial relationships between 'white' men and African American women was based merely on sexual attraction, and most of the 'white' men in these relationships were financially and emotionally supportive. For example, in the film, 'The Bodyguard' the 'white' man immediately takes an affectionate and supportive role in the life of the African American woman's son, Fletcher. He shows Fletcher how to build ships; he takes him boating; he tells him not to use bad language; and he saves Fletcher's life. This again reinforces the quantitative findings of greater 'warm' codes for 'white' men versus higher 'sexual' codes for African American men. 'White' men were portrayed as qualitatively more affectionate and emotionally supportive compared to their African American counter-parts. However, within interracial relationships, 'white' men served as a sort of mentor or protector to the African American woman, and very low levels of intimacy and duration were achieved. In fact, the duration of the interracial relationship in the film, 'Executive Decision', was zero minutes and the future of the relationship was unclear. In addition to these ambiguous endings, half of the 'white' male/'black' female relationships ended either in death or because the couple simply could not/should not be together. For example, the couple in 'The Bodyguard' parted, because their lives differed too greatly.

Another difference between films involving 'white' couples and other films concerned the development and centrality of the relation-ship. As implied by the above themes, more time was dedicated to the development of 'white' couples than African American or interracial couples. In over half of the films involving 'white' couples, the main themes and plots were centred on the relationship between the main characters. Unlike the relationships involving 'black' men, 'white' men and women were more often portrayed in a romance, where they met, fell in love, and faced obstacles to their love that they eventually overcame. Seven of the eight films involving 'white' couples clearly fit this description, while only two of the films involving African American couples did, one of them being 'Mandela'. Also, in many of the films involving interracial or African American couples, other dramatic themes (and sometimes graphic violence) distract the audience from even the potential for romance between the characters.

Discussion

Consistent with the taboo against interracial intimacies documented
throughout history (Myrdal 1962; Stember 1976; Bobo and Zubrinsky
1996; Collins 2000; Romano 2003), the findings of this study suggest
that African Americans remain a highly rejected racialized group.
Following the above findings, relationships involving African Amer-
ican men tend to be portrayed as sexually rather than emotionally
intimate and as less successful. These findings lend support to
Stember's (1976) concept of sexual racism and the historical dehuma-
nization of 'black' men. What's more, the highly sexualized nature of
relationships involving African Americans follows Collins (2000)
discussion of sexualized racism, since African Americans are por-
trayed as sexually deviant. In addition, findings of low emotional
intimacy in relationships involving 'black' men suggests an emotional
barrier between African Americans and 'whites', as interracial
relationships and African Americans are presented as pathological.
If no variation existed across relationship categories, then we could
dismiss the notion of emotional segregation. However, the variation
and patterns in the quantitative data and qualitative description
suggest a racialized and gendered hierarchy of whiteness. That is, the
most accepted and emotionally intimate relationships (as measured by
the variables in the study) tend to be those involving 'white' men and
women followed by those involving 'white' men and 'black' women,
while the least accepted relationships are those involving African
American men. This hierarchy of whiteness also works in concordance
with the historical rejection of African Americans and the main-
tenance of whiteness as superior.

As discussed above, racism is an ideology embedded in US society,
and emotional segregation operates within institutions, such as the
media, to reinforce racist attitudes towards African Americans.
Essentially, this racist ideology continues to classify African Amer-
icans as the racial 'other' – an 'other' that threatens the pureness of a
'white' society. In fact, of the 2,944 films from which the sample was
drawn, only 2 per cent involved African American couples and 1 per
cent involved interracial couples (0.5 per cent BM/WF, 0.5 per cent
WM/BF). It could be argued that the small percentage of interracial
relationships in film is merely a reflection of the less than 1 per cent of
'black'/'white' interracial marriages in society. However, none of the
films in this study depicted an interracial marriage. Rather, the
interracial relationships portrayed involved dating, friendship, and
collegial relationships. Much of the data on interracial friendships and
dating are conducted on youth and college populations. A 1997 Gallup
poll found that 75 per cent of African Americans claimed to have a
close friend who was 'white', and 59 per cent of 'whites' claimed to

have a close friendship with an African American (Entman and Rojecki 2000). Based on a study of 620 university students, 83 per cent of African Americans approved of interracial relationships, and 43 per cent of 'whites' expressed this opinion (Knox *et al*. 2000). What's more, the 1999 US Census shows that 32 per cent of African Americans are married (Current Population Survey 2004). Only two of the films in the study sample involved African American marriages, one of which was the true story, 'Mandela'.

These numbers suggest that by under-representing African Americans, the media plays a role in maintaining whiteness as normative. Unlike the backlash against integration that Stember detailed in 1976, contemporary portrayals may be sending racist messages in a more subtle way. It is this subtlety of racism that poses a threat to equality, because it prevents the public from acknowledging that racism still exists. In fact, researchers, such as Ford (1997) report that increases in comedic media portrayals of African Americans have created a tolerance of discrimination, sending the message that discrimination is not a serious problem worthy of critical examination. Through continued systematic study, racism may be exposed as a hidden, yet persistently viable social ill that permeates institutions, such as the media; hence maintaining the 'privilege and purity' of whiteness (Romano 2003).

