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Earl S. Mowatt

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Cross-Racial Relationships on Family-Themed Television Shows

An Indicator for Larger Race Relations in the United States

EARL S. MOWATT, *Bethune-Cookman University*

ABSTRACT—This research sought to examine portrayals of cross-racial relationships on popular family-themed television shows, focusing on three dimensions of human interactions; 1) interdependence, 2) individuation, and 3) romantic involvement. The units of analysis for this study were relationship interactions between European Americans and minority (e.g., African American and Hispanic) group members. Content analysis was used for this exploratory study to examine the extent that mainstream ideologies regarding race are embedded into the scripts of these popular shows. Findings from the study reveal that patterns of cross-racial relationships on television are very similar to some real world experiences. Analyzing scripted broadcast portrayals may provide a means for understanding larger race relations in society.

KEY WORDS—interracial couples, race/ethnic relations, inter-group relations, cross-race portrayals

CONTACT—Correspondence for this article should be addressed to to Earl S. Mowatt, Department Chair, Justice and Society Studies, Bethune-Cookman University College of Liberal Arts, 640 Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune Blvd, Richard V. Moore Center #101, Daytona Beach, FL 32114, mowatte@cookman.edu.

Introduction

ARGUABLY, THE UNITED STATES CAN STILL BE CONSIDERED A relatively segregated society (Massey, 2007). The lack of extensive social contact among members of divergent groups emphasizes television's role in understanding protocols of cross-race relationships. For some individuals who live the majority of their lives in homogeneous environments, much of what they learn about others is delivered through media outlets. As a result, television broadcasts become their primary source of information about disparate racial and ethnic groups (Larson, 2006).

Though race continues to be a strong social divider in the United States, its grip on cross-racial unions is becoming more relaxed. Intermarriages have been steadily increasing since 1970 (Rosenfeld, 2010), rising from 150,000 in 1960 to 3.1 million in 2000 (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010). These unions are roughly 13% of all marriages in the United States (Burton et al, 2010). This suggests greater social acceptance of same-race rather than cross-race pairings.

The pattern of cross-racial acceptance found in the real world is exemplified in television's pseudo world where family dynamics are central to the storyline. Recent trends in network programming involve family formations that include African American/European American and Hispanic/European American pairings. Additionally, the creators and writers of popular television shows often develop scripted narratives that emphasize distinct social roles among various racial groups (Head, McGregor, & Span, 2001) thereby collapsing characters into to widely accepted stereotypes. Rojecki (2007) asserts that television media reflects mainstream ideologies regarding race and should be a revealing indicator (Entman & Rojecki, 2001) of the manner in which racial boundaries are created and maintained in contemporary society.

Despite the current trend toward racial inclusion on TV, there are still relatively few programs portraying interracial unions. Mastro, Bradley & Greenberg's (2000) study of minorities on television suggest that persistent exposure to a single series depicting cross-racial relationships provides the strongest means of influencing social perceptions. This is partially attributed to the limited options for viewing those relationship forms (Mastro, Bradley, & Greenberg, 2000). Since television shows remain a conduit by which viewing audiences draw reference and form opinions, it is important that these storylines be examined.

Only a handful of scholars have examined cross-race interactions on popular primetime television shows. They include work by Entman & Rojecki (2001) and Weigel, Kim & Frost (1995). Entman et al. (2001) found that homogenous pairings involving European Americans are 6 times more likely to engage in activities that transcend the working environment than interracial pairs. Also, roughly 57 percent of interracial scenes are between mixed-sex pairs and only 2 in 10 features African American males with European American females. Where African American females are concerned, more than half of the interactions are with European American males. According to their research (2001), romantic involvement across racial lines was rarely depicted though one precedent-setting occurrence did appear during the 1999 season of *ER*. Entman & Rojecki suggest (2001) that the shows overwhelming popularity among African Americans and European Americans may have eased the producers' decision to explore interracial romance on the show. The researchers note (2001) the relative importance of this storyline in that it signals to cautious producers that depicting interracial romance offer minimal risk in jeopardizing the high-rating status of popular primetime television shows.

Weigel et al. (1995) replicated procedures used by Weigel, Loomis, and Soja (1980) in evaluating race relations on prime time television. Comparing results, cross-racial interaction depictions more than tripled in frequency from 2% in 1978 to 6.8% in 1989 (Weigel, Kim, & Frost, 1995). Though the 1980s witnessed an increase in cross-racial appearances, ratings for cooperation, common goals, and shared decision making in African American and European American relationships were not significantly higher in 1989 than they were in 1978 (1995). In addition, cross-racial romance remained quiescent between African Americans and European Americans in both studies (1995).

Though only a handful of researchers have explored cross-race relationships on primetime broadcasts, even fewer studies have explored the interactions within the context of family relations. This study sought to resolve this omission by examining cross-race relationships across two popular primetime television shows where family interactions are essential to the storyline.

Content analysis was used to examine patterns of interactions between minorities and European Americans to determine how mainstream ideologies regarding race are embedded within these programs. It is suggested (Yancy, 2007) that studying cross-race relationships provides a means for understanding larger race relations in the United States. This research ex-

amines the extent that televised cross-race relationship mirror real world cross-race relationships.

Literature Review

Since very little research exists that studies cross-racial relationships on television, this literature review looks at intimate interracial pairings in society from four different perspectives; 1) mainstream attitudes toward interracial marriages, 2) intermarriage patterns, 3) partner selection, and 4) distress factors associated with cross-racial unions. The extent that televised cross-race relationship investigated in this study mirror real world cross-race relationships may be revealing indicators of contemporary society's views of interracial relationships.

Mainstream Attitudes toward Interracial Marriages

Minority group members are more likely to experience negative effects of racism than members of the majority group (Yancey, 2007). Degrees of cross-racial acceptance, however, differs among the various groups. A discrepancy exists between interracial marriages containing African Americans and interracial marriages containing other races where African Americans are least favored for as intermarriage partners. Polling results from 2004 indicate that 34% of European Americans would object to their children marrying an African American (Squires, 2009). Lewandowski and Jackson (2001) report that African American/European American couples are perceived as less compatible than Asian/European American couples, and individuals would rather marry an Asian than an African American partner. Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian Americans were also more likely to marry European Americans than African Americans (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, and Freeman, 2010). Additionally, African Americans are more likely to cohabitate than marry in a mixed-race arrangement than other groups (Burton, et al., 2010). Yancey (2007) argues that the alienated position of African Americans in society create a unique barrier that undermines cross-racial acceptance. African Americans subsequently become least desired for dating among other racial groups (2007).

Yates (2007) suggests that racial attitudes of European Americans who intermarry are often adjusted based on their spouse's racial identity. These individuals are motivated to conceptualize racism through their spouse's experiences as a means for establishing healthy relationships (2007). This

occurrence is more prevalent through marital rather than through close platonic ties since motivational factors may not be as strong (2007). European Americans who marry interracially may also occupy a different social position than when previously married (2007), profoundly affecting their views concerning race. For them, racial discrepancies become actualized through subjective experience rather than second hand knowledge thereby reducing their acceptance of common European American beliefs such as individualism and colorblindness (2007).

Though America, in general, is becoming increasingly accepting of interracial marriages (Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001), data suggests that a significant number of European Americans still harbor negative attitudes regarding cross-racial relationships (Squires, 2009). Johnson and Jacobson (2005) make note that attitudes toward interracial marriages are mediated by the quality of social interaction between in-group and out-group members. Individuals who engage in cooperative and egalitarian interactions with out-group members are more likely to have favorable attitudes towards interracial marriage than those who engage in superficial and hierarchical relationships (2005). Factors that undermine intergroup contact include histories of group conflict and geographical isolation (Jacobson & Heaton, 2008). These structural divisors create barriers for qualitative intergroup contact thus influencing some opposition to interracial marriages.

Intermarriage Patterns

The United States is witnessing more interracial marriages than in previous years. The number of African Americans married to European Americans has tripled from 1970 to 1990, accounting for roughly 1.5% of all marriages (Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001). By 2000, nearly 6% of marriages were reportedly between members of different racial groups (Harris & Ono, 2005). Native Americans report the highest exogamous rates, followed by Asians and then Hispanics. African Americans had the lowest rates (Telles & Sue, 2009).

Data from the 1990 Census indicate that homogamy is most prevalent among European American husbands, European American wives, and African American wives and account for more the 95% of marriages (Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001). Comparatively, Asian women are more exogamous forming only 64% of relationships with Asian men (2001). African American men are more likely to marry outside of their race than African American women and are 3 times more likely to marry European American. 2.5% of African American wives, 29.6% of Asian wives, and 18.1% of Latino

wives have European American husbands (2001). In comparison, 6.7% of African American husbands, 17.9% of Asian husbands, and 18.8% of Latino husbands have European American wives (2001). When controlling for racial composition of local marriage markets, interracial marriage is more likely to occur between European Americans and Hispanics (2001). The researchers maintain that though data was taken from a 1990 sample, the patterns of intermarriage should resemble those emerging from 2000 data (2001). Jacobsen & Heaton's (2008) findings indicate that African Americans tend to be the most isolated group though they are gradually gaining acceptance by other groups.

When comparing status matches (average education, occupational prestige, personal income, etc.) between exogamous and endogamous couples, interracial couples are both better status-matched and have higher average status than same-race couples (Fu, 2008). High-status members of low-status minority groups tend to out-marry, though the opposite is true of European Americans. When both groups have lateral status such as European Americans and Asians, the members who marry out are more likely to gravitate toward the higher end of that group.

Additionally, cross-racial marriage reportedly (2008) has a reciprocal effect in terms of status exchange. Individuals from low status groups who married outside of their race gain higher status than their endogamous counterparts, particularly when married to European Americans. In contrast, high status members who out-marry experience lower status than their endogamous counterparts.

Partner Selection

Research suggests conservative/liberal self-identification can reliably predict interracial partner selection. Eastwick, Richeson, Son, and Finkel's (2009) study on interracial romantic desire indicate that European American with liberal viewpoints are more likely to consider African Americans for potential romantic partnership than their conservative counterparts. Resistance to interracial partnership can be attributed to in-group-favoring bias. Eastwick et al. also suggest that European American conservatives who covet social dominance over minority groups are less likely to consider romantic involvement with African Americans in order to support racial status quos (2009). In addition, conservatives tend to rationalize social systems that maintain traditional barriers between minority groups more so than those with liberal viewpoints.

On the other hand, African American sentiment regarding self-identification and interracial partner desire tends to be diametrically opposite to those of European Americans. African American liberals are less likely than African American conservatives to desire European Americans as potential romantic prospects (2009). Eastwick et al. (2009) explain the discrepancy through system justification beliefs. To this extent, African American conservatives would indeed be more likely to reflect positively in favor of members of the socially dominant group.

Socio-economic status is also a fundamental factor in interracial mate selection. Within the realm of the interracial marriage market, hierarchal status and compensatory exchange systematically determine who could select whom in forming a union. Xuanning Fu suggests (2008) that individuals with higher status have more choices in cross-racial mate selection. In other words, individuals with high-status can choose to out-marry, but those with low-status often must be selected. Additionally, equal status is shown to support the formation of interracial marriage (2008). However, individuals rarely cross-marry into different socio-economic status groups.

With the exception of a cross-racial component, interracial marriages follow the same patterns of endogamous marriages (Fu, 2001), citing love as the primary reason for marrying (Gaines, Jr., 1997). Fu (2001) suggests that one's resources can be exchanged when statuses do not match. Fu (2001) clarifies this by providing an example:

a man with a bachelor's degree might marry a woman with little schooling because of her unusual wealth. . . . her wealth would compensate for her lack of schooling. The individual's total resources are equivalent, but the pieces composing the total for each individual may differ.

Status withstanding, exogamous couples consider their relationship similar in most respects to endogamous couples (Forry, Leslie, & Letiecq, 2007).

Distress Factors

Though social norms that regulate cross-racial relationships continuously shift in their favor, interracial married/cohabiting couples still experience more psychological distress than same-race couples. The level of distress, however, substantially fluctuates across racial combinations. Bratter and Elsbach (2006) report that non-Hispanic men with Hispanic wives experience less distress than Non-Hispanic women with Hispanic husbands; European American men married to Native American women tend to have

substantially higher distress rates though they are a small percentage of all intermarriages by European American men; European American women married to African American men have significantly higher levels of distress than European American women married to European American men; the distress rates of European American men with African American wives are not significantly higher than those with European American wives; Asian and Hispanic men and women with European American spouses have almost identical distress rates as those in homogamous marriages; and while European American women who intermarry have much higher distress rates than those who don't, European American men who intermarry do not have substantially higher distress rates than those who don't intermarry. Zhang & Van Hook's (2009) research shows that interracial marriages involving Asians have the least amount of conflict and are more stable than endogamous European American relationships. African Americans experience the most conflict, followed by Hispanics.

Factors that mediate distress and conflict among interracial couples include neighborhood segregation, age, and relationship type. Couples living in areas with large concentrations of ethnic diversity and cross-racial interaction are more likely to experience lower distress rates (Bratter, et al., 2006). Those involved in relationships that were formed during periods of higher racial discord may have experienced distress levels that are higher than those formed contemporaneously (2006). Since cohabiting and marriage are two distinct relationship types, the relative stability of each may also differ (2006). Additionally, interracial couples may be subjected to social discrimination and prejudicial beliefs (Zhang & Van Hook, 2009; West, Magee, Gullett, & Gordon, 2014), which can arguably manifest into partner conflict.

Whites who possess lower levels of prejudice and are involved in cross-race relationships are more likely to experience higher levels of anxiety than their minority counterparts (West et al., 2014). Anxiety occurs from self-conscious concern over appearing prejudice to their respective partner (2014). Minorities, on the other hand, tend to experience anxiety levels that are similar to whites in same-race relationships. This is partly due to minorities having increased exposure to whites and is therefore more accustomed to cross-race interactions (2014). However, anxiety among minorities is likely to occur when they perceive or experience race-based marginalization from their relationship partner (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010).

Data

This study details a content analysis designed to investigate the nature of intimate cross-racial relationships on popular family-themed television shows. The unit of analysis is the interactional exchange between mixed race characters involved in an intimate relationship that lasted for the duration of an entire month. Relationships lasting only one or two episodes were not included in this study. The interactions can include exchanges where both parties are not present, such as through phone conversation. A month sample was drawn from two popular scripted network television programs that feature family relationships as the foundation for storyline events.

The shows for this study aired during the fall of 2010 “sweeps” when audience viewership data are collected for establishing advertising rates. In their analysis of African American and European American interactions on prime time television, Entman and Rojecki assert (2001) that examining shows during sweeps is a critical part of the research since broadcasters tailor their shows according to audience desire. They suggest (2001) that this approach will provide important information in analyzing the extent to which cross-race relationships are depicted on network prime time TV. Fall sweeps aired from October 24 through November 24, 2010. Only scripted shows were sampled for this research. News programs, sports and reality television shows were excluded since they are assumed to be primarily unscripted. This study aims to draw reference from fictitious exemplifications of the real world through broadcast media.

Throughout the entire primetime lineup, only two shows aired that included cross-race relationships as central storyline plots. As a result, they were the only ones sampled for this study. The shows include ABC’s *Modern Family* and NBC’s *Parenthood* with both shows centering on the lives of an extended European American family. *Modern Family* is a half hour television series that satirically follows the lives of three different families; one traditional, one gay, and one interracial. The families are tied through patriarchal kinship in which the late middle-aged father is married to a relatively younger Hispanic woman. *Parenthood* is a comedy-drama series revolving around three generations of family members. The members include the patriarch/matriarch couple, the oldest son with the traditional family whose daughter is romantically involved with a young African American male, a single-mom daughter with two kids, the youngest daughter who has a stay-at-home husband and daughter, and the second-son who is unmarried but involved in an interracial relationship with an African American woman and the father of her son.

Method

The methodology was developed from Weigel, Loomis, & Soja's study (1980) examining race relation on primetime television. The researchers content analyzed sixty-three hours of prime time television shows to analyze the degree to which cross-racial interactions on television were characterized by conditions that support friendliness and mutual respect in face-to-face encounters. To measure this, a series of ratings scales were developed that focused on five dimensions of human interactions. The dimensions include interdependence, individuation, cross-sex relationships, situational norms, and relative status. Interdependence ratings measured the extent to which the participants held common versus independent goals and were engaged in a cooperative versus a competitive encounter. Individuation ratings measured the extent to which participants were involved in an intimate personal relationship, multifaceted relationship, and shared decision-making responsibility. Finally, cross-sex relationship rating measured romantic involvement. Each interaction was rated according to a 5-point Likert scale. Situational norms indicated whether or not norms favor interracial equality. Relative status indicated whether or not the African American person had superior status in the interaction. Samples of both African American and European American interactions and European American and European American interactions were recorded for comparative purposes. Samples were drawn from the Spring, 1978 season of scripted prime time shows on the ABC, NBC, and CBS broadcast networks.

The primary goal of this current analysis was to examine how intimate partner cross-racial relationships on television are characterized. A series of rating scales were developed to focus on three theoretically relevant dimensions of interactional exchange aimed at evaluating the level of relationship durability for the cross-race pairings. These dimensions include interdependence, individuation, and romantic involvement ratings.

Interdependence rating consisted of two variables: one measuring the extent to which couples held common goals (e.g. direction of the relationship), and the other measuring the extent to which couples were engaged in a cooperative relationship (e.g. harmonious and non-competitive). Individuation ratings consisted of two variables measuring the degree of intimate personal relationship (e.g. time together alone), and shared decision-making (e.g. child-rearing responsibility). Cross-sex relationship rating consisted of one variable measuring romantic involvement. The variables were measured on a scale ranging in value from 0 to 3; 0 = no evidence, 1 =

some evidence, 2 = strong evidence, and 3 = actual evidence of occurrence. The compiled data was used for descriptive analyses.

Results

The data presented in Table 1 indicate three cross-race relationship types: a young adult African American female (AAF) and European American male (EAM) unmarried couple; an adolescent European American female (EAF) and African American male (AAM) unmarried couple; and a young adult Hispanic female (HF) and late middle-aged EAM married couple. Of the 33 interactions, 58% were between HF/EAM ($n = 19$), 27% were between adolescent AAM/EAF ($n = 9$), and 15% were between young adult AAF/EAM ($n = 5$).

In terms of interdependence ratings, the analysis revealed “Common Goals” mean scores of 2.80 ($SD = .45$) for AAF/EAM, 2.44 ($SD = .88$) for AAM/EAF, 1.21 ($SD = .63$), for HF/EAM, and “Cooperative Relationship” mean scores of 2.40 ($SD = .89$) for AAF/EAM, 2.67 ($SD = .50$) for AAM/EAF, and 1.45 ($SD = 1.22$) for HF/EAM.

Regarding individuation ratings, the analysis revealed “Intimate Personal Relationship” scores of 2.80 ($SD = .45$) for AAF/EAM, 1.11 ($SD = .78$) for AAM/EAF, 1.42 ($SD = .61$) for HF/EAM; “Multifaceted Relationship” mean scores of 2.80 ($SD = .45$) for AAF/EAM, .56 ($SD = 1.01$) for AAM/EAF, and 2.21 ($SD = .54$) for HF/EAM; and “Shared Decision Making” mean scores of 2.20 ($SD = .84$) for AAF/EAM, 1.0 ($SD = .87$) for AAM/EAF, and .58 ($SD = .90$) for HF/EAM.

Romantic Involvement Ratings report mean scores of 2.40 ($SD = .55$) for AAF/EAM, 1.0 ($SD = .87$) for AAM/EAF, and .58 ($SD = .90$) for HF/EAM.

In general, the young adult African American Female/European American couple had the highest overall ratings and the Hispanic female/European American couple had the lowest.

Discussion

The analysis revealed that cross-race relationships between African Americans and European American adults are typically presented as amicable or neutral whereas the relationship between Hispanic and European American tend to be more capricious. Despite indication that both the adolescent and adult African American/European American couples had common goals and cooperative relationships, individuation and romantic involve-

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Cross-Racial Interaction (n = 33)

	AA Female/EA Male Young Adult (n = 5)	AA Male/EA Female Adolescent (n = 9)	Hispanic F/EA Male Young Adult F/Late Mid-Age M (n = 19)
Interdependence Ratings			
Common Goals	2.80 (.45)	2.44 (.88)	1.21 (.63)
Cooperative Relationship	2.40 (.89)	2.67 (.50)	1.45 (1.22)
Individuation Ratings			
Intimate Personal Relationship	2.80 (.45)	1.11 (.78)	1.42 (.61)
Multifaceted Relationship	2.80 (.45)	.56 (1.01)	2.21 (.54)
Shared Decision Making	2.20 (.84)	1.22 (1.30)	.42 (.84)
Romantic Involvement Ratings			
Romantic Relationship	2.40 (.55)	1.00 (.87)	.58 (.90)

Note: Higher values indicate greater interdependence, more individuation, and stronger romantic involvement on a scale of 0 to 3. *sds* are given in parenthesis.

ment ratings differed. The adolescent couple was depicted as being more role-defined based on an employee/employer relationship, with little actual evidence that they may extend the relationship beyond the work environment. As an example, there was only one scene throughout the sweeps period where the adolescent couple exchanged a romantic kiss. In comparison, there were substantially higher ratings for intimacy, shared decision-making, and romance as characterized by the young adult couple. Arguably, situation context may influence the storytelling of both relationships. For instance, the adult couple had a history of involvement that stipulated higher across-the-board ratings. The adolescent couple, on the other hand, was embarking on a new relationship journey that included a complex supervisor/subordinate storyline.

Adolescent relationships differ from adults based on the participant's station in life. To this extent, examining cross-race relationships within the context of adults can be more revealing part of this study. When com-

pared to the African American/European American adult couple, the Hispanic/European American was portrayed as having less common goals and functioning less cooperatively. The African American/European American couple had higher ratings within the context of intimacy, shared decision-making and romantic involvement. The Hispanic/European American couple gained more parity when measuring levels of multifaceted relationships. In other words, both types are similar to the extent that there is evidence that the relationships are not narrowly defined to the extent that the couples are characterized as typically involved in activities that extend beyond the household. For instance, the African American/European American couple is sometimes seen house hunting or engaged in their son's school activity. The Hispanic/European American couple is often seen visiting extended family members or attending social activities.

While analyzing the material, certain themes surfaced that are worth discussing. For instance, conversational exchanges between the Hispanic/European American couple were mostly tense, whereas, the African American/European American couples tended to be more relaxed. This was particularly noticeable in conflict situations where the African American/European American couples remained calm throughout the ordeal compared to the Hispanic/European American couple who were more volatile. An example includes the African American/European American couple successfully negotiating the terms of their living arrangements despite differences in individual viewpoints. On the other hand, the majority of exchanges between the Hispanic/European American couple followed a routine trajectory characterized by marital dispute leading to high states of anger then eventual conflict resolution. Conflicts were typically settled amorously between the Hispanic/European American couple.

The media narratives contradict studies comparing marital distress across racial lines. Interracial marriages involving European American men with Hispanic wives tend to experience less relationship discord than European American men married to African American women (Bratter et al., 2006, Zhang et al., 2009). And that African American/European American couples are perceived as less compatible than other European American mixed race couples (Lewandowski, & Jackson, 2001).

The conflict storylines do, however, support research regarding impression management associated with cross-racial interactions. Bergsieker, Shelton, and Richeson (2010) findings indicate that minorities engaged in cross-racial interactions generally prefer to be viewed as competent and

with respect compared to European Americans who prefer being perceived as moral and well liked. This behavior is evidenced in several conflict situations where the minority women in the series either demanded respect from their partner or expressed their level of competence in conflict situations. This is evidenced in one scene where the Hispanic wife in the show *Modern Family* displayed her sharp-shooting skills and asserted that she could accurately hit a much smaller target with ease.

Skin tone and ethnic appearance were also notable factors. Both African American characters were portrayed as fairly light skin with European facial features. Researchers find that African Americans with more Afrocentric facial features tend to be more closely associated with negative evaluations (Dixon & Maddox, 2005). Arguably, this may be casting decisions aimed at positioning the characters favorably to large viewing audiences. Nonetheless, the African American/European American relationships tended to be presented as amicable on TV.

Amicable African American/European American pairings portrayed on television affirms to audiences that these interracial relationships can be imagined positively. Despite positive portrayals, Squires (2009) study indicates that many Americans still view intermarriages negatively. Though cross-racial unions may not be universally accepted, television programs such as *Parenthood* that characterize them favorably can be mediating factors in helping to mollify negative attitudes regarding interracial marriages.

Both non-European American women appear to be in their mid to late 20s with the African American female matched with a partner of similar age. The Hispanic female is matched with an older gentleman who appears to be in his late 50s to early 60s and the breadwinner of the family. The Hispanic/European American couple seems atypical, at least within the context of relationship formation and partner selection. In other words, they are not considered to be status matched.

Fu (2006) maintains that love withstanding, intermarriages rarely occur between individuals of different status groups. This idea is reflected in the storyline where the African American/European American couple share relatively equal status. Equal status is shown to support the formation of interracial marriage (2006). An imbalanced status exists, however, between the Hispanic/European American pairing. This formation can be explained through exchange theory where resources can be bargained when statuses do not match. Similar to Vincent Kang Fu's (2001) example, it is conceivable that a man with financial means might marry a woman with lower means because of her perceived beauty, and in exchange her beauty would

compensate for her financial deficiency. This notion is inferred in the storyline featuring the Hispanic/European American pairing to the extent that the Hispanic female was often portrayed in overt sexually alluring attire.

The African American/European American couple was depicted as potential cohabitating partners with no indication of future plans for marrying. Burton, et al. (2010) suggests that African Americans are more likely to cohabitate than marry a member of a different race. On the other hand, the Hispanic female/European male couple were depicted as being married. This is consistent with studies that suggest interracial marriage is more likely to occur between European Americans and Hispanics than between European Americans and African Americans (Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001; Burton, et al., 2010). Though, Tom and Helen Willis on the popular 70s sitcom *The Jeffersons* depicted a European American man who was married to an African American woman.

In regards to partner selection, Eastwick, Richeson, Son, & Finkel's (2009) research reveal that European Americans with liberal viewpoints are more likely to date African Americans than European Americans with conservative viewpoints. Additionally, African Americans with conservative viewpoints are more likely to desire European Americans as potential mates (2009). This is exemplified in the scripted storyline of the young adult couple where the African American female was portrayed as rather conservative while her European American partner was characteristically liberal.

In general, interracial relationships on family-themed television shows were typically portrayed as favorable to different degrees. However, there remained one significant point of exclusion. Despite obvious racial differences between partners, topics concerning race remained absent in virtually all storyline dialog. Presenting cross-racial relationships in this manner suggests to audience members that America has become a harmonious, multicultural nation, unified with common interests despite a long history of racial tension. Massey's (2007) research reveals otherwise, stating that social and structural forces that perpetuate inequalities in both class and race continue to exist within the United States.

Conclusion

Cross-race relationships provide an avenue for understanding larger race relations in the United States (Yancey, 2007). Presenting interracial marriages on television as, "frankly American" may seem audacious, but reflect-

tive of contemporary society. The United States is witnessing higher intermarriage rates than ever before. This study examined the extent to which these relationships are portrayed on popular primetime family-themed shows. The analysis showed that these relationships are generally conceptualized as being amicable. However, lack of available shows may limit this study. The two programs content analyzed in this study are the only ones that currently existed on network channels with cross-race relationships as central storyline components. Also, the relationship of the extended family members in regards to the interracial couple is worth exploring. The interactional response written into the storylines may offer additional insight. Lastly, this study specifically examined shows airing during sweeps. Theoretically, this should be a fair means for evaluation since shows airing during sweeps are more specifically scripted to appeal to large heterogeneous audiences than during non-sweeps periods (Entman & Rojecki, 2001). Since creative decisions are market-driven, there may be some post-sweeps storyline shifting. In this case, a post-sweeps analysis is recommended for future studies in this area.

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Earl S. Mowatt, is a Sociology Professor and Chair of Justice and Society Studies at Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach, FL where he oversees the Sociology and Criminal Justice departments. His research interests are in the areas of race/social inequalities, social action and change, family diversity, and social psychology. He has also served as a suicide prevention specialist at B-CU where he conducted research and developed programs aimed at reducing suicide rates among the following three at-risk populations—first generation college students of color; lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, questioning (LGBTQ); and military veterans. Mowatt has presented research on race relations and suicide prevention at various conferences throughout the United States.

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