Conclusion

According to the present study, there is a difference in the ways that African American and interracial couples are portrayed in comparison to 'white' couples. This difference reinforces the historical taboo against interracial intimacies, as well as the portrayal of the 'black' body as sexually deviant. Such cultural images perpetuated by the media, not only stigmatize interracial relationships, but also dehumanize relationships involving African American men and women. Both these conditions can prevent 'whites' and 'blacks' from seeing each other as emotional equals.

Within this post-Civil Rights era, there may be a greater number of African American and interracial relationships in the media, but there seems to be a lack of scenes in films, where these groups share emotional and intimate moments that go beyond sexual acts. In order to overcome these emotional barriers and the subtle forms of institutionalized racism that build them, these barriers must first be recognized and dismantled. This will require greater systematic examination of the institutions, such as the media industry, that perpetuate racism.

The study presented here focused more on the comparison of men, but future research comparing women would add to the findings of

this study. Also, examining the portrayal of other racialized groups besides African Americans would allow researchers to assess the extent to which emotional segregation is directed at African American/'white' relationships and the extent to which African Americans remain the most rejected group in terms of media portrayals. In addition, a study that controlled for film context by analysing all relationship categories within a given film rather than across films would offer a more rigorous test of emotional segregation. If relationships were portrayed similarly within a given film regardless of the racial make-up of the relationship, then perhaps differences across films could be explained by the audience being targeted or the context of the film. However, finding that relationships involving 'black' men are portrayed more negatively than those involving 'white' men within the same film would offer greater explanatory power to the racial make-up of the relationship. If such striking differences were discovered, a greater case could be made for the existence of emotional segregation within the media. Such discoveries could also lend insight to the question of whether or not these portrayals are intentional.

What's more, studies comparing emotional segregation across nations would contribute to an understanding of this phenomenon throughout the world. With the invasion of US and European cultures to many nations, such as India, South Africa, and Brazil, it is possible that the racist ideology that fuels emotional segregation has been transferred to non-European nations. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to compare emotional segregation in US media and media in other nations.

Theoretically, emotional segregation may also interfere with collective action, especially those that involve interracial efforts. Could emotional segregation play a role in the history of unsuccessful interracial movements? What is the process through which emotional integration can be reached in these movements? Social movement scholars have noted the importance of empathy in recruitment of activists and have called for greater attention to emotions in movement research (Groves 1995; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001).

Given the subtlety of racism, it is important now more than ever to examine the institutionalized racism that exists in US society. Problematic portrayals of African American and interracial relationships may not be easily discernible to the average US viewing public, especially since such images are embedded in US racist ideology. However, the findings of systematic studies of the media such as this one suggest that a negative message is being sent about interracial intimacies. This negative cultural imagery reinforced by the media may indirectly affect the social and economic positions of African Americans (Jewell 1993; Collins 2000). Contending with this imagery is necessary if we are to achieve equality, emotional and otherwise.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1.   Because the racialized categories of 'black' and 'white' are ambiguous and socially constructed, I problematize them by using quotation marks. The term African American(s) is not placed inside quotation marks, because this term refers to a cultural group in the United States, rather than a racialized group.

2.   Only heterosexual relationships were examined due to the nature of sexual racism as defined by Stember (1976) and the conceptualization of emotional segregation in this article. However, future studies examining emotional segregation could explore the portrayal of gay and lesbian relationships.

3.   If the race of the characters was undetermined or it was unclear if the film contained a relationship between a man and a woman, the film was labelled 'other'. Also included in this category were any films that did not fit the established interracial relationship categories (e.g., 'white' man/Japanese woman).

4.   All interactions (alone, touching, embracing, kissing) were recorded only when they took place between the main characters of the films and any other character as long as the interaction fit the relationship category of the film. However, intimacy, centrality, success, and duration were noted only for the main relationship of the film. If the film contained more than one relationship that fit its relationship category, all of the interactions were recorded, but in terms of coding intimacy, centrality, success, and duration, a judgement call was made about which relationship in the film was the more important or main one.

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Appendix A: Coding Sheet

Name of Film_____
Length of Film_____
Names of Characters_____
Year_____
Director_____
Relationship Category_____

Centrality: The relationship between the characters is a main theme of the film.

  0) No
  1) Yes

How many times are the characters alone together in the film?

     BM/WF

     BM/BF

     WM/WF

     WM/BF

How many times do the characters embrace (use above relationship categories)?

Nature of the embraces (A tally was kept for each type of embrace, kiss, touch, etc.)

  1) Formal
  2) Friendly
  3) Warm
  4) Sexual

Comments:

How many times do the characters kiss?
Nature of the kisses

  1) Cheek—peck
  2) Lips—peck
  3) Lips—full
  4) Lips—sexual

Comments:

How many times do the characters touch?
Nature of the touches

1) Formal
2) Friendly
3) Warm
4) Sexual

Comments:

How far apart do the characters stand or sit?

1) Distant
2) Professional
3) Close but not touching
4) Intimate (touching)

Success: The characters have reached some degree of intimacy and this intimacy still exists at the end of the film.

0) No
1) Yes

   When is intimacy reached?____minutes

Comments:

Duration: How long does the relationship last?___ minutes

Duration is to be recorded from the time intimacy is reached until the time the relationship ends.

What types of activities do the characters engage in as part of their relationship?

1) Professional
2) Group
3) Intimate

What types of problems do the characters face in the relationship?

Is the relationship between the characters developed over the course of the film?

How and why do the relationships end?
Comments:
Overall comments: