Experiences of White Women in Interracial Relationships: Individuals, Partners and Mothers

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Abstract

This research is a qualitative, heuristic study involving in-depth interviews with eight white, professional heterosexual women in interracial relationships. The women were found through an opportunistic or snowball approach. The participant women were in the age range 25-60. Six were married and two were in long term relationships. All women had children, seven having mixed-race children between 18 months and 23 years of age. Four women had partners of African-Caribbean heritage, three had partners of African heritage and one had a partner of Nepalese heritage. The women shared their reflections on having to confront the realities of racism, coming to terms with their own ambiguous racial position, facing the notion of whiteness and considering their social position as white women. The research was conducted using a heuristic methodology to explore white women's experiences, using creative images and personal reflective and reflexive narratives integrated throughout the text. The research offers insight into how the social experiences of being in an interracial relationship impacts on white women; as individuals, partners and in their role of mother. Implications for themselves as mothers and parenting their children in a racist context are explored and discussed.

The findings suggest the women can feel caught between the known (whiteness) and the unknown (blackness). Having crossed a 'socially unaccepted racialised boundary' and challenging explicit dominant social, gendered and racialised beliefs, the women stepped into the unknown involving experiences of changes in status, challenges to assumptions of their maternal competence and living in a world which involved a continuous process of deconstruction and reconstruction of a new, unforeseen racialised identity. The white women moved from being an 'insider' within their own dominant social experiences, to becoming an 'outsider' within another cultural context, sometimes experiencing uncertainty about where they belonged. The white women experienced a shift of reference group orientation, with a new experience of continuous external scrutiny unfolding. These newly encountered social and personal events challenged the white women to review how they previously saw themselves, with this all impacting on their previously taken for granted social status. These experiences impacted at emotional and cognitive levels. As a consequence, the white women often found themselves occupying a liminal or unknown space where a process occurs of attempting to come to terms with the new experiences, new learning and adopting alternative strategies to deal with these different experiences. Implications for counsellors working with white women in interracial relationships are considered and suggestions for therapeutic engagement are made.

KEY WORDS: interracial relationships, mixed-race children, mixed-race families, white women and racial identity
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Dedication

Thank you to my family Nick, James and Ayesha who have provided support and encouragement throughout the whole process of undertaking this research. They are an integral part of this research.
I am indebted to Liz, my supervisor who has believed in me and been alongside me enabling me to get through some tough moments.
Who am I?

When I look in the mirror I see

White
  Woman
  Middle class
  Privileged
  Educated
  Professional
  Able bodied
  Heterosexual
Partner
Parent

So why do I feel?

Anger
Hurt
Pain
Tension
Challenged
Pressure
Frustration
Uncomfortable

What do others see?
  A white woman with a black man
  Sexually ‘easy’
Deviant
  Betrayer to own community
  Mixed-race children
  Problems
  Different

There is
Devaluation
Disapproval
Negative thoughts
  Judgements
  Assumptions
‘Not one of us’
“It was the absurdly unrealistic scene – and indeed one that would spring from the kind of nonsensical targets and equality quotas we see in the NHS – showing a mixed-race middle class family in a detached new-build suburban home, which was most symptomatic of the politically correct agenda in modern Britain [...] This was supposed to be a representation of modern life in England but it is likely to be a challenge for the organisers to find an educated white middle-aged mother and black father living together with a happy family in such a set-up.”

Daily Mail, 28th July 2012 (Mix-D, 2012)
Chapter One

Introduction

The above excerpt from the Daily Mail provides one contemporary denigrating stereotype of how mixed-race families are openly portrayed in the UK national media and, in particular, the social positioning of white women in mixed-race relationships. As a woman in an interracial relationship, I find such media representations lack sensitivity and awareness. In this section, I introduce my research and provide a reflexive insight into what the experience and process of undertaking this research has meant for me at a personal level as is consistent with the chosen methodology of the heuristic process. I will also give an overall guide to the layout of the thesis. This will include personal reflections, an understanding of the heuristic process, links with academic literature and therapy processes and the steps/procedure of data collection and analysis. My approach to writing is autobiographical, it is my subjective description of the research process, and includes some reflexive creative work as part of the thesis, whilst retaining a commitment to academic convention and formality. This differs from autoethnography where the sole focus is the researcher’s personal experience. Autobiographical writing is a subjective approach to writing which incorporates personal experiences with a focus on a particular issue and in this thesis this is the experiences of white women in interracial relationships (Hiles, 2008).
Picture 1, a ninety year old tortoise, reflects my symbolic journey, at times arduous, unending, unrelenting, sometimes losing meaning and feeling impossible to reach the end. However, I held in mind a quote by Albert Einstein that "logic takes you from A-B but imagination will take you everywhere" (Tenzin-Dolma, 2013). I believe this reflects my experience and personal journey in the research process over the past five years in addition to my search for persistent understanding of the connections between my own personal experience and the experience of other white women in interracial relationships. Due to my own personal experiences, this often causes tensions internally and externally and I often feel misunderstood and isolated, appearing to others as if I am ‘ranting’. As a consequence of feeling unheard, this leads to an emotional explosion through wishing to encourage a change of perception from others. Other felt tensions
Throughout this process have included different positions I have struggled with, that of white woman, researcher and counsellor. An evolving, reflexive feature of undertaking this research has been recognising my own experiences through participants’ experiences and unconsciously affirming my experiences through other’s experiences.

During the lengthy process of undertaking this doctorate, I have been a weary traveller, at times not knowing whether I would reach the end, and there have been mixed, contradictory and conflicting feelings throughout. I have been challenged by travelling through different emotional terrains, crossing boundaries and experiencing deep reflexive moments, feeling as if I have been everywhere, sometimes confused and overwhelmed, but on many occasions excited in engaging in the process. It has been a long road, sometimes straight, sometimes winding, going through barren literature deserts lacking in meaning with no clear direction, struggling at the impassability of methodological mountains, stuck in theoretical swamps, occasionally finding calm in emotionally regulated pastures and then being energised on the crest of waves on the sea of data discovery. This journey is shown in my reflexive moments of self-doubt, through to enlightenment, from focus on traditional conventional approaches to research process, to discovering a creative element in the chosen methodology of the heuristic process which enhanced my understanding and awareness of why I was undertaking this research at both a professional and personal level. I did not set out to deliberately undertake what may be perceived as a less ‘traditional’ way of engaging in research. My research enlightenment has been an evolving, changing process as experienced by other researchers in their quest for meaning (Kouritzin, Piquemal and Norman, 2009).
I came to undertake the doctorate in 2009 with what I thought was a clear, specific topic about white women’s experiences in interracial relationships, but with no clear idea of the how, the what or the where for research exploration. From a personal and professional standpoint, this is a subject that often evokes highly charged emotional responses, particularly, as in this research topic, there are highly charged emotional perceptions related to social taboos of white women crossing racialised boundaries. According to Parker and Song (2001):

"The topic of mixed-race can bring out the worst in people. From the vicious harassment of couples in mixed relationships to the hatred expressed on supremacist websites, few subjects have the same capacity as 'racial mixture' to reveal deep seated fears and resentment (p.1)."

On looking for images about mixed couples on the internet, Picture 2 appeared. I was shocked, angry and distressed that this offensive image was so freely accessible and sad and weary that as a white woman in an interracial relationship, I still have to deal with social hostility which this image represents for me.
Historical context

This image underpins the long, historical, social, moral and legal condemnation of women who enter into mixed-race relationships (Alibhai-Brown, 2001; Dalmage, 2003; Olumide, 2002; Tizard and Phoenix, 2002; Okitikpi, 2009). Historical influences, according to Christian (2008) include an early UK study in 1930, the
Fletcher Report, seen as highly influential in shaping people’s perceptions of mixed-race people and their families:

"The children find their lives full of conflict both within themselves and within the family and all the circumstances of their lives tend to give undue prominence to sex. These families have a low standard of life, morally and economically and there appears to be little future for the children" (cited in Christian, 2008, p.230).

In its time, The Fletcher Report was seen as having social and scientific credibility. The Fletcher Report reflected a negative social perception of how mixed families, and particularly white women in mixed relationships, were perceived and responded to. I wondered how this view had come to be. Were perceptions of mixed families always so hostile and offensive? In a UK historical context, Fryer (1984), Ramdin (1999), Alibhai-Brown (2001) and Okitikpi (2009) have traced the presence of black people in the UK to the time of the Roman occupation, participating in everyday life as servants, musicians and professionals. With the later era of colonialism, and African slavery in the west, the images of black people became more derogatory and the relationships between ‘races’ were seen as scandalous and morally wrong. Justification of this negative treatment of black people was through a process of political and pseudo-scientific assertion of black people being intellectually, morally and culturally inferior (Fryer, 1984; Ramdin, 1999; Okitikpi, 2009). Coinciding with this was the view that white women who had relationships interracially were also perceived as morally and intellectually inferior and sexually ‘loose’ (Alibhai-Brown, 2001 and Okitikpi, 2009). White women in mixed-race relationships, in the UK were seen as ‘crossing the racial boundary’ and betraying their community and contaminating the pureness of the white ‘race’ (Fryer, 1984; Alibhai-Brown, 2001; Okitikpi, 2009). Thus, a negative racialised discourse in the UK was politically, psychologically and socially established over time.
With the abolition of slavery and decline of colonialism, there came an expectation/hope from black people from the Caribbean and Africa and with Asians from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh that they would experience and be entitled to the same rights as white British subjects (Alibhai-Brown, 2001; Okitikpi, 2009). However the historical racist ideologies were well established and heavily influenced views about 'white superiority' versus 'black inferiority'. Within this UK historical social perspective, according to Alibhai-Brown and Montague (1992),

“However mixed-race couples choose to live their lives they cannot shake off historical baggage or isolate themselves from the assumptions and bigotries of the outside world. These attitudes invade their lives. And for many it is the transition to parenthood that brings this realisation most profoundly” (p.19).

These views are echoed and supported by Ifekwunigwe (2001) who asserts that

“…independent of rapidly changing demographics indicating a rise in both the number of mixed-race relationships and birth of mixed-race children, there is still a deep seated and now unspoken white English anxiety concerning ‘racial’ infiltration by black and Asian ‘alien-settlers’” (p.58).

These are views still current in 21st century UK (Okitikpi, 2009; Harman, 2010) succinctly expressed and reflected by the 2012 Daily Mail quote at the beginning of this thesis.
Context for this study

As a white woman in an interracial relationship, I have had to confront the realities of racism, come to terms with my own ambiguous racialised position, face the notion of whiteness and what this means, acknowledge my own contribution to racism and also prepare my children for managing racism to be able to develop a positive sense of self. Empirical research in the UK by O'Donoghue (2004), Caballero, Edwards and Puthssery (2008) and Twine (2010a, 2010b) suggests for white women in interracial relationships, the experience of racist social positioning is a part of daily life either vicariously through their partners’ experiences or those of their children. One may assume that the prevalence of negative attitudes and stereotyping about white women in interracial relationships would have diminished over time, but in my experience and in the UK research informed opinion of others, this is not the case (Harman, 2010; Okitikpi, 2009). I believe this area is often overlooked in counselling practice and research because there are unfounded assumptions that ‘racism no longer exists’ (Moodley and Lubin, 2008; Moodley and Vontress, 2010). In support of the lack of acknowledgement about racialised themes and influences in social research, Twine (1999) has argued feminist theorists do not adequately acknowledge the uniqueness of the position of white mothers of black children because the literature does not recognise or comprehend this group’s indirect and direct experience of racism in the UK:

"Their struggles to counter everyday racism illuminates the limits of previous feminist theorising about intersections of race, class and gender that has assumed ‘racially unified’ mono-cultural families and ‘fixed’ racial privileges for white women" (p.744).

It is important to address these issues in practice and research in recognition that racism is still embedded in UK society and has an impact on interracial families
This is often an emotional and contentious area in academic and professional worlds because it elicits strong emotions of defensiveness, guilt, anger, hopelessness and discomfort (Okitikpi, 2009; Sue, 2010, 2015). These are all emotions I have experienced over the years; however for me, rather than a topic of avoidance, this emphasises the need for research about racial issues to be given higher prominence. The legacy of racism is never far from my experiences of attitudes and perceptions about interracial families and children and is confirmed in current research undertaken by British researchers (Okitikpi, 2009; Williams, 2011; Caballero, 2012). According to early UK research by Banks (1992)

“….the biggest difficulty facing such relationships is that of social stigma which exerts outside pressures on relationships through discrimination and the way people look at people of mixed-race and mixed-race families.”

This view will be explored further in the literature review and is reflected in the experiences of the women who participated in this research.

Terminology
At this point, I feel it is important to clarify some of the terminology used in this thesis. As a group, families and individuals have had numerous terms ascribed such as 'transracial', 'interracial', 'intercultural', 'mixed-race', 'multiple heritage' and 'mixed' (Williams, 2011; Morley and Street, 2014). A comprehensive list of the many descriptive labels used is attached (Appendix1). Individuals who are born into these families in the UK often prefer to self-ascribe as 'mixed' or 'mixed-race' to actively and openly acknowledge their mixed identity of racial and ethnic groups (Ali, 2003; Caballero, Haynes and Tikley, 2007; Caballero et al, 2008; Williams, 2011; Morley and Street, 2014). White women in the UK tend to describe their relationships as ‘mixed’, 'interracial' or 'intercultural' (Caballero, 2012;
Bystydzienki, 2011; Okitikpi, 2009). Although acknowledging that ‘race’ is socially constructed as many of the women’s lives in this research are affected by social contexts, I use the terms ‘interracial’ and/or ‘mixed’ to incorporate the participants’ partner’s heritage with some partners being of ‘international heritage’, including African and Nepalese. It is important to acknowledge this research focuses mainly on black/white partnerships, and not other types of 'mixing' such as religious faith differences. Additionally, other factors such as social class, age and family background experiences bring multidimensional processes to mixing (McKenzie, 2013; Edwards and Caballero, 2008). This research exclusively focuses on interracial relationships of white women who have visibly distinct non-white partners as this is my personal and professional topic of interest.

**Population statistics**

Both the 2001 and 2011 UK census found the black/white category of mixed people in the census has been the largest growing mixed category. Current statistics from the 2011 census are attached in Appendix 2.
The above chart shows the relative proportions of the various UK mixed populations with total mixed population groups being 2.2% of the total population of England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2012). The total white population was 87%.

**The Research Questions**

**Integrating aspects of the vulnerable and personal with the erudite**

An aspect of gaps in the existing UK research on current social perception and experience I wanted to particularly explore was that of stereotypes and assumptions around such relationships and the potential impact of this on white women, their relationships and implications for counselling. I wished to hear other women’s reflections on their experiences. Were they similar or different to mine? Did education make a difference? What were their experiences of social
perceptions? I also hoped to explore an alternative portrayal of personal aspects of the women's experiences of cultural difference, diversity and what impact being in an interracial relationship had on their lives. Had the social situation for white women changed, were the pressures different and were there other issues that may have been overlooked?

The main research questions in this exploratory study arise from gaps in the existing UK research and are:

1) What are the personal and social experiences of middle class white women in interracial relationships?

2) How do these personal and social experiences impact on middle class white women as individuals, partners and mothers? This generated a related sub question of:

2a) how do middle class women integrate these experiences and tensions and what are the emotional consequences of such experiences?

3) How are my own experiences as a middle class white woman in an interracial relationship similar to or different from other middle class white women in interracial relationships?

The research questions therefore draw on the lived social experiences of white women including myself who are in interracial relationships. I recognise that although women's experiences will be influenced by social, political, economic, racialised and gendered factors, these may alter and/or have a different emphasis placed upon them according to their unique experiences and social contexts. My own experiences, values and knowledge will also influence the study. I understand and experience racism and prejudice as a central part of the everyday reality of interracial families and therefore I often become passionate about these
experiences and so have to be aware of others’ experiences and hear their unique stories from their perspective.

The topic and research questions have evolved over the years; I am aware that my own experiences have left me constantly hyper-vigilant about noticing micro-aggressions (Sue, 2010) towards myself and my family.

“Micro-aggressions’ are the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender or sexual-orientation and religious slights and insults to the target group or person” (Sue, 2010, p.5).

These are often subtle verbal and non verbal exchanges, for example “are these ‘your’ children?” I was interested in whether and how other women may experience these microaggressions and the impact on them and their relationships. In an early assignment, as part of the doctorate programme, I started with a psychologically rooted approach to understanding the experiences of white women in interracial relationships by looking at my own identity development using the Helms identity model (1990). I found this experience enlightening in terms of understanding and making sense of my experiences and how these experiences contributed to my own evolving personal identity development as a white woman and, importantly, as a white woman in a mixed relationship. I realised going through these stages helped to reach the point of understanding my whiteness, my guilt and shame in my growth and understanding of racial consciousness. I had initially thought about using the Helms identity stage model for my research, but felt it may become too restrictive in using a fixed stage paradigm approach for understanding the depth and breadth of participants’ experiences. With this in mind, I searched for an alternative way to enable a greater richness of data and understanding of experiences. I then altered the research focus and method using
a reflexive heuristic process of my experiences with those of white women sharing their reflections of their lived experiences. As a result of engaging and immersing in this reflexive heuristic process, my own personal engagement and emotional journey has altered. There have been a number of parallel processes occurring throughout the past five years. First, in my development as a researcher, second, in my personal identity development and third, in expressing myself in more creative ways. I have discovered that different forms of creative art in the heuristic exploration and expression process have enhanced my learning process. This creative process has become a meeting place of the inner and outer worlds of my experiences (Rubin, 2010). Creativity is a symbolic means of communication and personal and professional expression. This new experience and understanding also has direct links with my work as a therapist as images allow an unfolding of a story from all dimensions, feelings, thoughts, experiences, memories, values and beliefs (Malchiodi, 2002). I have also used creative forms as part of my research with this increasingly being acknowledged as important in research (Knowles and Cole, 2008). “Creativity is like freedom: once you taste it, you cannot live without it. It is a transformative force, enhancing self-esteem and self-empowerment” (Rogers, 1993, p.221). I have used collage, the metaphor of the quilt, photographic images, art and mandalas throughout as part of depicting, expressing and consolidating my reflexive process. Images are a source of meaning-making which flow from an inner creative part of ourselves (Rogers, 1993; Malchiodi, 2002; Butler-Kisber, 2010). Additionally, I have kept a written reflexive log to express some of my personal dilemmas, emotional thoughts and the questions that have invaded my mind. This has allowed me to explode and ‘rant’ in order to free myself of some emotional expression to enable me to write for academic convention. Some examples are provided in appendix 3, also included in appendix 7 are reproductions of larger images of some of my creative work to enable the reader to
I am constantly drawn to these more creative forms of expression and my creativity is autobiographical, as is this thesis, placing myself and my experiences at the centre of the process.

**Influences on choice of methodology**

This research is an exploratory, subjective, creative and descriptive study. I knew I did not wish to be engaged in a predictive, objective or quantitatively confined approach, but I endeavoured through this work to meet the demands of and show respect for a vigorous, empirical research process. Having read Romanyshyn (2007) and Malchiodi (2002), I began to understand a deeper connection within myself, be more compassionate with myself and have a stronger belief in myself. This involved developing a greater connection with mind, body and inner awareness and deepened my sense of well being through connecting with creative elements within me which had been frozen. Whilst the subject is not ‘transpersonal’, my personal experience has been transformative unlocking my creativity which I believe has brought added dimensions to the research process as well as to myself. I hope the research subject, which can be an emotive one, due to the connection with ‘race’ and all its social and personal implications, will contribute to wider academic knowledge and enable professionals to better consider implications for their own practice development and growth of subjective ‘other’ awareness. Although this research topic arose from my own personal experience of being a white woman in an interracial relationship, I hope this research will give valuable information for counsellors to understand the experiences of white women in interracial relationships and how their social experiences impact on their sense of self and family relationships and how these experiences may inform decisions white women in interracial relationships make in their lives. Throughout the research process, I was conscious of many tensions
and dilemmas including how do I make women’s personal experiences visible and relevant to an academic and applied professional audience? Would the analysis process reduce the women’s meanings to only reflect the more general, less poignant aspects, resulting in a loss of meaning/significance and ‘the residue’ becoming less personal? This highlighted the differences and difficulties for me in a professional role versus a personal, emotive role and the realisation of tensions between personal private experiences as a white woman in a mixed relationship, and the perceived external perceptions of other white women in interracial relationships. This generated the second research sub question of how do women integrate these experiences and tensions and what are the emotional consequences of such experiences? Trying to maintain the balance between my thoughts and feelings often proved to be challenging, finding the emotional self often taking precedence, but through reflection noticing the triggers and making decisions about what could be incorporated. The heuristic process readily acknowledges this tension as part of engagement in the research.

With all of this in mind, it was important for me to choose a methodology which would incorporate the opportunity to write using an autobiographical type approach, to use creative reflexivity such as image journaling, to have a narrative approach to data collection using in-depth open interviews, which were as egalitarian as possible to enable women’s voices to be heard. This will be discussed further in the methodology chapter. Throughout the whole process, my own experiences have been a driving force to explore ‘relational aspects’, not just my relationship with participants, but also a recognition that women are talking about their own personal experiences of their relationships. There is also my relationship with my personal and professional experiences, with the data and the creative elements of collection and analysis. In order to maintain the integrity of all
this, it was important to select a methodology to honour and recognise the value of the subjective, highly emotive and personal nature of the research and choose one that would adequately capture the importance of the sensitive contextual issues. This heuristic research has a phenomenological foundation with an aim to describe and connect with the lived everyday experiences of white women in interracial relationships from their own personal perspectives. Finlay (2011) states the aim of phenomenological research is “to clarify taken-for-granted human situations and events that are known in everyday life, but typically unnoticed and unquestioned” (p.15). Heuristics takes a step further by the researcher having a direct experience of the phenomenon in the research as is my experience as a white woman in an interracial relationship.

Underlying this research journey and reflected in the third research question is my desire to gain a deeper insight about my own, and other women’s, lived experiences. This occurs through the reflexive process of looking inward (connecting with emotions), outward (connecting with context experiences), backward (reflecting on insights about past experiences) and forward (considering where to go next and how to deal with situations in the future) as described by Watts-Johnson (2009). As this process occurred, I found myself moving away from the more restrictive quantitative driven processes of research from A to B, to a more creative, reflexive and imaginative approach as reflected earlier through Einstein’s previously quoted view of the potential enlightening, enriching experience of creativity.

As a consequence of my personal academic development, I found myself drawn to Moustakas’s heuristic methodology (1990, 2001) as this appeared to offer the flexibility, creativity, subjectivity and enriching participant and self-enquiry process
I was looking for. At times it felt as if ‘I was chosen’ to engage in the heuristic research process and this challenged me, particularly as I had hoped for a more straightforward, less personally involving journey through this doctorate. By embracing this approach, it has pushed me to limits I had not anticipated. However, I felt the heuristic approach was appropriate on a professional and personal level and suitable for this exploratory research enquiry and fitting ethical process requirements.

In addition, as a counsellor, I am drawn to a person-centred approach which is essentially relational and is based on the belief that growth occurs through the relational process (Rogers, 1990). Moustakas, the originator of heuristic methodology, was also a play therapist and trained with Axline whose model of play therapy I use, a relational and non-directive play therapy (Axline, 1987; Moustakas, 1997). As a contemporary of Rogers, Moustakas’s professional and personal beliefs fall in line with the person-centred approach. Moustakas (1990) saw his heuristic approach as applicable to counselling practice by integrating aspects of self searching and self dialogue as part of the personal growth process. Counselling is a relational process, aiming to develop mutual trust through the therapeutic relationship and seeks to explore the nature and essence of the ‘other’s’ lived experiences. For these reasons, the heuristic methodology appeared particularly suitable for this research enquiry and for me as a researcher.

**Understanding Connections and commonalities**

In considering the first research question, I have noticed a commonality running through aspects of this research process, and that of other research, about being on the edge of white society or at the boundaries of acceptability or being socially
marginalised. Firstly, white women in interracial relationships are often considered to be on the boundary or on the edge of white society or marginalised (Dalmage, 2003, Luke, 1994 and Childs, 2005a). My chosen methodology is also seen as 'on the edge' (Fenner, 1996) to 'traditional' approaches. Race and counselling are often on the edge as the two are not integrated into therapeutic practice or training (Moodley, 2009). The fourth element of marginal positioning is the use of creative elements, again, 'on the edge' and marginalised in both in practice and research (Knowles and Cole, 2008). In addition, Edwards and Ribbens (1998) acknowledge that qualitative research “is itself a marginalised methodological discourse” with researchers having to justify their underlying ontology and epistemological beliefs. A further 'on the edge' aspect in this research is the one of its feminist principles as the feminist perspective, according to Hesse-Biber (2012), is often perceived as marginal due to the constant challenging of dominant forms of knowledge, incorporating reflexivity throughout the whole research process, subjectivity and inclusion of ‘private’ lived experiences of women.

Thus the process of choosing the right methodology was important for me and as there are a multitude of approaches, varying in focus on a continuum of the 'rigidly' objective, to intuitively subjective, this selection took some time. In addition, I felt it was important to have the added dimension of ‘self’ as part of the research process. The heuristic approach seemed to fit my criteria, allowing all of me to be present in the research process as an active participant sharing similar experiences, a facilitator of the experiences of others, supportive of the needs of others and active processor of others’ experiences. An awareness of Moustakas' perspectives in my work as a counselling practitioner has contributed to my extending and understanding the process of heuristic enquiry in its application to a reflexive, creative interview dialogue. Heuristic research is an “organised and
systematic form for investigating human experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p.9). In this research process “not only is knowledge extended, but the self of the researcher is illuminating…..It involves self-search, self-dialogue and self-discovering. The research question and the methodology flow out of the inner awareness, meaning and inspiration” (Moustakas, p.11, 1990).

Additionally during the development of my understanding of the heuristic process, I was curiously drawn to an Indian patchwork quilt. I had experienced difficulty in understanding why this should be, but I allowed this experience to filtrate my being, constantly going back and actively exploring the quilt. Then I had a moment of insight and a cathartic realisation occurred! There ‘it’ was! This represents my experience of doing a doctorate, difficulty in initially finding all the pieces, my thoughts initially fragmented, engaging with different, abstract, seemingly unconnected notions such as theory, data collection, methodology, my story, participants’ stories, and academic assignments during the first three years. How to put this information all together, to make a whole, was my question. It was not like the traditional patchwork quilt with neat aligned edges and clear patterns; it was jagged, ill fitting, with seemingly different shapes. Would it all come together and fit into an integrated, aesthetically pleasing and meaningful whole? I realised this was how this metaphor of the quilt, and my doctorate journey started. Each segment represents its own story. I pondered on experiences and narratives of the women selecting their pieces and putting them together to make a whole. Was this one woman’s work or several women? The materials used in quilting are often old sari materials. Were these used and discarded, forgotten, or never used materials? If these materials could speak, would they have their own stories to tell? There may be many stories behind the quilt. For me, this journey is about the interaction and intersectionality of women’s social roles, personal relationships and
their personal goals and ambitions, the experienced positives and the lived challenges. My participants’ stories are in my quilt as well, their interconnections with other women who they know in interracial relationships. Both quilt and personal story may look random, but there is order and, when made into a meaningful whole, completeness. I began to see the process of the doctorate in the same quilt making, interconnecting way.

I intend to use the quilting framework metaphor analogy for identifying research themes and the process of ‘sewing together’ through the interconnectivity and subjectivity in meaning making of the women’s stories. The personal stories and quilt patches are all different and unique in content from different times and places and expressed in different ways to different people at different times, in attempts to form a coherent, but sometimes chaotic, process of meaning and interpretation. Some stories and patterns may have similarities such as ‘colour of emotion/pattern of presentation’, but none are the same, and each ‘patch’ represents the individual. Together, similar to a quilt, joined by a personal and social connecting thread or backing material, much as social and personal context, these women are joined by their unique reflections of their lived experiences in an interracial relationship.
Historical background of the Metaphor of the quilt

Historically, quilts were created by women and used to record and tell family stories, births, deaths, marriages (Ball, 2008). This use makes my research process metaphor poignant. Quilts have been used to represent/document social issues as a "communicative expressive forum or sign. Quilts contain symbolic messages and stories told beyond the life of the quilter" (Ball, 2008, p.365) and gave women a means of sharing personal and social expression other than the spoken voice. In addition, the process of selecting the fragments to make the whole and the linking of the fragments into a perceptually integrated whole, for the purposes of meaning making, should be seen as constructively therapeutic and promoting a gendered bonding process in experience sharing with other women. This was my research path initially unknown to me, and only unfolding in disclosure as I experienced the meaning of the research quilt.
Flannery (2001) views the quilt as a metaphor with many feminine connotations and believes quilting as a metaphor for scientific research is also culturally inclusive. This fits with Polyani’s (1966) view of the importance of tacit knowledge: learning that cannot be put in to words that can only be acquired by doing. Such may be the practical process of quilting with unforeseen meaning making, and therapeutic outcomes.

**Connecting the threads of the research**
The structure of the thesis will follow the following format. I explore and review the literature relevant to my research; any studies, articles and books that may be similar or related and offer a critique. A substantial chapter on methodology will follow with a full explanation of the heuristic approach and my rationale for using this, plus the epistemological perspectives which guide my way of working. This ‘Methodological Chapter’ considers the importance of the in-depth interview I used for gathering data. Other areas are explored including ethical considerations, insider/outsider issues and the importance of reflexivity. In the next chapter, ‘Findings’, I present the data which includes brief portraits of the individual participants, identified themes, individual depictions, a composite depiction and a creative synthesis. The last chapter, ‘Discussion’, covers discussion of the research process including my own experience and its relevance for other professionals and implications for further work. Limitations and advantages of the current research are also discussed. Throughout the thesis, I include various images of art work that I have completed during the process of writing as a research log creatively depicting reflections and aspects of my journey as a symbolic means of logging my experiences and those of others. I also provide
examples of my reflexive process in Appendix 3 to allow the reader insight into my personal thoughts on the research journey.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter discusses the relevant literature related to my research and the literature which has guided my research process. This chapter also discusses the initial process of gathering relevant information followed by relevant literature on counselling and race, the meaning of whiteness, white women’s identity development with particular reference to Helms’s white racial identity model, the symbolic meaning of black and white, the social context of mixed-race families as portrayed by the media, research relating to interracial families, and literature related to counselling interracial couples and families. This review is broadly based due to the wide ranging issues relevant in the research topic of white women in interracial relationships and white mothers with mixed race children and their social positioning, social and interpersonal relationship support needs.

Information gathering

I have been a hunter gatherer where I have been seeking out relevant literature through searching various formal and informal networks. It became a lengthy pursuit where the information was often hidden or immense in content. This meant I had to make decisions about its relevance to my topic or I found myself wandering in unknown terrain, stuck and distracted, but fascinated by related ideas. The process of gathering was lengthy, usually interesting and on many occasions emotionally draining.

Initially, I struggled to find the language for the literature review as this process seemed incongruent with a heuristic research process due to the literature review being more formal and moving away from self in the literature’s objective writings. In order to gather the literature I engaged in the following stages of searching:
The library databases

Electronic searches using Psych Info using search terms such as 'multi-racial families', 'multicultural families', 'mixed-race', 'white woman' 'mixed heritage', 'white identity', 'mixed relationships', 'intermarriage', 'intermixing',

Journals relevant to the subject area, for example, Ethnic and Racial studies, Journal of Black Psychology, Family Journal, Race and Society, Counselling Psychologist,

A general internet search using Google Scholar,

Organisations who involved and supported interracial families such as People in Harmony and Intermix who have published articles and links to other sites,

Individual relevant author searches whose websites gave a list of all their publications.

In addition, I collected numerous books which were also an excellent resource for further journals, articles and books.

Inclusion/Exclusion criteria

I attempted to include literature which was detailed and qualitative and provided insight into the lived experience of white women traversing the previously unexperienced and unforeseen nature of being in an interracial relationship and having mixed race children. Literature that drew on white women's experience and gave them a voice was seen as important and necessary to include as this was the focus of my research, exploring the nature of middle class, professional white women's experience and giving them a platform and voice. I was particularly interested in research which looked at the experience of more middle class women. This was difficult to find as much of the research explored the white women as an undifferentiated homogenous group from a moral, social and
intellectual deficit perspective. Research from this perspective is included and discussed as this sets the social position of white women from a historical and contemporary perspective and identifies the negative influences that they and their families face. As commented above, the literature search confirmed there tended to be a lack of social differentiation of women in interracial relationships and my interest is in exploring the experiences of women from a similar class background to myself, arising from my own experiences, as a middle class woman, who feels negatively impacted on by the deficit perspective in much of the existing research. In addition, in selecting research, I also thought it necessary to include wider intersecting perspectives on race, gender and how counsellors in training may be influenced in their training and service provision for racial literacy.

The initial search involved gathering as much information as possible covering different aspects of the subject no matter how small or tenuous the link. I felt I could not undertake this research with white women in interracial relationships without consideration of a number of aspects which included the importance and relevance of counselling and race, the social construction of race and gender, the intersection of class, gender and race in setting the context for women’s lived experiences, the meaning of whiteness in the context of women’s lives, women’s identity development, the historical and current perceptions and experiences of white women in interracial relationships, and finally, to consider whether counselling literature adequately acknowledged these issues in its practice and theoretical orientation. In addition, I also provide a rationale for exploring Helm’s Racial Identity Model and its UK cultural relevance to the research questions and why this model, and similar, was not considered suitable. In considering the notion of USA research cultural relevance to my research, the issue of research transferability arose and is discussed in the next section.
Transferability of USA research to the UK context

During my search for relevant literature about white women’s experiences in interracial relationships, I discovered the majority of historical articles and research emanated from the USA (Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell, 1995; Karis, 2003; Killian, 2012, 2004, 2003, 2001), although over recent years there has been an increase in UK based research (Harman, 2013, 2010; Oktikpi, 2009; Twine, 2010a, 2010b, 2001, 2000; Bauer, 2010) often from a sociological or anthropological perspective. Although the USA and UK have differing historical social-political backgrounds and legal perspectives regarding race relations and interracial couples, the overall themes identified so far in the UK were similar to those in the USA which would seem to indicate at least some potential for transferability. These themes included social rejection, abuse of power, negative personal and social stereotyping and external societal pressures impacting on family dynamics. (Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell, 1995; Karis, 2003; Killian, 2012, 2004, 2003, 2001; Harman, 2013, 2010; Oktikpi, 2009; Twine, 2010a, 2010b, 2001, 2000; Bauer, 2010).

The notion of transferability in qualitative research has been suggested as an alternative to the concept of generalisability, the term often used in quantitative research as a measure of research value (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As Polit and Beck (2010) argue, the transferability of research “is an act of reasoning that involves drawing broad conclusions from particular instances…… and is thus associated with use value.” Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that 'use value' can be said to exist when the benefit of the results in application or increased understanding of personal or social processes exceeds the findings from participants studied in the research. In conceptualising the position of white
women in interracial relationships in the UK, USA research has the required 'use value' to aid my social and conceptual understanding of the potential social positioning of white women in the UK. There appeared to be parallels in USA women’s emotional experiences which had some resonance with my own emotional experiences as well as those expressed in UK research such as negative comments made by strangers based on stereotypical assumptions about white women in interracial relationships (Twine, 2010; Harman, 2010, 2014; Okitikpi, 2009). This sensitised me to what might come to be found in white women's narratives in the UK as well as alerting me to potential differences in experience.

However, regardless of issues related to the transferability of USA research, a claim of transferability is not the focus or intent of my research and no transferability is inferred. In line with Lipscombe’s view (2012) on the transferability of qualitative research, this research does not purport to transfer or hold beyond the particular participants. This is not to say that the current research has no ‘use value’ (Smaling, 2003). This research is exploratory in nature and does not seek to make findings beyond those of the research sample. As such, I make no rigid assumptions of the USA research transferability to my study or assertions of the transferability of my study to any other group of middle class white women in interracial relationships. Those who are in such a relationship should assess the findings, much as me, from their own personal experience. Those counsellors who work with white women in an interracial relationship and have little experience with this group may find it helpful to make use of the findings to extend their understanding and awareness to develop their practice base.
With all this in mind, in the search for research I found myself going 'off track' exploring areas which although were interesting, and although providing insight as to how other disciplines approached this subject, were not directly relevant, but did expand my knowledge and challenge my thoughts. It felt like I was putting a jigsaw puzzle together, not knowing where to start as depicted in Picture 4.

![Picture 4: Putting it all together?](image)

All these different aspects were important and I could look at each area in-depth and still not reach my journey’s end. I made the decision to include a brief overview of these different aspects which would set the context for the research and the experiences of the participants. I was aware that inevitably I would not be able to do justice to each aspect. However, it felt important to raise this as social context issues often get overlooked by practitioners as identified by Wheeler (2006). So, my aim is that by including issues such as whiteness, intersectionality and relevant literature, these will give a context to the current research topic. I will start with an exploration of power as this is an important, relevant theme which
runs through the whole research process and underpins a number of issues which may impact on women’s daily lives.

**Issues of Power**

Issues of power and its effect on the research are interwoven throughout the thesis. However, when specifically exploring this as a discrete topic, the following issues are offered as being central to an understanding of power and its relationship in the therapy and research process.

Power is the ability to bring about a situation or a way of construing a position to impose a definition and control that position (Rosado, 2015). Proctor (2014) has extended this notion and argues the existence of three types of power in the therapeutic relationship; the first being that of power inherent in the role of the therapist due to the authority vested in the therapist to define the client’s ‘problem’, together with the power a therapist holds in the organisation and institutions that they are employed by. Proctor (2014) calls this ‘role power’. The second factor is one of power arising from structural positions in society with regard to the intersectionality of personal factors such as gender and age which Proctor refers to as ‘societal power’. The third aspect that Proctor considers is one of power stemming from the personal and ethnic/social histories of the therapist and client and their potentially differing experiences of power and powerlessness which Proctor refers to as ‘historical power’. Proctor (2014) argues that it is one’s personal history and experience which will influence how individuals relate to each other in these power influenced relationships. Proctor (2014) further argues that regardless of a person-centred therapist’s attempts to reduce their power in the therapeutic relationship, role power will still exist as this is inherent in the role of the therapist. This is because regardless of the therapist’s own personal position,
power is inherent in the role stemming from the power based relationship, structural issues and institutional demands that may be an unspoken and an unidentified element in the therapeutic encounter. One could generalise Proctor's (2014) argument to the qualitative research process in the need to be aware of the power dynamic due to the forming of a focussed situational relationship similar to that which exists in the therapist's relationship with the client. As Proctor (2014) argues, it is not so much how the therapist (or researcher) perceives their role, but also how the client or participant perceives the role, even if unspoken. One can see this potential influence in the role of a qualitative researcher conducting interviews. Although our shared social experience, to some extent, may arguably reduce issues of historical power, the process by which I may make and attribute different meanings to these historical experiences is important in the power dynamic. I attempted to work with Proctor's (2014) perspective through including the views of Campbell and Wasco (2000) who argued the central aim of feminist research is to "identify the ways in which multiple forms of oppression impact women's lives and empower women to tell their stories by providing a respectful and egalitarian research environment" (p.787). As discussed and interwoven throughout my research, this notion implicitly underpins the heuristic research process.

Consistent with heuristic methodology, and akin to feminist research, is a focus on a supporting and caring research environment that strives to be non-hierarchical. My research focuses on enabling the stories of marginalised individuals to be accurately and empathically told to help influence and facilitate change to transform an oppressive social system. Although Proctor (2014) rightly identifies the difficulties in achieving equality in the therapeutic, and by implication, the research process, as Liamputtong (2011) suggests, feminist methodology strives
to promote an egalitarian model of collaboration and attempts to minimise the researcher/participant relationship separation/divide. Thus having some awareness of Proctor’s perspectives may be argued to be the initial point for change and increased connection with a client or research participant through a personal recognition of self impacting in the therapy and research process. Proctor's call for structural, role and personal imbedded power inequality awareness is an implicit process requirement in heuristic methodology (Hiles, 2008; Liamputtong, 2011; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). This is because consistent with the heuristic methodology adopted in this thesis, researchers are encouraged to explore their own experience, to openly share information, when appropriate, about themselves and to facilitate self-disclosure, reciprocity and rapport to build trust between a researcher and participants, to promote the transformational success and social relevance of research (Campbell and Wasco, 2000). As will be later discussed, it was with this perspective in mind that a heuristic approach was preferred as Proctor’s (2014) power inequality issues are central to a heuristic methodological approach and process (Liamputtong, 2011; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011).

From my position above, and throughout the thesis, it can be seen that I acknowledged my role in the process of power and attempted to reduce and better manage this through my use of heuristic methodology, self reflection, reflexivity and theoretical discussion of the impact of power as a central issue in the construction and maintenance of racism and sexism and the therapy and research associated oppressive processes (Rosado, 2015; Proctor, 2014; McFarlane, 2008).
Several writers have argued that a dominant group having power gives that group the ability to define themselves in a context of dominant superiority (Proctor, 2014; Liamputtong, 2011; Campbell and Wasco, 2000). In considering a particular manifestation of power, Rosado (2015) argued that racialised power is perpetuated through oppression and culture, where culture is a system in which imposed and perceived truths become perpetuated by a particular group and come to permeate their unconscious as unquestionable. I would argue that perhaps, more importantly, the perceived truths become imbibed by the oppressed as unquestionable, such is the nature of power mediated through social oppression and racism. From this belief system, rationalised conclusions/outcomes form that become deeply ingrained and indistinguishable from more 'objective/rational' truths. Rosado (2015) also argued cultural assumptions and patterns of thinking establish an individual's perception of the world. This then tends to establish a set of automatic beliefs that go unchallenged and bond an individual to their group, bringing about social conflicts with other groups. Such a notion of power intersects with the cultural view of the position of women as subordinate social objects. Thus, in terms of gender intersecting with aspects of racism, the potential to be defined, limited, judged and excluded, becomes magnified for the white woman in an interracial relationship as she breaks with the expected and implicit cultural values of the powerful and becomes marginalised, losing white privilege and status.

For this thesis, it was important to explore the interconnections and intersectionality of various groups and oppressions in order to incorporate the social and political context into the areas of theory, research and practice (Proctor, 2014; McFarlane, 2008). Importantly, McFarlane (2008) challenges the notion that consideration of power in therapy is only relevant if clients belong to a minority
group. McFarlane (2008) argues that individuals from an initially perceived advantaged, non minority group, such as white women in interracial relationships, once they enter a mixed relationship, may find themselves achieving/experiencing a disadvantaged identity position when they cross powerfully ascribed racial divides that challenge their behaviours when entering interracial relationships. Whilst not experiencing racialised oppression when in a protected identity within a powerful white dominated structure, once behaviours are seen to challenge dominant power structures, notions of power and racialised oppression, previously not experienced, may well come to the fore. Power translates into racialised privilege typically discussed in the research as ‘white privilege’ (Frankenberg, 1999; Ryde, 2009). As Altman (2003) argues “White racial unawareness is a function of white guilt for having oppressed black people through particular actions or through collusion….. We (white people) have a vested interest in being unaware of what we have done, and thus who we are” (p.105). Thus Altman suggests that white unawareness stems from a position of white privilege and white power. As Lago & Haugh (2014) argue, the concept of ‘whiteness’ is an aspect of identity. It then follows that this is also an aspect of privilege and power. Lago & Haugh (2014) further note that complex emotional feelings often result from white counsellors exploring issues of race, power and difference. Common descriptions of those emotions related to the development of mixed relationships included feelings of guilt, denial, distortion, defensiveness and withdrawal. These are similar to those emotions described by Lago and Haugh (2014) in the development of white counsellors exploring their white privilege. This will be further considered in the next section.
**Social constructions of race**

Having an understanding of the social construction of race and white privilege as facilitating power is important and relevant to this research with white women in interracial relationships. Essentially, there is no clear biological or scientifically grounded difference between groups (Frankenburg, 1993; Byrne, 2006). However, the social use of skin colour to distinguish ‘the other’ is a means to keep those without power (usually ethnic minorities) in a subordinate social place and enable those with power (usually white groups) to maintain it. This is a complex issue and is not one dimensional and only one aspect of lived social context (Wander, Martin & Nakayama, 2005; Feagin & Vera, 2005). This is often unexplored, and a taken for granted position of power which makes it difficult for white people to deconstruct their group position in holding power (Rothenberg, 2001; Dyer, 2005).

Lack of exploration and openness can leave white women in interracial relationships confused and distraught when caught between what it means to be white, and ‘not white’, or how it feels to be ‘black’, as a marginalised, racialised group experience, and how this impacts on and changes their previously held and taken for granted social experiences of white privilege (Rothenberg, 2001; Dyer, 2005; McIntosh, 1989). This experience is sometimes described as ‘crossing borders’ or being ‘in between’ (Killian, 2001; Dalmage, 2003; Wilson, 1981). Twine (2001), an American researcher, who undertook an ethnographic study of UK mixed race families draws upon the work of critical race theorists and black feminist theorists in understanding the marginalisation of white women who become ‘transracial’ mothers and are then “subjected to forms of social control, surveillance and moral censure usually considered restricted to women of colour” (p.130). Twine (2001) states these mothers’ experiences are marginalised in feminist analyses of race and racism. Alongside Frankenberg (1993), Twine feels that insights from critical race theories can be applied to understanding the lives of
British white mothers. Twine also draws on the work of Collins (1994) a black feminist theorist from the USA recognising that “several of the dimensions of struggle identified by Collins as specific to women from racial and ethnic minorities in the USA can be applied to the struggles of white transracial mothers in Britain” (p.133) and these theories can be “deployed to illuminate some of the ways that white transracial mothers are policed and controlled as a group of transgressive mothers” (p.134). Twine (2001) also cites Roberts (1999) and Crenshaw (1992), two black feminist theorists from USA, to offer further understanding of white British women’s experiences. Roberts (1999) suggests that even “those in the racially privileged white middle class share particular vulnerabilities” (p45-46). Crenshaw (1992) identified limitations in both feminist and anti racist theories in not representing the ‘real’ experiences of black women and the intersectionality of racism and sexism. Twine (2001) takes this one step further by stating “while the maternal struggles of white birth mothers of African descent children have rarely been considered by feminist and antiracist theorists, black feminist theorists, such as Collins, Crenshaw and Roberts offer a number of theoretical insights that can be useful when considering the maternal struggles of transracial mothers parenting black children” (p.134).

**Counselling and Race**

Due to the above issues of race impacting on power, identity, personal and social relationships, I wished to also explore the issue of race in professional counselling relationships. It felt important to offer an overview of counselling and race. My search for relevant literature confirmed that issues of race and cultural diversity were not well addressed in counselling training and service provision generally. McKenzie-Mavinga’s 2009 UK research found black trainees felt training courses did not address the emotional impact of racial themes. The McKenzie-Mavinga
study (2009) was a heuristic study with interviews with five black counsellors and three counsellor training courses and a later survey of 21 black counsellors and 21 black clients, looking at their understandings of therapeutic collaboration. This found that participants perceived training of counsellors did not incorporate black perspectives and experiences of racism. Similarly, Watson's (2011) UK research also found black counsellor trainees felt their specific training needs tended to be ignored, and/or seen as problematic in the training process. This perceived deficit in counsellor training was also emphasised by Alleyne (2005) when looking at racial oppression in the workplace and its impact on the individual's identity and emotional wellbeing. All three researchers emphasised the importance of therapists developing awareness about racism and identified a gap in training and research with white researchers generally not addressing issues of race.

There has been much discussion around race, culture and ethnicity, but mainly in sociological and anthropological contexts (Collins and Solomos, 2010; Bulmer and Solomos, 2004). In contrast, there is only a handful of evidence based publications rooted in research on British counsellor's practice and attitudes with black client groups (Banks, 1999; McKenzie-Mavinga, 2009; Ryde, 2009). According to some researchers (Banks, 1999; McKenzie-Mavinga, 2009; Ryde, 2009; Moodley and Lubin, 2008) there has been only marginal and relatively unchallenging discussion regarding race and racism in practice and research in counselling. Moodley and Lubin (2008) argue there is a “paucity of innovative practice and constant recycling of the same themes in multi-cultural research.” Moodley and Lubin argue counselling tends to maintain a narrow, fixed viewpoint which continues to reinforce stereotypes about race, ethnicity and culture. There is a need for more culturally skilled counsellors who “understand how race, culture and ethnicity affect personality formation, vocational choices and manifestation of
psychological disorders” (p.160). The current BACP Course Accreditation Criteria do not explicitly mention the terms ‘race’, ‘racism’ or ‘discrimination’, but specifically refer to the more general, and I would argue ‘gentle’, less challenging and less specific terms of ‘difference’, ‘diversity’, ‘prejudice’, ‘cultural factors’ and oppression. This relatively ‘safe’ terminology used by the BACP, with no explicit mention of race or racism, tends to confirm Moodley and Lubin (2008), McKenzie-Mavinga (2009), and Alleyne's (2005) views of ‘race’ and ‘racism’ lacking a significant presence in counselling training and counselling accreditation body acknowledgement.

With all the above in mind, Moodley and Vontress's (2010) argument that counselling research and practice still fail to recognise and show sensitivity and understanding of ethnic minority needs and experiences has grounded support. Connected to this, I found a lack of insight or understanding in trainee counsellors of interracial relationships and the social and emotional pressures such relationships experience. This was shown in my Doctorate Assignment Two (2011) which involved a focus group of white British counsellors discussing issues related to culture, race and ‘intermarriage’. The arising themes confirmed white women in interracial relationships were still perceived negatively, with unfavourable stereotypes about their relationships still held and negative assumptions made about why women entered these relationships. These negative assumption themes included hyper-sexual interests or personality difficulties. The other significant issue was the discomfort the trainee counsellors felt in talking about ‘race’ shown through deflections, minimising, skirting round discussions, the ‘elephant in the room situation’ or silences, many ‘erms’ and hesitant responses. This mirrored research findings with counselling and psychology students from the USA (Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Utsey, Gernat and Hammar, 2005).
Moodley and Palmer (2006) state that the challenge for psychotherapy is to engage counselling theory in an innovative and alternative way so that the notions of multiple identities and multiple selves begin to evolve new epistemologies in research as well as the actual delivery of psychotherapy to allow for trainees and practitioners, who are not conversant with issues of race and counselling, to begin to develop an understanding of the interconnections of various forms of oppression and the significance of this for practice. At the same time, the 'traditional', colonialist based ideas that encompass race, culture, ethnicity, together with notions of antiracism and multiculturalism, must be deconstructed and more fully theorised to provide clear psychological schemas within which new clinical paradigms and research methods can be formulated” (p.23).

In addition, one needs to consider the impact of mainstream, influential counselling theory on counsellor’s perspectives on race. For example, Mattei (2010) argued that psychodynamic theory does not fit easily when considering the current social constructs of race and culture. This is because of the inherent bias and prejudice of psychodynamic theory’s colonial social era being embedded into its concepts and historical world view tending to present a hierarchy of culture and ethnic groups with the white male seen as superior, and the white woman as inferior to the white male, but superior to other females from other ethnic groups and needing ‘protection’ from others. As well as criticisms of psychodynamic theoretical content, Talahite and Moodley (2004) suggest a denial (or at least an avoidance) of race and culture in the therapy process, even if unintentional or intentional through a wish to present neutrality, may lead to a negative transference with counter-transference reactions.
In addition to criticisms of the psychodynamic approach applied to ‘race’, one has to critically consider whether Rogers’ client centred approach can be said to be an improvement over psychodynamic theory by being sufficiently sensitive to cultural issues. Firstly, it does not adequately take into account different groups’ social positioning. Rogers’ approach originated in the 1960s where there was social-political conflict on the continuum of segregation versus assimilation (Dhingra and Saxton, 2004). At the time Rogers began his writing in the 1950s and 1960s, racial segregation in the USA was legal and, from a white perspective, socially acceptable. Regardless of intent, Rogers writes from a white male perspective with basic assumptions in his theory and approach that all have equal access to basic freedoms and rights (Banks, 1999). This was not so for African-Americans or women in general at the time of Rogers’ writing in the social and political context of client-centred therapy and still remains true today (Morris, 2007; Sue, 2005). Dhingra and Saxton (2004) argued that Roger’s not explicitly acknowledging the influence of race and culture in his theory and the implications for practice is theoretically and practice context naïve, denying the reality in which people live. They further argued that the naïve assumption that counselling approaches have universal applicability and that all groups have common therapeutic goals, is best seen as a marker of cultural encapsulation and a denial of cultural differences. The reader is reminded that the purpose of this research is not to offer a scoping critique on race and counselling orientation. However, perspectives on counselling interracial couples are later considered to illustrate the responsibility of counselling training for this group.

According to Moodley and Vontress (2010), although many counsellors and researchers may acknowledge that race and gender are socially constructed and will have an impact on the therapeutic process and outcome, these issues may be
left unspoken, not addressed or unchallenged in the counselling process and may lead to misunderstandings and inadvertent imposition of bias towards clients (Moodley and Lubin, 2008; Moodley, 2007, 2010). Discussion of racism still creates discomfort, anxiety, resistance and sometimes shame and guilt amongst professionals (Ridley, 1995; Sue, 2010; McKenzie-Mavinga, 2009; Lawrence, 2003; Tuckwell, 2002; Lago, 2006, 2014). By not accepting there are differences and that people’s daily lives are affected by racism, this can be considered ‘racist’ in allowing inaccurate racialised assumptions to continue (Ridley, 1995; Sue, 2010). It is exciting to see British researchers beginning to challenge the ‘status quo’; however their voices are still whispers, not integrated into the wider world of research (McKenzie- Mavinga, 2009; Alleyne, 2005).

Some counselling literature in UK is beginning to address the importance of recognising the impact of whiteness on the therapeutic process (Tuckwell, 2002, 2006; Addy, 2008; Ryde, 2009; Lago and Haugh, 2006; Wallis and Singh, 2014). Studies in whiteness originate from the USA and have gained credibility with academics and professionals undertaking research studies and teaching on professional training courses for psychologists and clinical practitioners (Todd and Abrams, 2011; Ryde, 2009; Sweeney, 2008) with a focus on enhancing counselling practice. This interest arises because as well as black people having a ‘race’, white people too have a race and its influence is one that is only just beginning to be researched (Twine 2010; Harman, 2010; Ryde, 2009; Sue, 2015). It is important to recall that many years ago De Bois (1936/1994) offered the challenge to white people “to turn their lens of analysis about race round and look at themselves in the mirror.” The emphasis in both USA and UK is on moving studies away from oppressed minority groups to consider dominant social groups. One such study by Todd and Abrams (2011) in the USA with twelve counselling
psychology students looked at white dialectics or the tensions that white trainees may experience as dominant group members. In-depth interviews were conducted using a modified grounded theory approach rooted in feminist and antiracist principles ‘to examine how white individuals talk about, think about and relate to others’ (p.359). The researchers, both white, used a rigorous reflexive approach throughout the research process to ensure transparency. Their analysis derived a framework of six dialectical tensions a) whiteness and self b) connection in multiracial relationships c) colour-blindness d) minimization of racism e) structural inequality f) white privilege. Todd and Abrams found that through discussion, students fluctuated along a continuum within each dialectical tension. This framework may offer insight into how people may fluctuate in their views and account for contradictions and tensions whilst processing their thoughts and feelings about these issues. This is particularly relevant in understanding how white women, from a dominant group, in relationships with minority group partners might see themselves and where on the dialectical tension continuum they may locate and shift themselves. This research offered a useful framework to consider exploring narratives about developing racial awareness. This research appears to have further added to Helm’s White Racial Identity Model (1990) and McIntosh’s White Privilege Model (1998) by increasing the dimension of awareness on which white people become aware of racial issues and their own racial positioning and unearned white privilege. This will now be considered as it relates to white women in an interracial relationship.

Research on white women's racial identity

Few British researchers, with the exception of Twine (2010a), Harman (2010) and Byrne (2006) have considered the impact of whiteness and unearned privilege and how this affects the identity and socialisation processes, particularly for women in
interracial relationships who may experience challenge and change to their previously unexplored personal, relationship and social status issues. Ryde (2009), a British researcher and psychotherapist, explored her own white racial identity on a personal and professional level through participation in a co-operative enquiry research group for her doctoral thesis. Ryde gave a full, emotive and transparent account of her process in understanding the meaning of whiteness for her as an individual and as a therapist. She also offered a comprehensive model for working with clients and made suggestions for personal development.

In further developing counsellors' abilities to work with race, Frankenberg's USA ethnographic research is a useful reference (1993). This used in-depth interviews with thirty white women in mixed relationships, including her own personal experience, as a marker for looking at how race shapes white women's lives. This included 'unearned' privilege, which refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed and was the social context from which women perceived self and others (Frankenberg, 1993). White women's worldview was argued to be embedded in historical experiences, a particular cultural view that was uncritically seen as the 'norm' and often excluded the experiences and views of 'others'. Frankenberg (1993) argued that white women's lives, in mixed relationships, are racialised, but are different to black experiences where race is often perceived as 'a problem' and whiteness as 'the norm'. From this it was argued white women were therefore unable to perceive or understand (non-white) others' experiences. I have come to realise my own difficulties in acknowledging this through my personal contacts within my partner relationship. I have increasingly come to understand how my own race privilege has contributed to my unexplored sense of racial self, my social experiences and perceptions of others.
It could be assumed that due to a white woman’s close partner relationship she would increase her awareness of racial consciousness. However, research from the USA (Sweeney, 2008) conducted with seventeen white women, eight of whom were in relationships with black men found the white women in interracial relationships were more likely to recognise race and show more racial awareness, but some still held colour-blind attitudes and showed little awareness of their own white privilege. Racial identity is not perceived as an important factor, due to white privilege, for white people to have to consider and research suggests they often lack awareness of how race shapes their lives (Frankenberg, 1993; Karis, 2003; O’Donoghue, 2004). White privilege tends to be taken for granted and, as Helm’s Racial Identity Model suggests, white people tend to be oblivious of the influence of race on themselves, while denying the importance of race and its impact on others. Our identity is influenced by how we make sense of our experiences and how we understand ourselves and differentiate ourselves from others (Frankenberg, 1993; Karis, 2003; O’Donoghue, 2004; Addy, 2008).

O’Donoghue’s research (2004) with eleven white mothers of mixed-race children in the USA explored the women’s racial socialisation process. She found the majority of the women did not recognise themselves as having a racial identity. This was intertwined with a “social class based identity with a focus on manners, education and status” (p.75). All the women identified difficulties of varying degrees when they entered an interracial relationship, with reactions from others ranging from disbelief to hostility. As a consequence, the women became more aware of racial injustice and some developed recognition of an increase in awareness of themselves as having a racial identity and white privilege that had historically afforded them privileges. Whilst I find it useful to consider these aspects, it is not an absolute given that all women experience this awareness and
there are other contextual intersecting factors which contribute to a sense of self, such as social class, education and gender. However, O'Donoghue's findings provide insight into individual's experiences of the women's development of racial awareness allowing myself, as a professional, to empathise and begin to understand the experiences of others.

With this in mind, one may ask what is the influence of white women's developing sense of self on their children's identity? Britton (2013) states that:

"Whiteness is present in everyday social practices, processes and interactions, yet there is an assumption, sometimes implicit and other times explicit, that it is unimportant to the identity development of mixed parentage children. By uncovering what happens to whiteness in families where one parent is white, we are arguably in a better position to understand the meaning and role of race and racism in the lives of all members of mixed parentage families" (p.1320).

Twine (2010a) in her multi-methodological research with twenty five British women, over a period of ten years, has also considered the meaning of 'whiteness' in identity development in interracial relationships. Twine explored ways in which white members of transracial families negotiate race, racism and racialisation and acquire racial literacy and how this may impact on parenting children of mixed parentage. In addition, she analysed the meaning and impact of whiteness from black family members' perspectives and concluded that white family members are perceived as: (1) an asset in a racist society because they have privileged access to economic resources when compared to black people; (2) a source of potential personal and family injury because they increase exposure to racism; (3) a liability because they are culturally disadvantaged because of their racial privilege, which may prevent them from empathising and successfully countering racism their children encounter; and (4) an additional potential liability as white members may engage in 'sexual adventure' that accelerates assimilation of mixed-race children into non upwardly mobile social
class elements of white English society and therefore threatens the perceived potential respectability of upwardly mobile black families (Twine, 2010b). These findings tended to confirm the negative view of white women, even from close black extended family members. I believe this research is the only publication that has considered the views of black family members.

Just as racial identity is of significance, similarly, Oakley (2000) has long argued that gendered identities are socially constructed and these inequalities, much as those of racial inequality, stem from historical phenomena. This feminist focus recognises power dynamics between dominant and oppressed groups and highlights how this affects identity development. Thus, oppression of women can be seen as linked to the social construction of both racial and gender identity where white women in interracial relationships lose white privilege and then become forced, through their altered social position, to acknowledge and consider the impact of race on themselves and others. From a personal perspective I have to remember that oppressive experiences are not always determined by race, and that there may be a complex interaction between gender and class as well. How white women perceive these issues may well be determined by their own personal experiences and this may reflect a different and developing reality dependant on their own values and subjective processing of circumstances over time.

**Gender role socialisation intersecting with race**

On 6th July 2015 following the success of the women’s football team at the world cup in Canada, the FA tweeted “Our lionesses can go back to being mothers, partners and daughters.” This statement encapsulates how women are perceived in society and how, through a socialisation process, women may talk about their experiences using these relational terms of 'mothers', 'partners' and 'daughters', to
describe themselves. In this current research, women automatically talked about their experiences from the perspective of partner or mother. When women actively resist these normative roles and distance themselves from these ‘traditional’ roles, this may create conflict externally and internally and the ‘raised eyebrow!’ Gender role socialisation generally teaches boys to be individualistic, competitive, fearless and achievement focussed. Girls, on the other hand, are socialised to be relational, nurturing, accommodating and supportive (Robinson, 1999; Maher and Ward, 2002; Oakley, 2005; Worrell and Remer, 2003). In listening to women’s voices about their experiences, Harding (1991) emphasised the importance of recognising differences in experience, such as social class as well as similarities to validate each woman’s experiences and how they perceived themselves.

It is widely understood that an aspect of prominence and central to all women’s perceptions of themselves is that of ‘motherhood’, whether they become mothers or not. This is because in addition to their relational roles, women are frequently defined by their biological function and motherhood is seen as the ultimate goal for a woman (Phoenix, Woollett and Lloyd, 1991; Trepagnier, 1994; Van Scyoc, 2000; Campbell, 2013). An early writer, Haug (1987), suggested women are active participants in the construction of their identity contributing to seeing the motherhood role as central. According to May (2008) “being a ‘good’ mother is important for a successful moral presentation of self” (p.471) and “behaving in a morally acceptable way ensures being accepted as a member of a social group” (p.472). She argues this is an important need of belonging, that the majority of people desire. Thus, shared norms and behaviours become markers for respectability and sense of belonging. This may lead to women emphasising a “successful moral presentation" of self in public as an overriding importance and emphasis on their identity. When ‘white mothers’ step outside the socially
perceived norm of 'good' mother, that is, white, middle class professional, they are often perceived as 'other', deviant or less than good. These 'others' include lone parents, teenage mothers and mothers of mixed-race children (Phoenix et al, 1991; Britton, 2013). Phoenix (1991) claims white women in interracial relationships are not only affected by how society sees them in relation to gender, but also in terms of their experience of racism through their perceived deviant, socially threatening relationship with a black man. This has consequent undermining repercussions on their sense of self as women, and of white women in interracial relationships being 'less than good'.

Britton (2013) also considered how white mothers may be perceived and “positioned in relation to dominant social and cultural understandings of ‘good’ mothering” (p.1313). Britton (2013) emphasised the importance for researchers to consider the impact of whiteness and mothers’ racialised identity when undertaking research with mixed-race families. Research by Lewis and Ramazanoglu (1999), in their study of white women’s accounts of their whiteness, used a critical gaze approach in their analysis of interviews with twenty seven white British women exploring each woman’s sense of being white. Their analysis identified whiteness as “an unacknowledged, privileged social identity and as part of a system of unacknowledged racialised inequality rather than one of natural merit which is taken for granted normality” (p.24). The women in their study found it emotionally difficult to engage with this process and the researchers found a great deal of contradiction and inconsistency in the women’s thinking. However this opportunity did allow women to think about process issues and give meaning to having a privileged position in a racialised society. For example, noticing differences in treatment, even where they may have been disempowered by
gender and class. Whilst women recognised inequality, it was difficult for them to understand the racialised aspects of this and how that impacted on their lives.

This developing recognition of ‘what it means to be white’ was also identified in writings by O’Donoghue (2004), Lazarre (2001) and Rush (2000). O’Donoghue’s USA research with 11 white women in interracial relationships found “the majority of white women had been raised without any clear sense of ethnic identity” (p.74). Even with a white woman who may have self-confidence and high self-esteem, on entering an interracial relationship, her white reference group support and affirmation may be lower or non-existent, due to an interracial relationship changing her previous ‘white privilege status’. This may impede her ability to withstand and challenge the impact of racism towards herself, her partner and her children, as she has no previous experience or framework of response to begin to manage this (Twine, 2010; Robinson, 2001). The significance of this for a white woman’s racial identity development is suggested by Donoghue (2004) quotes Luke (1994) who:

“….laments that mothers of biracial children are usually treated merely as heritage markers of their children and not as individuals worthy of a voice and who have an ethnic and racial identity of their own” (p.126).

Donoghue (2004) and Luke (1994) recognise the importance of exploration of a white woman’s identity as it will have an impact on development of the family, her parenting and the racial socialisation on her children. However, these writers do not discuss how women integrate both white and black racialised experiences into their identities as parents of mixed-race children. Women may sometimes struggle to acknowledge their own fragile identity in this process and how this may impact on their children’s socialisation process. White racial identity models and their value in this research will now be considered.
White Racial identity Models

There have been a number of different theoretical models offering explanations regarding white racial identity development. This research can be seen as an early forerunner of whiteness studies, but differs in that the identity model approach tends to take a more empirical and developmental approach and a less reflexive and less subjective perspective. Hardiman (1982, 2001), Helms (1990, 2008) and Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson (1994) have all addressed the issue of white people’s perception of their own racial group membership and perceptions of black people and awareness of institutional racism and white privilege. Research in critical ethnocentric whiteness studies by Helms (1990) and Sweeney (2008) in the USA, indicates social interactions with black people are an important predecessor to transformations in white racial identity. Sweeney’s research (2008) considered how race shaped white women’s racial consciousness as a consequence of sustained social contact through marriage. Although the model discussed developmental stages, these were not necessarily sequential, being fluid in relation to the experiences, tensions and insight of women. Earlier research by Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson (1994) questioned whether racial identity involved a developmental process which led to a model of racial consciousness development. The models also do not address the intersectionality or separate influences of gender, class and education. Although not always sufficiently flexible and offering a definitive explanation of white identity development, these models do however offer an overview on how people may develop their racial consciousness as a result of their personal experiences. Specific examples of racial identity models are shown in Appendix 5 and a specific model on mixed race couple identity development is discussed next.
In considering the differing experiences within interracial relationships, Foeman and Nance (1999, 2002), in reviewing USA literature on mixed-race couples, offered a stage model suggesting interracial couples progressed through several development stages to deal with adverse situations in their relationship. The four stages of an interracial relationship identified by Foeman and Nance (1999, 2002) were:

1) Racial awareness at an interpersonal and cultural level: Couples begin to look at similarities and differences in experience, sometimes, but not always, beginning to learn to articulate the role and influence of race in their lives. Communication will either highlight these issues or minimise these dependent on individuals’ awareness of their own identity as well as understanding their partner. The couple may feel it necessary to frame their attraction in terms of ‘I liked the man and didn’t see black’ rather than ‘I like black men’.

2) Coping with social definitions of race and dealing with lack of acceptance: leads to the couple thinking about how they deal with these negative situations and challenges together. During this stage, couples are likely to use certain strategies such as humour or ignoring as a way of coping to survive as a couple.

3) Identity emergence: during this phase the couple take control, so instead of seeing obstacles to overcome, they develop behaviours that are self sustaining and share their experiences openly with society at large.

4) Maintenance: at this stage couples focus on effective strategies to maintain their relationship and openly communicate about issues relating to race and identity.
This model, although conceptually useful, does not adequately discuss how conflict between the couple, and from wider social networks, may be processed and its effect on the relationship and on the parenting of mixed race children. The model takes a rather overly cognitive account of experiences of interracial couples and does not adequately deal with emotional influences and direct experiences of hostility through racism.

Initially, I was keen to use a racial identity stage model as a basis for my research to consider the development of women’s racial awareness. With further reading, I developed a number of reservations about the appropriateness of stage theories. Models of White Racial Identity are exclusively of people moving through stages in a sequential way. Often, it was not clear from the model how I would set about attributing the actual stages. There appeared a lack of clarity in defining terms in an ‘operational manner’ which meant it would be difficult for others to assess whether or not a person is in, or is moving to, or has moved to a particular stage. Therefore, how would one be certain if change had occurred and, importantly, what exactly had changed and by what means? Although as an individual, I could see my own subjective movement, I could not always identify the specific factors of significance within a particular stage. This would make it difficult defining this change for others unless they too had specific knowledge and understanding of identity stage models. A further caution was that of how would I know and observe a link between the behavioural changes, and the posited changes in the stages in the person’s attitude and general world view? Although stage theories may allow some conceptual clarity, they also may be open to inappropriate use if applied too rigidly to fit people into ‘categorical boxes’. With this in mind, I became cautious of an over-acceptance of the stage process as providing ‘the answer’, and needed to view the use of the model primarily as contributing to a preliminary
understanding of some aspects of an individual’s experiences and where they may appear on a ‘continuum of understanding’ and ‘race awareness’.

In the next section, I look at symbolic meanings of ‘black’ and ‘white’, relevant American research and current British research. I review research on white women’s autobiographical stories and lastly consider literature relevant to counselling white women in interracial relationships. This understanding of symbolic racialised language is important as it often constructs white people’s everyday uncritical, unquestioned understanding of race and its meaning in the context of a vacuum of direct experience and social engagement with black people.

**Symbolic meaning of black and white.**

I started thinking about the symbolic meanings of ‘black’ and ‘white’ (Ronnberg, 2010). I am referring to the unconscious mind which may affect thoughts and feelings which then possibly transfer to images of black/white people (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). As can be seen from the time line in Figure 2, Dalal (2006) has traced ‘The evolving meanings of black and white’ and how the words have increasingly developed associations with ‘negativity’ and ‘positivity’. Dalal (2006) concluded that “blackness gets attached to a thing in order to cathect it with repellence, with the converse being true for whiteness” (p.29). So black and white have developed powerful implicit meanings of subjective nuance with ‘good and bad,’ ‘us and them’. Attaching these descriptions to people was argued to have started a process of value based racialised ‘othering’ and created an evolving social hierarchy based divide of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Dalal, 2006, p.30).
Providing confirmation of Dalal's views, Ryde (2009) makes use of Katz's (1978) early work demonstrating if a group of people were asked to write down their associations with the words black and white, what would be written would tend to reflect stereotypical assumptions related to negative associations for 'black' and positive associations for 'white' (Ryde, 2009). This then has implications for how people may unconsciously use and construe these terms in everyday language even when not directly referring to racialised issues. My understanding would be that an interracial couple may symbolically and unconsciously be perceived as representing these semantic racialised social tensions. This view is similarly held by Okitikpi (2009) who states that "the couple’s relationship becomes a metaphor for an ongoing discourse about the wider relationship between black and white people and the uncertainties about the level and nature of integration that should exist between the two groups" (p.135). If these symbolic meanings of black and
white influence people's interpretations of mixed families, do they also influence how some counsellors, in their sometimes uncritical, unexplored view of white self, power and privilege, influenced by media and use of uncritically embedded semantic meanings, see and work with the women in these relationships?

**Research literature relating to interracial families**

The main body of research about couples and families has emanated from the USA with a focus on couple coping strategies and parenting mixed-race children (Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell, 1995; Childs, 2005; Root, 1992; Dalmage, 2003; Bystydzienski, 2011). Themes identified in the research included family opposition to the relationships, experiences of racism, challenges to their own racialised identities particularly for white women, societal intolerance, crossing racialised social boundaries, hostility from both black women and white men towards white women in interracial relationships, communication difficulties between couples, stereotypes regarding sexual promiscuity and concerns regarding the psychological wellbeing of the children. The research used a variety of methods including in-depth interviews and focus groups with couples found through snowball sampling, organising data into common themes identified through transcriptions, coding and thematic analysis or grounded theory.

Since 2000 a number of relevant studies have been carried out in the UK (Bauer, 2010; Twine, 2010; Caballero et al, 2008; Caballero and Edwards, 2010; Harman, 2010; McKenzie, 2013; Okitikpi, 2009). Researchers were from a social science or anthropological background (Bauer, 2010; Twine, 2010) and interviewed couples or lone parent mothers with a focus on parenting (Okitikpi, 2009; Harman, 2010; Caballero and Edwards, 2008, 2010; McKenzie, 2012). Although the USA and UK have differing historical social-political histories regarding race and
interacial couples, the themes identified in the UK are similar to those in the USA. The predominant ethnicity of the couple pairing was black/white although some authors also interviewed interracial couples with Asian heritages (Edwards and Caballero, 2008). Twine (2010) and Bauer (2010) used an ethnographical approach where they spent considerable time over several years living in the community and even staying with the families. This allowed the researchers to make in-depth relationship connections with their participants and immerse themselves in the daily lived experiences of their participants to understand the issues at depth. Research by Bauer (2010) looked at the processes of change in both Caribbean and British kinship patterns amongst mixed families in London, the impact interracial families have had and how they have developed new features of kinship to survive and thrive despite social opposition and ambivalence towards them. Similarly, Mckenzie (2013) undertook an ethnographic study on a UK Midlands council estate. She interviewed thirty-five working class white women who were single parents with mixed race children. These women identified feeling stigmatised due to living in a particular neighbourhood, and being socially isolated, outside the local community. The women tended to perceive themselves to be stigmatised by the white community and looked down upon because they had children of mixed-race which confirmed proof of their perceived socially deviant sexual relationships with black men. The women found the strength to support each other and create an alternative cultural environment mixing aspects of both black and white working class identities. Other researchers (Luke and Luke, 1998; Owen, 2002) also found that some couples constructed their own cultural, class and gender identities specific to being a mixed couple. This may relate to the interracial couples’ identity model as previously discussed (Foeman and Nance, 1999; 2002). Twine’s (2010) research focussed on how white mothers dealt with racism and their ability to prepare their children for racism. This she
talks about in terms of preparing children for ‘racial literacy’. Twine spent several years collecting data to explore the meaning of race, racism and whiteness through interviews with extended family members and the families’ communities. Twine explored ‘contact theory’ similar to that discussed by Sweeney (2008), which considered how white women’s racial consciousness and understanding of whiteness developed as a consequence of close relationships with their black partners.

Harman’s (2010) research with thirty lone parents with mixed-race children from various locations in the UK considered the impact of racism and the changing nature of white privilege for these mothers. The women experienced racism, social disapproval, felt they were not positively acknowledged or fully recognised by society because they were white and did not receive full recognition in terms of racism and discrimination. Harman (2010) described these experiences as “draining, depressing and damaging” (p.188). As a consequence of these tensions, the mothers were no longer able to take things for granted as (privileged) white women and “experience a loss of white privilege due to the effects of racism and the desire to protect their children and themselves from its pernicious effects” (p.192).

Other research in the USA by Karis (2003) with seventeen white women, 28 to 65 years old, in interracial relationships who were professional, had graduate education and identified as middle class, focused on how “white women articulate, challenge and reproduce white racial identities within committed heterosexual relationships with black men and as mothers of bi-racial children” (p.24). Although women stressed ‘race did not matter’ in their private lives and was only relevant in the public experience of their lives, Karis found in their narratives specific
language which indicated shifts in awareness along a continuum of racial awareness, identifying dual positions as white women in interracial relationships as ‘racial insiders and outsiders within’. Luke (1994) and Frankenberg (1993) also conceptualised white women as ‘outsiders within’, that is, being a white woman had certain social privileges, but their partners and children were excluded. Therefore, the opportunity for ignoring the impact of race was no longer an option for the white women. Karis saw that women’s denial of race acted as a protective response to stereotypes, emphasising ‘they did not marry a black man’, but a person who happened to be black. Although some women denied stereotypes of interracial couples, they often gave examples of how these stereotypes affected their sense of self and affected how they behaved in public. Karis (2003) offered some suggestions for therapeutic work with interracial couples such as being aware of the reasons for any contradictions in experience and behaviour and shifting views along a continuum of whether race mattered or not. Karis suggested that white partners may need help in moving from a colour-blind stance, and developing understanding of how race and gender are intertwined. Therapists should have an awareness of the social location of interracial couples and, given the racial identity shifts experienced by white women, therapists should not assume ‘common ground’ based on shared whiteness.

Hill and Thomas’ (2000) USA study interviewed four white women and three black women in interracial relationships using semi-structured interviews and a grounded theory approach for data analysis. This study took an intersectionality perspective of “how women described their racial identity development and the influence of gender identity development as part of this process” (p.1). They categorised findings as “constraining”, that is, identities reported to be oppressive and imposed or “empowering”, that is identities the participants embraced because
they were constructive or affirming of their experiences” (p.10). For example, an imposed ‘ascribed identity’ for the white women was when they felt others saw them as ‘rule breakers’ due to stepping outside expected norms of behaviour as white women. An empowering ‘ascribed identity’ for women was about ‘refusing to take sides’ racially. In terms of ‘reference group orientation’, women in this study talked of a shifting of this identity orientation as a consequence of their interracial relationships. Another theme was that of ‘masked reference group’ orientation, that is, their group orientation changed when they were not with their partners when others sometimes made ‘assumptions of similarity’ in opinion based on whiteness. Identity changes included increased awareness of racial issues and white privilege. Again this links to notions of ‘racial literacy’ and ‘racial awareness’.

An empowering reference group orientation included having ‘more than one orientation’. Hill and Thomas (2000) found that the dominant theme from the narratives was that of racism and the women “appeared more conscious of racial identity changes than gender identity changes” (p.29). This suggests the impact of race on social identity of the women was more salient and influential than other social categories of oppression. Studies in Britain (McKenzie, 2013; Harman, 2010; Twine, 2010) have also highlighted the importance of understanding the relevance of whiteness and intersectionality and have considered the interaction between class, race and gender as part of understanding white women’s experiences. From my own perspective, it can sometimes feel fragmented when considering one ‘category’ such as gender or race alone. I have to acknowledge that there is a diversity of multiple identities and social positions which affect my experiences and changes according to context, experience and time. What is important is the relational, multilayered aspects and fluidity in recognition of the position of self in relation to others and the often gendered and racialised social positions others adopt and assume in me. It may be about using a different ‘lens’
for different inequalities, but recognising that they are not always independent of each other.

A further UK study looking at the interracial couple relationship dynamics by Okitikpi (2009) was based on semi-structured interviews with 20 black men and 20 white women in interracial relationships. The aim was to "understand their motivation for entering the relationship and their experiences of being in the relationship and how they coped" (p.xii). This study identified that people in these relationships were still subjected to intense public scrutiny and often relied on each other for support or sought out a new reference group for friendships. The research also found a sense of isolation, where the couples were careful who they shared information about their relationships with. They also experienced negative reactions from both white men and black women. Okitikpi highlighted that couples were more likely to be motivated to work together as a couple so as not to appear to fail and confirm the belief their relationship would fail. Although couples were often faced by additional challenges, the relationship provided added strength individually and as a couple and the interpersonal differences were seen to be complementary (Molina, Estrada, and Burnett, 2004; Karis and Killian, 2009; Okitipki, 2009). Okitipki found there were challenges in the relationship, but these were not always due to racial issues and often arose due to disparities in education or wealth or gender roles. Other studies (Bauer, 2010; Twine, 2010; Caballero et al, 2008; Caballero and Edwards, 2010; Harman, 2010; McKenzie, 2013; Okitikpi, 2009) suggest it is often external social factors that place pressures on mixed couples, such as dealing with disapproval, racism and antagonism from the wider community. This created extra interpersonal layers to deal with other than the usual expected relationship issues.
As with any relationship, interracial relationships present a complex picture and we can only use these research findings to inform us of some issues that may influence the mixed couple’s relationship dynamics. Karis (2003) and Killian (2004) found that whilst faced with challenges, the participants in their research also identified many gains in bridging cultures, understanding racism, developing an understanding of each other’s differences and consequent personal growth.

One area that often causes relationship pressures, particularly for the white woman, is hostile views from black women. Collins (2000) suggests that white women in interracial relationships are perceived as keeping black women single and there is resentment when a white woman has children with a black man. Most of the existing research (Twine, 2010; Karis, 2003; Otitkpi, 2009) has identified that black women convey strong opposition to interracial relationships. To the black woman, these relationships are perceived to be personally rejecting by black men, and may evoke a sense of personal and ‘historical loss’ and injustice in black women through a recognition of the perceived shortage of ‘good marriageable black men’ (Collins, 2000; Childs, 2005b). From Childs' research (2005b), using focus groups with college students, the basis for the black women’s opposition was that these mixed relationships were perceived as “detrimental to the aspirations of black women, undermining the black family structure and hindering the cultural survival and connectedness of black communities” (p.558). Again, one can see the existence of social hostility to white women in interracial relationships which could impact on the family environment and parenting influences.

**Mothering and parenting mixed-race children**

Although previously mentioned, this separate section is important for the thesis to emphasise as it provides the wider social perspective of the devaluing social
portrayal of white women in interracial relationships who go on to break another taboo of crossing the racial divide by having mixed-race children. There is a significant amount of research both in the USA and UK about mixed-race children which raises questions on whether white mothers are adequately placed to parent and support their child around issues of race and identity development (Robinson-Wood, 2011; Twine, 2010). I remember vividly in the eighties there were constant debates about whether white families should adopt or foster children of mixed-race due to white families presumed lack of racial awareness and inability to help children deal with racism and develop a positive racial identity. The debates overlooked that many white birth parents were successfully parenting their mixed-race children. However, an opposing research focus was that on children from unsupported lone parent families who were struggling with multiple complex social issues and this leading to an increase of mixed-race children in the statutory care system (Barn, 1999). As a white mother of mixed-race children, I remember historically feeling anxious, questioning my ability to provide the support, knowledge and education necessary for my children to survive in a ‘racist’ world. Such was my level of anxiety, I even feared the possibility of the ‘knock on the door’ to be told I was unable to provide a positive identity for my mixed-race children.

This is an emotional subject for many white women who often feel judged, questioned or misunderstood (Harman, 2010; Caballero et al, 2008). Having crossed the boundary in their relationships, the birth of children raises another basis for questioning the validity of the parenting environment of ‘what about the child?’ Much of the research is about children achieving a satisfactory racial identity development (Twine, 2010; Harman, 2010; Caballero et al, 2008, 2012; McKenzie, 2013). Research, already mentioned, by Twine (2010), Bauer (2010),
Okitikpi, (2009) and Donohue (2004) focused on the development and importance of the white woman’s own racialised identity in the importance of preparing their children for the white racist world. Women in their research recounted numerous experiences of hostility from others about their children often said in the presence of the children. Twine (2001) found that white mothers are often subjected to forms of parenting surveillance usually restricted to black women, confirming the white woman's drop in perceived social status when ‘crossing the boundary’. Twine (1999) also identified that white birth mothers often subjected themselves to harsh self-surveillance and self-directed criticism to ensure perceived competence. The recurring themes in the research findings are related to their presumed lack of competence as mothers, based on their crossing racialised boundaries, and questioning whether the women are sufficiently skilled, or racially literate, to adequately parent their mixed race children. Greene (2001) implies that because white women are not aware of themselves as having a racial identity in a ‘racialised world’, this compromises their ability to provide their mixed-race children with skills necessary for their children’s future. This is the recurrent theme of negative appraisal of white women with mixed-race children in the literature (Barn, 1999; Harman, 2010; Twine, 2010; Luke, 1994; Root, 2001; Tizard and Phoenix, 2002; Caballero et al, 2008, 2010). This appears an extreme view and, arguably, taken to its extreme position could be used as a rationale to remove children from their mother’s care. This perspective does not allow for learning, understanding and development of racialised socialisation or take into account the potential for social networks to provide support.

The existing research acknowledges that having children brings additional layers of concern for white mothers which would not be considered if they had a white child (Root, 2001; Twine, 2010). Women were found to often express feelings of
helplessness, frustration and anger at their children’ experiences of racism and their lack of preparation for how to protect their children from this and prepare them for an unjust world (Robinson, 2001; Caballero et al, 2008; O’Donoghue, 2004; Robinson-Wood, 2011).

A common, alienating experience expressed by women in the research was one of they often do not look like their children and frequently receive ‘sympathetic’ comments because people cannot believe they are birth mothers. Strangers were found to often openly query, in an invasive manner, “is that your child?” Presumptive comments, such as, “Do you foster?” or “How good of you to adopt”, were said to be common (Caballero and Edwards, 2010; Edwards and Cabellero, 2008). Having a child of mixed-race thus challenges dominant social norms of what is usual or acceptable. The insensitive, invasive questions further serve to stigmatise the adult relationships and the legitimate existence of the children. Edwards and Caballero (2010) compared white mothers’ experiences in the 1960s with current day experiences. Although some factors had changed, such as availability of support networks and racism being less overt, racism was found to sometimes be more covert, in the form of microaggressions (Sue, 2010) the process of which has been earlier discussed. The mothers’ felt “that negative assessments were made of women who partnered outside their own racial group. Judgements about women’s morals had changed little over the past half century” (Edwards and Cabellero, 2010, p.537). In addition, women often became sensitised and aware of experiencing more favourable treatment when on their own than when with their partner or their children (Harman, 2010). This links to the USA findings of Hill and Thomas (2000) of differing reference group orientation when on their own and may contribute to developing an increased sense of whiteness and racial identity.
Tizzard and Phoenix (2002), in a UK study, found 85% of their study's mixed-race young people had directly experienced racism. These experiences emphasised the importance of parents addressing these experiences as part of a protective and proactive socialisation process. Robinson-Wood (2011) states quite vehemently that “white mothers who do not initiate conversations about race with their children, or those who do not have sustained interaction with racially different people, may not do enough to equip their children with tools to develop racial identities” (p.341). Researchers (Edwards et al, 2010), through talking with white parents, identified different parenting strategies to identity development and dealing with racism. These included ‘open individualised’, that is they see their child’s identity as beyond racial parameters to be ‘citizens of the world’ or stressed inner potential and abilities and believed children could choose their own identity. A ‘mix collective’ approach involved a belief that their child’s identity was rooted in the parent’s joint identity so they acknowledged both parents identities being of value; thus a mixed identity was stressed. The third perspective was a ‘single collective’ where only one aspect was stressed to promote a sense of belonging, for example, one set of religious practices or one racial affiliation. Without exception, all white mothers in these research studies in the USA and UK had concerns about their children’s future, in a racialised context, and questioned their own ability to adequately parent. The majority endeavoured to ensure their children had access to relevant cultural practices, developed an awareness of their ethnic history, had toys and books which reflected their identity to help them connect with a positive sense of self (Harman, 2010, 2013; Caballero and Edwards, 2010; Edwards and Caballero, 2008). Kilson and Ladd (2009) found some women were racially naive, that is, not acknowledging the importance of racial identity awareness and were reactive in their parenting stance about racial
incidents experienced by their children rather than seeing the importance of preparing their children. Kilson and Ladd felt that higher social class status may have shielded these mothers from racism and they therefore could avoid facing these issues.

Research in USA and UK (Snyder, 2012; Williams, 2011; Crawford and Alaggia, 2008), with mixed-race individuals, identified that family approaches to addressing race and racism varied along the continuum from colour-blind to antiracist, but where parents were open in their discussions about race and its social significance, the young people were more open to discuss racist incidents and felt more positive about themselves and their identity. In research by Crawford and Alaggia (2008), young people identified the importance of exposure to both parent’s cultural backgrounds believing their parent’s influence in acknowledging racism was critical in informing their developing views on self and negotiating and understanding social contexts. The young people wanted their parents to be actively engaged in this process.

In taking this review further, I believe it is necessary to include as part of the literature review white women’s own autobiographical reflexive stories about their experiences. Two women, Lazarre (2001) and Reddy (1997) have written about their experiences in interracial relationships. Two women Wolff (2000) and Rush (2000) have transracially adopted and have written about their experiences as white women adopting black children. Kilson and Ladd (2009) are both women in interracial relationships who talk about their own experiences as well as the research they have undertaken with twenty five black and white middle class mothers of mixed-race children. These women’s experiences echo similarities of other research narratives. Some had experienced difficulties in acceptance and
stigmatisation from families and both communities. They talked about the looks received from strangers which, whilst not openly hostile, appeared to be curiosity about how they had become a family; also their children had received racist comments.

Lazarre (2001), Reddy (1997), Wolff (2000) and Rush (2000) document their own journey towards understanding the extent and impact of race and racism, including a progressive change in their own racial identity, recognition of their own ambiguous racial position and developing a growing awareness of white privilege and the impact on their parenting approach. All developed heightened awareness of overt and covert experiences of racism and talked about the experience of ‘border crossing’. Two of the titles illustrate this ‘Crossing the Colour Line’ (Reddy, 1997) and ‘Loving Across the Color Line’ (Rush, 2000). They recounted negative discriminatory experiences from professionals who were either experienced as judgemental or made negative assumptions about their relationships and their children. Teachers in particular were seen as insensitive and lacking awareness (Rush, 2000; Wolff, 2000). This is an area identified in British research (Tickley, 2004) concerning educational achievement of mixed-race children who experienced devaluing comments from teachers and white peers and were more likely to be excluded, and less likely to achieve significant exam success than their peers. Research showed that having mixed children had a huge impact on these white women particularly when experiencing people who held strong negative views and showed this in their behaviour towards the children. The women described some profoundly upsetting moments of these negative attitudes. For example, a child being told to slow down in a race by a teacher to allow white children to win and a mixed-race child, in the gifted class, being placed on her own at the back of a group (Rush, 2000; Wolff, 2000). The experiences are too
numerous to record here, but in summary, there was an increasing awareness by white women of needing to prepare their children for such undermining experiences. The parenting of boys especially raised concerns as a consequence of society’s stereotypes of black men, for example, telling a son not to put his hands in his pocket when he went into a shop (Reddy, 1997) or explaining to a son why he was being stopped frequently by the police (Lazarre, 2001). The reports are profound and express many feelings of frustration, pain and anger. In reading these women’s accounts, I recognised similarities in experiences and also that the emotional rollercoaster of being in an interracial relationship that can evoke strong emotions such as pain and anger, shock and guilt about being white and disbelief that children are also exposed to these hostile attitudes and having it regularly confirmed that being a parent of a black child brings extra layers of worry.

**Literature related to counselling interracial couples and families.**

Interracial relationships and coping issues tend to be a neglected area in counselling research, although there is limited American research related to counselling interracial couples, families and individuals with a focus on identity in mixed-race individuals (Karis and Killian, 2009; Henrickson and Paladino, 2009; Thomas, 2003; Gillem and Thompson, 2004).

Although the cultural competence of counsellors has frequently been identified as important for working with diverse groups (Sue and Sue, 2008; Lago, 2011; Tuckwell, 2002, 2006), it is apparent that work with interracial couples is relatively overlooked. As this group is not a recent phenomenon, I wondered if this marginalisation was due to historical negative assumptions about these relationships and the degree to which they were ‘doomed to fail’, ‘deserved help’ and the degree to which they can be helped due to problems seen as inherent in
these relationships and beyond repair. To achieve cultural competency, the literature (Hill and Thomas, 2000; Henricksen and Paladino, 2009) stresses the importance of the therapist reflecting on their own racial identity and their personal beliefs about interracial relationships, recognising the existence of racism and enabling couples to develop strategies to deal with racism and recognise the importance of being able to talk about these issues. Therapists are said to often avoid the discussion which could be for various reasons, such as not wishing to be seen as racist or feeling taking a colour-blind approach such as ‘I don’t see colour’ (Killian, 2003) is the most efficacious way forward. Karis (2003) suggests that due to external views about interracial relationships, there may be contradictions in viewpoint about whether race is of significant concern. Killian (2003) argues that therapists need to provide the space to accommodate the ‘shifting’ attitudes to race and 'mixing' and pay attention to underlying feelings about identities and race as well as the ways gender and race intertwine. Killian further identified that white partners may need help to move from a colour-blind stance and also understand issues around whiteness. Killian (2003) further argues it is necessary to be open to discussion and acknowledgement of some of the racialised experiences couples may face. This also is true if only working with one individual in the interracial relationship. Killian adds a warning that white therapists should not assume shared common ground with the white woman based on whiteness. This is particularly relevant given white women’s stories about their shifts in awareness, crossing the borders and changes in their white racial identity and how they are responded to by white society. A study in the USA (Poulson, 2003) based on interviews with seven family therapists on their experiences of counselling interracial couples, found that although couples presented with a variety of relationship issues, underlying these were concerns related to racial and cultural differences. The therapists felt it was essential that therapists needed to be aware
of and understand “historical, social and psychological contexts in which these relationships are based” (p.173) to better understand the couples' lived experiences and the social strains.

Overview

My intention in my research was to explore with white middle class women their experiences of being in interracial relationships to further understand the impact of this on their sense of self, their parenting experiences and the development of their relationship with their partner. In general, the majority of the British literature focuses and relies on assumptions that white women in interracial relationships are working class with little education and sometimes those with social services involvement, thus implying the majority of white women in interracial relationships as having these characteristics and viewing interracial marriages as deviant or problematic. Little of the research has considered the role of the educational experience of white women in helping them process their experiences and form their views. It was due to my identification of this gap in the research that I decided to look at the experiences of educated white women in interracial relationships. Furthermore, little literature in the UK has considered the potential counselling needs of this group, either as individuals, their children or the family unit. An aspect of my research was to give this more thought and consideration than currently exists. The literature review has described and debated the intersection of a number of social positionings, including notions of race, gender, and culture and moved from wider theorising to notions of contextualising findings in the lived experience of white women in interracial relationships, their partners and their children (Reinharz, 1992; Frankenberg, 1993; Oakley, 2000, 2005; Okitikpi, 2009; Williams, 2011; Caballero, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2012). The literature review has gathered and assessed literature pertinent to the topic of
exploration and also relevant to the research questions posed at the beginning of the chapter. What has arisen from the literature review is that the direct experience of white women in interracial relationships is far from socially harmonious in British society (Banks, 1992; Okitikpi, 2009; Williams, 2011; Caballero, 2012) and neither are their children's direct lived experiences harmonious (Parker and Song, 2001; Christian, 2008). This literature review identified that white women in the UK in interracial relationships are still experiencing devaluing and rejecting social reactions to themselves, their partners and their children (Alibhai-Brown, 2001; Dalmage, 2003; Olumide, 2002; Tizard and Phoenix, 2002; Okitikpi, 2009). Importantly, what has come out of the literature review is that white women in interracial relationships should not be seen or construed as a homogenous single group (O'Donoghue, 2004; Caballero, Edwards and Puthssery, 2008; Twine, 2010a, 2010b). They vary widely in terms of their appreciation of the issues they experience and their ability to process these and make consistent coherent sense of the experiences. This involved helping the women develop an understanding of the impact of racism on self, family relationships and the influences of racism on the development of their children (O'Donoghue, 2004; Twine, 2010a, 2010b) thus acknowledging the impact of racism and sexism through their shared intersections. Related to my research questions, I decided to include research that focussed on how white women in interracial relationships have been socially perceived and personally construed and depicted in their relational context with black men, white UK society and in their role as mothers of mixed race children (Fryer, 1984; Ramdin, 1999; Okitikpi, 2009). Importantly, I wished to also include, research findings on when the personal and social experiences of white women in interracial relationships were heard and acknowledged (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). This latter focus was important as earlier research tended to focus on
viewing interracial marriages as deviant or problematic (Ifekwunigwe, 2001; Okitikpi, 2009; Harman, 2010). These assumptions have been based on racialised social stereotyping and a disparaging questioning of motivation for entering into such relationships (Ifekwunigwe, 2001; Okitikpi, 2009; Harman, 2010). Historically, white women were ‘objects’ of study rather being given the opportunity to talk about their experiences from their perspective. (Alibhai-Brown, 2001; Dalmage, 2003; Olumide, 2002). It was not until the 1990s that voice was given to white women in interracial relationships as research participants (Alibhai Brown and Montaghue, 1992; Rosenblatt et al, 1995; Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992).

I was uncertain of the degree to which my participants’ experiences would vary due to, for example, differing personal beliefs/values, and experience, age and personal histories. The research questions were an attempt to explore and describe the lived social experiences of middle class white women who are in interracial relationships. The choice of heuristic methodology explicitly placed me and my own experiences and views in the research process where I then became an actor in this process which I recognised as having influence not only in the interview and storytelling process, but also the representation of the findings (Moustakas, 1990). I acknowledged that although women’s experiences will be influenced by social, political, economic, racialised and gendered factors, these may alter and/or have a different emphasis placed upon them according to my interpretation of their unique experiences and social contexts. In line with the early research by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I acknowledged that research can involve multiple meanings with research being influenced by a researcher’s own personal history. This is consistent with Proctor’s (2014) notions of power, where I needed to position my own experiences, values and knowledge as also influencing the study. I understand and experience racism and prejudice as a central part of the
everyday reality of interracial families and therefore I often become passionate
about these experiences and so had to be aware of others’ experiences and hear
their unique stories from their perspective to be able to tell their story both
accurately and empathically. I wanted this research to provide women who are
marginalised the opportunity to share their lived experiences using a research
approach that honoured this inclusive perspective and facilitating process. With
this in mind, the next chapter on methodology gives my rationale for choosing a
specific methodology of heuristics (Moustakas, 1990; Hiles, 2008) to achieve this
broad aim and respond to the research questions of:

1) What are the personal and social experiences of middle class white women
   in interracial relationships?

2) How do these personal and social experiences impact on middle class
   white women as individuals, partners and mothers? This generated a
   related sub question of:

   2a) how do middle class women integrate these experiences and tensions
       and what are the emotional consequences of such experiences?

3) How are my own experiences as a middle class white woman in an
   interracial relationship similar to or different from other middle class white
   women in interracial relationships?

In the next chapter I will look at methodological considerations which attempt to
respond and engage with my research questions in a rigorous and disciplined,
reflexive manner, keeping sight of robust research expectations and combining
this with feminist notions that acknowledge aspects of power, subjectivity and the
intersectionality of oppressions to explore the lived experiences of white women in
interracial relationships. The next chapter also outlines my ontological and
epistemological perspectives and gives a rationale for my approach and the active participation in the heuristic process.
Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter draws on the social context set in the previous chapter where I looked at the historical and contemporary position of women in mixed race relationships, drawing on current issues and reflecting on my own direct experiences. In this chapter I draw on the academic literature to provide further context in terms of theoretical and research grounding for the present research methodology. This chapter also introduces my participants and then provides my rationale for choosing a qualitative approach, in particular heuristics. This recognises that this study is an exploratory study asking the questions:

1) What are the personal and social experiences of white women in interracial relationships?

2) How do these personal and social experiences impact on white women as individuals, partners and mothers? This generated a related sub question of:

   2a) how do women integrate these experiences and tensions and what are the emotional consequences of such experiences?

3) How are my own experiences as a white woman in an interracial relationship similar to or different from other white women in interracial relationships?

I provide the reader with an insight into my dilemmas and reflections in the search for a research methodology relevant and sensitive to exploring the personal narratives of the eight women research participants. I consider the notion of ‘bricolage’ and how this approach was initially envisaged and explored as potentially suitable. I describe how my feminist and multicultural principles informed my choice of the finally selected heuristic methodology. I explain my
approach to capturing the meaning, sensitivity and lived experiences of my
dialogue with the women research participants through the chosen heuristic
method. I also explain my understanding of heuristic research methodology and
its particular application to my research journey. This section takes the reader
through the stages of the heuristic process, which includes choice of question,
selection of participants, data collection involving the use of interviews and some
of the dilemmas that needed to be considered and then the analysis process.
Other important aspects of my research methodology are the importance of
reflexivity, the place for expressed emotions in research and insider/outsider
status issues. My writing takes a narrative form in which I am totally present, but
respectful of ethical research guidelines. There are many questions running
throughout the narrative which ensures that I am constantly challenging myself
and giving thought to my process, the participants and ethical issues. I also
consider the process of integration of ethical issues in the methodology.

My conceptual framework including issues of power that have informed my
methodological approach

As a white woman in an interracial relationship, I am under no illusion as to how I
may be perceived by ‘others’, through denigrating looks and offensive comments
by both family and strangers, that communicate a lack of awareness and
stereotypical assumptions about my gender, class and race. It was important that
my methodological approach incorporated an opportunity to offer a forum to
address these aspects as well as offering a more balanced viewpoint about such
issues relating to gender, and race in particular. The conceptual framework
informing my methodological approach includes feminist and multicultural
theoretical principles which have drawn attention to, and challenged issues such
as power dynamics in research and therapy (Reinharz, 1992; Frankenberg, 1993;
Oakley, 2000, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Proctor, 2014) amplifying marginalised voices. Although theoretical positions offered by Proctor (2014), Burman, (2013), Sue (2010) and Lago (2006) provide validating theoretical perspectives, it is my direct personal experience which has been the driving force for my choice of methodology. Robinson (2005) emphasises that external learnt knowledge should not supplant women’s subjective experiences. Thus, although the theory provides the foundation for informing my understanding, my personal reflections are more powerful and determine the meanings I make of my experience. In this thesis, race and gender are given more attention due to my research interests and personal experience of their social significance. It may be argued that this is particularly true for many white women in interracial relationships where negative stereotypes and assumptions are experienced through, for example, the white woman’s negative social status in her relationship with a black man. Although not strongly ‘Political’, I believe that feminist and antiracist principles constantly inform my values professionally, and personally, underpinning any engagement I have with others. This has been a strong thread throughout this thesis from start to finish and is implicit and embedded in my thinking and approach to writing. With this in mind, the pertinent issues which I endeavoured to consider included how my experiences are influenced by issues of race and gender where I sometimes experience people’s assumptions as marginalising and oppressive social impositions. Through reflexivity, I constantly seek to ensure a collaborative and egalitarian relationship in my counselling and research practice, through reflection on my constraints and biases. I recognise the personal power women can have to make choices in their lives, for example choosing to hold white privilege as a position of power. I recognise white women in interracial relationships may be dealing with racism and/or sexism in their lives and the power imbalance which exists in both spheres (Ifekwunigwe, 2001; Okitikpi, 2009; Harman, 2010), and
consideration of individual, structural, institutional and societal aspects of power is also required (Phoenix, 1991; Sue, 2010; Britton, 2013; Proctor, 2014).

With this in mind, I have considered and drawn on feminist (Proctor, 2014) and antiracist principles (Sue, 2010, 2015) to inform my choice of methodology. These principles were constantly reflected on throughout the research process. Examples of my reflections are shown in the Appendix 3. These principles also implicitly echo Moustakas's (1985) and Hiles's (2008) views of transparency and openness in the research process. My commitment to a transparent and reflexive position on power and its influence in the research process was demonstrated by:

1. In-depth interviews with an emphasis on facilitating the communication of research participants to present their own reality from their own perspective (Oakley, 2005, 2001; Harding, 1991; Reinharz, 1992; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Moustakas, 1990, 2001). I openly acknowledge the interview is a ‘power influenced relationship’ between two people (Proctor, 2014). The quality of the research was dependent on the acknowledgement of a number of factors; reciprocity, shared understanding, friendship and an understanding of power dynamics (Proctor, 2014; Devault, 1990; Douglas, 1985; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995 and Oakley, 1981). The issue of power is discussed by a number of feminist researchers, including Oakley (1981), Ribbens et al (1998), Hesse-Biber (2012) and Proctor (2014), who state that the breakdown of power relations can be enabled, as is implicit in the heuristic process, where there are shared identities and shared experiences between the interviewer and the interviewee. However, I could not assume that because my participants are women and are in interracial relationships, that we had shared identities or shared understandings. Both Reissman (1987) and Edwards (1990), identified in their research that ‘race’ and ‘class’ affected the research process and the interview relationship. Perceptions
of me as interviewer and ‘powerful in role’ (Proctor, 2014) by the interviewee may restrict the level of trust in sharing personal narratives in the interview. It may be that the participants saw me, as ‘researcher’, as ‘privileged’ and may thus potentially have been less likely to initially openly share their views or believe that I could fully understand their experiences. Throughout, I believed it was important to acknowledge potential difference and not to assume similarity solely based on gender.

2. My use of semi-structured interviews, rather than structured interviews, was seen as giving some element of control to participants through facilitating the discussion of issues that they may feel relevant to the topic and to themselves. Semi-structured interviews also allowed more of a dialogue involving a two-way process rather than an ‘interrogation’. Participants were able to ask questions and I attempted to be available and comfortable in answering these and to share my own thoughts. I understand that no matter how much I as a researcher tried to create a reciprocal, equal interview relationship, all researchers ultimately have the ‘power’ when interpreting women's words for academia. This is why I saw it as important to ensure that I considered aspects of the process of the interview.

Frankenberg (1993) states when discussing her own approach that “rather than maintaining the traditionally distant, apparently objective and so called blank face persona, I positioned myself as explicitly involved in the questions, at times sharing with interviewees either information about my own life or elements of my own analysis of racism as it developed through the research process” (p.30). This has echoes of my approach. However I was constantly aware that my own position may have been viewed differently by my participants who may have invested more power to me due to my position as researcher or through non verbal messages
conveyed by myself in the process. Oakley (1998) states that where a hierarchical relationship is acknowledged as existing, with attempts to minimise this, the resulting data are more intrinsically valid. However, can we ever have an absolute non hierarchical relationship in a research interview? I may expect a great deal from the participants in sharing their personal experiences. For some this may be the first occasion they have considered the issues and for others, they may feel they may have moved on and may find it difficult or irrelevant to return to their previous experiences or memories. However, what is shared and what is left out is of equal relevance and importance.

3. I saw it as my responsibility as the interviewer to engage in the process, build a strong relationship and enable participants to engage fully in the process, whether that was retelling their experience or discovering new aspects or ‘re-searching’ themselves. The interview was hoped to be collaborative process. As such during the interview, the participants and I found we could interact in different ways – as researcher, counsellor, professionals and women. Although the interview is not therapy, it can have therapeutic effects on both the participants and the researcher (Nunkoosing, 2005; Goodrum et al, 2007; Birch & Miller, 2000).

4. My own investment in the process through deciding to choose a subject that had personal relevance initiated an expectation, as part of the interview process, that I would be sharing my thoughts and feelings and experiences and would be open to my participants being curious about these experiences and my views. I was aware that this could be a positive enabling experience for the participants, but may at times have inhibited their engagement due to my ‘apparent’ knowledge about the subject and my own experiences. This perspective links with Proctor’s (2014) writing on the therapist having unspoken power in the relationship dynamic.
From this, I also needed to take care not to direct conversations where I wanted them to go because of my own experiences, and allow the women the choice of what they wished to talk about. What I may perceive as an issue, may not be the case for those I am meeting with.

5. I understood the important aspects of a feminist approach are that it pays attention to difference, gives voice to marginalised groups, offers a more creative approach to studies involving feelings as well as thoughts and looks at everyday experiences of women. Whilst it may be seen as biased from a positivist perspective, Renzetti (1997) suggests that “what sets this type of research apart is that is also good social science; that is, it seeks to give voice to and improve the life conditions of the marginalised, and it transforms social scientific inquiry from an academic exercise into an instrument of meaningful social change” (p.143). This informed my approach and choice of methodology due to the research suggesting women in interracial relationships would be seen as having marginalised voices (Twine, 2010b; Phoenix, 2009, 1991; Harman, 2013).

6. In addition, similarly to Bystydzienski’s (2011) recognition of the feminist approach to difference that ‘seeks to explicate complex relations between multiple dimensions’, I believed this feminist perspective on difference would be relevant to a study involving women in interracial relationships.

7. In my role of researcher I attempted to present women’s narratives as fairly and accurately as possible without minimising their content. This was an aspect emphasised by Moustakas (1990, 2001) as a necessary requirement of the heuristic process and again, this influenced my choice of heuristic methodology.
This latter point left me with the question of how did my own experience and identity of being in an interracial relationship inform my interaction and the researcher/participant relationship? Could I see life from the perspectives of others during our meeting? I could not assume that our whiteness was a common connection or the fact that we are both white women in interracial relationships had an exact shared meaning. There may be some similarity of experiences, but there may well be many differences. It was important to recognise that different aspects of the women’s and my social identity may be present at different times during the interview. Kelleher & Hillier (1996) cited by Carter (2004), state “whether respondents feel commonality or difference according to gender or cultural identify may fluctuate during the course of one interview” (p.86).

With all this in mind, I considered the importance of holistic reflexivity in the research process as identified by Hesse-Biber (2012) and in-depth interviews using a dialogical approach to attempt to counter any inequitable power dynamics (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Proctor, 2014; Oakley, 2005; Douglas, 1985; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Tang, 2002). Hesse-Biber (2012) states that “reflexivity exposes the exercise of power throughout the entire research process” (p.559) that it is a holistic process and “fosters sharing, engaged relationships and participatory knowledge building practices, hence producing less hierarchical and more ethical social research” (p.560). A heuristic methodological approach acknowledges these aspects thus offering the researcher and participants the opportunity to challenge power dynamics and create a balance between the researcher’s own voice and that of the participants. My aim throughout has been to conduct sensitive research through the constant use of reflexivity as shown in some of the examples in Appendix 3 where I am constantly challenging my thoughts and
feelings, asking questions of myself and the research process. The issue of power was an important aspect that I considered and reflected upon throughout the whole process even when on occasions this was uncomfortable in recognition of some of my own assumptions and tensions about particular participants. According to Hesse-Biber (2012) “a reflexive methodology seeks to describe reality within its multiple contexts, to encourage interaction between the researcher and participants, and to minimize power differentials during the research process” (p.567). These principles informed my approach and choice of heuristics which honours these views.

Additionally, my approach to the interview has involved a move away from the ‘traditional approach’ and used a creative, active and feminist approach (Douglas, 1985; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Oakley, 1981; Tang, 2002) which emphasises an egalitarian relationship between researcher and participant, reflexivity about the process, an understanding of contextual issues and the emotional impact of both women’s experiences on the interview process.

Feminists have challenged the traditional interview process, particularly the issue of power within that relationship. Oakley (1981) first suggested that the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved “when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship” (p.41). Oakley (1981) believed that this non-hierarchical relationship could be achieved by women interviewing women due to their shared gender, socialisation and life experiences, thus making the social distance minimal and less threatening. Subsequently, other feminists in discussing the issue about women interviewing women questioned whether gender and personal involvement
may not be enough and other social contexts such as race and class can influence the balance of power in the interview (Riessman, 1987; Edwards, 1993; Phoenix, 1994). Maynard (2002) identifies "matching interviewer and interviewee has been seen as one way of minimising exploitative power relations in qualitative research. These are serious issues in terms of good research practice" (p.36).

These aspects of my conceptual framework, including issues of power, that have informed my methodological approach are also demonstrated in my reflexive examples and further explanation to that above is given later in the methodology chapter.

**Participant recruitment and engagement**

This study is a qualitative, exploratory, heuristic enquiry of eight able bodied and heterosexual white women in interracial relationships. They were obtained by a snowball process (Browne, 2005) or an opportunistic method (Bryman and Teevan, 2005) through social and professional contacts. I had initially thought I would struggle to find participants, an experience that Caballero (2014) discussed in her paper describing the reluctance of women in interracial relationships to come forward for research purposes. However, I was amazed at the number of women who wanted to share their reflections. A number of factors may have influenced this such as the participants’ education status and confidence. I was excited by the women’s wish to participate as this appeared to give validity and recognition of the importance of this subject. I met eight women for in-depth, informal conversational interviews ensuring an emphasis on an egalitarian relationship, reciprocity and shared understanding (Oakley, 2005; Douglas, 1985; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Tang, 2002). This was to enable a flow of natural dialogue (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) rather than stilted question and answer
sessions. This approach is “consistent with the rhythm and flow of heuristic exploration and search for meaning” (Moustakas, 1990, p.47). In addition, I had additional informal and enlightening conversations with women who have shared their own experiences prior to the formal research interviews, and this has enhanced the interview dialogue with the eight research participants.

Whilst more potential participants were available, it was important to identify eight participants who would potentially offer a range of experiences. I realised this was difficult as this was not a homogeneous group of women in terms of age, outlook and life experience. I wanted to interview women who were educated and articulate who could bring a different perspective to the existing research on the issue of white women in interracial relationships through bringing into play their educational experiences to explore and analyse their lived experience of being in an interracial relationship and associated social experiences. The participant women were in the age range of 25 to 60. I travelled to meet all in their local environment, usually their homes or neighbourhood offices. There was a large geographical range in their living environments. I travelled to Edinburgh, Scotland for one participant with the rest being in London and the west and east midlands. Six were married and two were in long term relationships. All women had children, seven women had mixed-race children between the ages of eighteen months and twenty three years and one woman had formed a later interracial relationship with no children from this. Three of the women had university educated partners, three women’s partners had attended further education and two completed secondary education. Four women had a partner of African-Caribbean background, three an African background and one a Nepalese ethnic background.
'Why a qualitative approach’?

According to McLeod (2011) “the primary aim of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of how the social world is constructed” (p.3). This meaning making perspective underpins my heuristic study of white women’s experiences of being in an interracial relationship; how do they experience being in this relationship, and perceive the influence of internal and external social and interpersonal factors? Do other differences of race, social class and gender impact on their social construction of self, family and others? Integral to this study is my own lived experience and how, through the personal narrative of my participants, my own identity development is mirrored, reflected and how personal development occurred, reviewed, subjectively interpreted and processed for meaning.

I do not intend to discuss historical aspects of the development of qualitative research in-depth, as this is succinctly covered by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) who trace the growth of qualitative research over the past 40 years through eight identified phases up to the present day. They cover the influences of feminist researchers and the move towards more non-traditional forms of expressing research ideas, for example, narratives, and also the use of self in the process (Reissman, 2008; Richardson, 2007, 2007; Knowles and Cole, 2008; Ellis and Bochner, 2000). The work of feminists has been hugely instrumental in developing qualitative research and legitimising and accepting the use of narrative, subjectivity, reflexivity and a relational contextual approach to research. These are discussed later in this chapter. In support of this trend, Silverman (2007) notes that “qualitative researchers almost Pavlovian tendency to identify research design with interviews, has blinkered them to the possible gains of other kinds of data” (p.38). Silverman talks of an ‘interview society’ as a cultural environment which has made
the use of qualitative interviews uncritically attractive to researchers. He argues this may limit the potential richness of data that could be produced. Silverman argues that communication can be enhanced through other means such as use of visual and auditory experiences and access to experiences through the unconscious where material which was once conscious, but has been forgotten or suppressed is stored. This material may include experiences, feelings and memories. I believe Silverman did not go far enough in his argument. As well as interviews potentially limiting the data collected, it could be argued the analysis of the data may also require a more creative approach so as not to bring into play limitations in interpreting the data. This is something I considered when thinking about the relevance of methodological choices. I did not reject the value of interviews in this research. I carefully considered the value of the research interview and its application to my research topic and my research participants. Having chosen to engage with articulate, educated white women who ‘talk and reflect’ for their living as counsellors, teachers, social worker and researcher, I believed an interview was an appropriate research tool to engage with the women. Indeed, in this research, not to use interviews may have lost the potential for connection in expression and meaning. Creative, non-verbal methods of expression were offered to the women such as a collage, and art work, to express experiences as an opportunity to use alternative means of expression, but all chose to talk. With Silverman’s argument of the need for creativity in mind, the narrative themes expressed by the women have a creative analysis approach in the heuristic theme interpretation. This will be discussed further when discussing the heuristic process in detail.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) acknowledge there is a multitude of approaches, methodologies and methods used in qualitative research and thus, researchers
may use more than one in their studies. An example of such an approach is described by Kincheloe (2001) as “a complex, quilt-like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage” which offers a mosaic of interpretation. The ‘bricolage’ is seen as “a piecing together and editing parts into a whole with its own meaning and significance” using imaginative elements such as images, poetry or stories in the presentation of the formal research project (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The researcher is thus seen as a ‘bricoleur’. They explore different perspectives of socially privileged and the marginalised in relation to formations of race, class, gender and sexuality. Denzin and Lincoln describe these bricoleurs as living on the boundaries of what is typically seen as acceptable research practice and that the most important ‘border work’ is in feminist and race-ethnic studies. This is particularly relevant to my research as white women in interracial relationships are often described as marginalised, and themselves living on the borders of what is acceptable in white dominated society (Dalmage, 2003). Etherington (2004b) talks of the bricolage being “underpinned by a heuristic journey of discovery” (p.50). Also, West (2001) likens heuristic research to bricolage in which “a variety of methods are used to elucidate the research topic” (p.2). So my underlying principles are informed by heuristic, feminist, multicultural and arts methodological approaches.
Ontology and epistemological underpinnings

Picture 5: The Methodological Wall

This picture encapsulates my emotional experience of engaging with ontology and epistemology – facing a brick wall, wondering and questioning my way forward. I am faced with confusing, sometimes contradictory and overlapping views which all have validity. So where do I fit? The questions of ontological realities and epistemological knowledge leave me with tensions; does this mirror my experience of social worlds being messy, confusing and full of tensions? My stance throughout this research is holistic, integrating ontology, epistemology, methodology and method and seeing research as a process analogous to building a house. The foundation (ontology=constructivist-interpretivist) gives a firm ontological base. The architect’s drawings (epistemology=social constructionist) form the knowledge base for the house design. The construction
(methodology=heuristic) informs the building process; is it co-constructed or self built and what building materials do I need? The building process is similar to my interviews and creative presentation approaches. This then results in the need for quality control of the building; a recognition of the need for constant questioning of myself, to hold in mind I am seeking to illuminate the perspectives of the participants in their social contexts and how these may have been shaped by their social experiences (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2005) this holistic, integrative and constructivist approach gives researchers the opportunity to “hear the voices of those who are silenced, othered and marginalised by the dominant social order” (p.28) and express their experiences in their own words. Following Ponterotto’s (2005) perspective, I believe my study sits predominantly within the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm. Ponterotto (2005) argues the constructivist-interpretivist posits there being multiple meanings of the person experiencing the phenomenon, as well as multiple interpretations by the researcher (p.130). There is an emphasis on a subjective stance (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Interpersonal and intrapersonal subjective realities are said to be interpreted through social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values (Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Grbich, 2007). This meaning making takes place through a socialisation process in different social contexts such as family, community, school and media. We learn to recognise, construct, reconstruct and understand ourselves in these different settings. Therefore our reality is socially constructed (Burr, 1995; Berger and Luckmann, 1999) I also believe reality emanates from a social historical context but my engagement in the research process places an emphasis on a dialectical approach between researcher and participant. As such, constructivism-interpretism and critical ideological approaches tend to form the conceptual base for multicultural research (Ponterotto, 2005; Morris, 2007; Ramji, 2009).
As identified, my work is informed by feminist and multicultural principles as well as my own therapeutic stance as a counsellor in being open to the experiences and personal reflections of others and the meanings they attribute to these. From this, I am drawn to qualitative research because, as a therapist, I work mainly from a person-centred perspective, valuing the individual, attending to their individual narratives, hearing their voices, being non-judgemental in trying to understand their perspective, taking into account their multiple, intersecting experiences of gender, race, class, sexuality and disability. Thus having an awareness of social constructionism and how individuals make sense of their world and their experiences in the context of their interaction with others and the social world, I hope to ensure I take into account multiple individual perspectives.

White women in interracial relationships and their lived experiences are at the centre of the enquiry, so this study is about making women more visible (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). As these women are in interracial relationships, some of their experiences may be about the impact of race on their partners, themselves and/or their families. It is accepted by much of the scientific and academic world that class, race and gender are socially constructed (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Gunaratnam, 2003; Ramji, 2009; Morris, 2007). Ideas about race were historically based on a belief that people could be divided biologically (Fryer, 1984; Okitikpi, 2009) thus assuming there were physical and cognitive differences and people were ‘sorted’ accordingly into categories. Skin difference became a marker of difference and social hierarchy was established using black and white as the visible markers. This created symbolic and imagined differences (Fryer, 1984; Dalal, 2006) which keeps the black and white worlds separate maintaining a binary view of superior vs inferior
and good vs bad. As populations 'imbibe' these views, albeit often unconsciously, a social hierarchy is established and racism subsequently creates and maintains the social boundaries between black and white. Social constructions of race have become embedded in social contexts such as political, families, communities and schools which give meaning to lived social experiences of people (Fryer, 1984; Dalal, 2006; Morris, 2007; Ramji, 2009). This is where I overlap into a critical stance, recognising that realities about race and gender are created by social bias. Having this view drives me to uncover the contradictory notions of others which may be hidden or constructed through everyday experiences. My own experience has been movement from a traditional, stuck, fixed position to a desire for change because race/racism is a social taboo through people’s avoidance to recognise the impact (Sue, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Lago, 2006). As a consequence of my experiences I agree with the viewpoint of Addy (2008) that “the invisible whiteness of being creates a tangled and sticky web of racial dominance and cultural racism” (p.10). I hope through my research using a qualitative, heuristic approach to honour the subjective lived experiences of white women in interracial relationships, while recognising my subjective stance as a researcher to give some meaning to complex and variously interpreted experiences. However, Morris (2007) notes many researchers rely on a combination of their own perceptions and experiences which are reliant on dominant oppressive views and, as a result, offer or provide negatively subjective and inaccurate attributions of participants’, thus offering a "casual approach to race which does not fully attend to how this complex construct is constructed, negotiated and reaffirmed through interactions" (p.412). It is important to acknowledge the complexity of race and how this impacts on our understanding of others and the impact on their life opportunities. According to Akamatsu (2002, p.50) cited in Addy (2008)
“…if cultural racism is like the air we breathe; if it is everywhere amongst us; if it is within the social discourses and social histories that shape our identities; then we will enact racist thoughts and practices without necessarily realising that we are doing so, or realising the effects on other peoples' lives” (p.12).

This is true for the policy maker, the counselling practitioner and the researcher influencing the policy maker and counsellor. These are often linked together in a web of power, attempting to promote their own hidden quilt of meaning, unexposed, unstated and untested in assumptions of accuracy, sensitivity, altruism and potential respect on the recipient.

With this in mind, hooks (1995) challenged people to consider intersectionality of race, class and gender as it is difficult to separate and should be considered together, in a contextualised whole, looking at how each impact on the individuals’ sense of self as well as how they relate together and affect their lives. Again, for some women in interracial relationships, the emphasis may differ according to their context and their experiences. So it is useful to consider how white women in interracial relationships are affected by dominant, social and cultural views of such relationships, particularly as historically these have been viewed negatively with women seen as crossing boundaries of ‘the more dominant social norms’ (Dalmage, 2003). Their perceived position as women, partners and mothers will be affected by socially and culturally constructed contexts interacting and intersecting with the socially and politically weighted notions of race, social class and associated privilege (Dalmage, 2003).

There is an increasing awareness of intersectionality and all research should consider the intersection of different systems of social oppression (Moodley, 2009; Burman, 2004). McDowell and Fang (2007) suggest a new approach to research
informed by “critical feminist and multicultural theories that are supportive of equity and inclusion and centred on concerns of those inhabiting traditionally marginalised and oppressed social locations” (p.551). Additionally, McDowell and Fang (2007) argue discussions of race or issues relating to race often are surrounded by social tensions or personal discomfort when talking about these issues and, as such, often such discomfort is not addressed in research. If I as a researcher do not reflect or acknowledge these issues, I am less likely to detect, collect, analyse and explore such discomfort in my methodological approach (McDowell and Fang, 2007). To allow me to understand and gain the essence of these meanings, I found it was important to continually challenge and confront my own racialised and cultural position in conducting this research. This in turn gives voice to people who have often been silenced or misrepresented and placed on the margins.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argue research is often seen through the lens of the white, middle-class male and therefore may not be truly reflexive of what is important to the participants’ gender and socially different experiences at the centre of the research process. Careful personal challenging and use of reflexivity is necessary to check the balance of power and consider socio-political contexts to attend to the multiple intersectional issues of class, race and gender and ask the question ‘What are the lived realities of the participants?’ Even where there is apparent commonality in researcher and participant, it may not always produce a connection (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). For example, Phoenix (1994), a black female researcher interviewing women participants, found she did not always get the rapport through gender identification, because there were what she perceived to be overriding or ‘higher order’ socially influenced issues such as social class and race, affecting social engagement and personal comfort. From this, I realised
that I needed to reflect on my assumptions of assumed commonalty with the research participants and attempt to bridge any disconnections and tensions in the interview process. Phoenix’s (1994) finding tends to confirm that beliefs about ourselves and others are shaped by deep and complex socio-political variables and relationships that go beyond our initial and surface engagement. I recognise such beliefs and assumptions may be rigidly maintained, with no sharing of ‘the quilt’ to ensure greater subjective connection in meaning and understanding. With this in mind, an exploration of the heuristic approach and its use in this research will now be provided.

Heuristic Methodology

Use of the heuristic process in this research

“I believe that the projects we undertake related to other people’s lives are inextricably connected to the meanings and values we are working through in our own lives” (Bochner, 2001, p.138).

According to Douglass and Moustakas (1985), heuristics offers “an attitude with which to approach research, but does not prescribe a methodology. It is the focus on human experience and that person’s reflexive search, awareness and discovering that constitutes the essential core of heuristic investigation” (p.42). According to Bright and Harrison (2013) heuristic investigation ontology is well-aligned with the values of counselling. It is very much process-focused rather than task-focused. My process of choosing the methodology involved various stages from initially trying to resist my leaning towards heuristic enquiry, thinking that a thematic analysis would be more appropriate for the research enquiry task. I tried to rationalise and find reasons to resist the heuristic process, but kept being pulled back from within to heuristic enquiry. Maybe the personal element would allow me to continue my reflexive quilt making journey in making links with others and
understanding myself and through the experiences of others, make sense of these experiences and my identity. One reluctance to engage in this was an underlying fear of personal vulnerability, exposing my personal self and, from an academic perspective, knowing this methodology is perceived as marginal and difficult to meet the required criteria for academic rigour and strict investigative approach. For example, Sela-Smith (2002) researched and critiqued the heuristic approach, looking at 28 theses out of which, she argued, only three were truly heuristic as most lacked sufficient personal involvement and engagement from a heuristic ethos, relying on external aspects rather than internal experience. Etherington (2004a) used heuristic methodology in her research and subsequently described it as “a methodology of its time” and suggested more narrative and reflexive approaches have superseded the heuristic approach. McLeod (2011) believed heuristic studies failed to get to the point of publication “because they are inherently unboundaried and do not readily fit into academic schedules” (p.208). Despite the views of Etherington and McLeod, the heuristic approach felt highly relevant for my research due to the personally enabling element, the reflexivity and the potential for transformational aspects to self which are integral aspects of my development as a counsellor. I could also see the links with humanistic counselling due to Rogers and Maslow being contemporaries of Moustakas, with a belief in “key aspects such as each person having within them the potential for growth, creativity and meaningful self-expression” (McLeod, 2011, p.205). Creativity and meaningful self-expression are part of ‘the quilt making process,’ linking others in their shared commonality of meaning and expression central to a heuristic approach.
Heuristics takes the research process to a deeper personal level, acknowledging the subjective and personal as part of the research from start to finish and that all aspects are relevant to the research. According to Hiles (2008)

“...heuristic inquiry involves more than the researcher simply analyzing their own experience. Nor is it a variation of phenomenological inquiry...It sets out a systematic and transparent methodology for self inquiry” (p.1).

As I experienced in this research, many writers acknowledge that self is always present (Richardson, 2000; Bochner, 2001), and that subjectivity enhances the writing and evokes imagination as well as increasing the awareness of others at a deeper level (Muncey, 2010; Sparkes, 2000; Ellis and Bochner, 2000). According to Moustakas (1990), one of the key elements of heuristic enquiry is that the researcher:

“must have had a direct personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated. There must have been actual autobiographical connections. It also must have social context significance because it is about understanding the world in which we live” (p.14).

Heuristic enquiry recognises and encourages the researcher's subjectivity and sees this as an important aspect of the process. From the position of subjectivity, I am a white woman in an interracial relationship, so have direct experience and I am still in the process of understanding how these experiences have impacted on my identity. My experiences are valid and incorporated with those of the participants. According to Moustakas (1990), it is the researcher who creates the story that depicts the meanings and essences of these experiences. In her critique of the heuristic approach, Sella-Smith (2002) identified six components that are intrinsic to heuristic enquiry:

"the researcher has experienced what is being researched, the researcher makes reference to a passionate concern that causes the investigator to reach inward to tacit awareness, the research indicates
surrender to the question, self dialogue, the search is a self-search and evidence of transformation has taken place by way of a story” (p.69).

Sella-Smith found that many researchers inaccurately studied external situations of the participant, rather than internal experiences of themselves, and the inclusion of the participants seemed to create a distraction from the necessary reflection on the internal process of the researcher. Whilst I was keen to explore my own experiences, I found a tension in trying to balance my own narrative with writing a thematic analysis of the participants’ narratives to embrace the academic writing criteria. Sela-Smith also found there was confusion around use of language between feeling, reporting and observation between internal connections and external verbal reporting for research writing purposes and very often there was a shift from self-search to ‘observation of the other’, which confirmed my own dilemmas and tensions. The heuristic process sends the researcher back into self to a deeper level. During the whole process I attempted to hold on to all these elements in my knowledge building research process.

Like any qualitative approach to research, there are advantages and disadvantages to using a heuristic approach. For me, it appeared to honour the depth of human experience for individuals. It incorporated the possibility of alternative forms of expression such as poetry, art, stories. Although, in common with McLeod (2011), I believed the heuristic approach initially appeared ‘unboundaried’, this was only in the initial stages. When I achieved a better working understanding of the process, I later took the view of Sella-Smith (2002) and Etherington (2004) finding it to be rigorous and disciplined, often expanding understanding into areas previously untouched by the limitations of other methodologies. I found the heuristic approach to be one that suited my research focus and topic involving the personal, subjective and emotional. In addition, the
allowance of ‘the data of experience’ was important in aiding my understanding of the participant’s world views and experience.

According to Douglass and Moustakas (1985) “heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurement; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behaviours” (p.42). The concepts of heuristics involve self-dialogue, intuition, in-dwelling, focusing and internal frame of reference (Moustakas, 1990, p.15-27). These are summarised in appendix 4. The heuristic stage process used in this research will now be discussed to allow the reader to see my approach to ‘gathering and analysing the data’ of interview as the heuristic process was found to offer both ‘an attitude’ to ‘data collection’ and a ‘functional analysis’ approach to the narrative data though its suggested organisational strategies:

The stages of a heuristic inquiry

Moustakas (1990) describes six stages to guide heuristic inquiry research. I will discuss each to guide the reader through my chosen process and my emotions and thoughts involved in each stage. This was an experiential pathway with a number of avenues and parallel process occurring simultaneously.

Stage 1 - Initial engagement.

This is when researchers start to think about and connect with an interest which awakens a passion to pursue further. I was aware of the general area of research, but not the specific focus in particular. Being on the doctorate brought other issues to the surface. For example, I questioned my ability to actually complete a doctorate and whether I would be emotionally robust enough and sufficiently intellectually able to succeed. Two events occurred which were particularly
relevant. The first was a conference in the UK around mothers of ‘mixed-race’ children at which I presented a paper, and the second was a conference in Canada in relation to ‘mixed-race’ at which I presented a workshop. The crystallisation had taken three years to decide specifically what I wanted to research. In the first year, I was thinking that I was interested in whether attitudes had changed towards women in interracial relationships but later, this became a self-search about my own experiences and identity. Why did I choose this? It felt a known and sensitive, but worthy area; I had experience and knowledge; it felt less frightening. At the time I envisaged a clear objective piece of empirical research; how unaware was I about the emotional and methodological roller coaster I was about to embark on. The first two years were about getting into the process of the academic environment, questioning self, giving myself permission to be more creative in my writing and viewing the doctorate through a different lens. It was completely different to previous academic experiences, staying safe in my topic and maintaining an interest and a realisation that there was ‘a long way to go’. I knew I wished to pursue the topic, but lacked clarity and certainty and confidence. I had the passion and the personal experience. There were some experiences on the course which led to confirming my subject choice, for example, a focus group which highlighted how white women were still socially misrepresented. I had a lot of questioning conversations with myself about validity, my over-emotional involvement in the topic and at that stage I was really unaware of the numerous different methodological approaches and their relevance and application to my choice of study. There were many fears, uncertainties and questions about how to get to the heart of the inquiry. Why was I drawn to this area of research? I had questions about my own identity and the impact of the relationship of this on my sense of self. This led to identifying a need to explore some of these questions through an assignment on my own racial identity
development to identify process implications and start to clarify what research I wished to undertake.

Stage 2 - Immersion

During this stage the researcher immerses self in the topic fully in daily life. According to Moustakas (1990) “once the question is discovered and its terms defined and clarified, the researcher lives the question in waking, sleeping and even dream stages” (p.28). In this stage, I started to question and look at myself differently and found myself talking more about the topic, exploring this in-depth and getting increasingly emotional and frustrated about others’ perceived lack of awareness, thus confirming my wish to pursue this as an academic process of self development. Was this truly other’s lack of awareness or a reflection of my own rigidly held views, a dogmatic overlay, showing a lack of tolerance of the views of others? During this period I became more sensitised to issues of racism and oppression and challenging stereotypes, and also my views in more depth through conversations with other women who were in interracial relationships. I found myself moving from feeling isolated to making numerous, enlightening connections with women in interracial relationships. I also delivered a talk at the University of Manchester student conference in 2012 and the general feedback was of my passion for the topic. During this period of self exploration, the process of identifying and selection of participants took place.

Issues about self disclosure, reflexivity and ethical principles are discussed later in the thesis and were all considered during this time of Immersion. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and themes identified. Following this, I produced collages which were my creative representations of the interviews. Heuristic enquiry involves dialogue and reflexive meetings in which narratives of
the women’s lived experiences are gathered. The collection of themes, essences, qualities and feelings was a deeply involving process. Threaded through this is my reflexive process of my experiences as a researcher and also as a woman who has personal experience of this phenomenon to enable the joining of the pieces to make a visually consolidating, creative representation of narrative meanings through the quilt.

I followed further guidelines for organising the narrative data provided by Moustakas (1990, 2001). This resulted in discussing thematic structures and including significant impact words from the participants to produce a ‘map of meaning’, by picking out the essential themes reflected in their language. Secondly, I included individual depictions which are the individual portraits of the women participants and their reflections which were used to illustrate and illuminate the subject themes which have been identified from the data. I completed some collages following my immersion in the participants’ interviews to aid my reflection on meaning and to visually represent the participant’s meaning of their experiences through a creative arts process (Appendix 6). These offer a visual representation, a sensory response, an alternative way of expression, and the use of symbolic images gives a ‘sense’ of something rather than a literal explanation. I was influenced by Butler-Kisber's (2008) view that a collage gives a more holistic, embodied and alternative representational form of meaning making where ‘meaning’ is not just understood to be a themed construction of what verbal text represents (p.268). I hoped the quilt, the collage and verbal theme interpretation would together enhance understanding of the women’s stories, show poignancy and open up other avenues for reflection and understanding. As written texts often need to go through numerous drafts and interpretations prior to completion so too, according to Butler-Kisber (2008):
“the collage process may go through a number of iterations before images are glued, but it results in a metaphorical product that is subject to or available for different responses, providing alternate ways for interpreting both conscious and unconscious ideas” (p.269).

This was an aspect of my journey, having numerous changes in direction as a result of new understandings creating new growth, new development and increased levels of awareness. This was also impacted on by two other events that occurred around this time which had a marked personal impact. I had an interview with another doctorate student regarding culture and an interview with another researcher about the impact of client work on myself. The significance of these was the realisation that the impact of culture in the counselling relationship could not be overlooked and remained an important component in the counselling process. This needed to be seen in the context of the impact of a counselling case on myself of a woman in an interracial relationship who appeared to be progressing through a similar, but an historical, personal relationship journey to myself. Both were linked to my thoughts and feelings confirming and contributing to my decision to follow my research path. The seeds were sown and needed nourishment and care in order to grow. This led to the next stage of incubation.

Stage 3 – Incubation

According to Moustakas (1990) during this phase “the researcher retreats from the intense focus on the question…..Although detached from the question…on another level, expansion of knowledge is taking place” (p.28).

So I stepped off the roller-coaster, feeling overwhelmed by the whole process which led again to questioning myself and questioning the validity of the research. I was weary and needed a break. I had been regularly producing a changing collage to aid my understanding of the research meaning and noticed that this had
become overwhelming, disorganised and messy, so I dismantled it. I had retreated from the practical and emotional elements of the research process due to feeling overwhelmed. Like the seed, the thesis needed to be left alone. I needed to be left alone and allow the inner self awareness to grow rather than meddling with it. Polyani (1966) states that discovery does not happen through over concentrated efforts but "more often comes in a flash after a period of rest or distraction.....a process of spontaneous mental reorganisation uncontrolled by conscious effort" (p.34). This leads to illumination, like the seed, it bursts through the soil so the essence of the research comes into awareness.

Stage 4 – Illumination

At this stage according to Moustakas (1990) “illumination as such is a breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes” (p.29). When reflecting, I discovered new pathways and found I was seeing aspects I had not been aware of previously in the intense emotions expressed by the participants and the realisation that they collectively mirrored my own experience of racial consciousness development from naivety to enlightenment. I was reminded of the situation when I could not remember a word, the more I focused, the less I could remember, but as soon as I was distracted or relaxed, that memory returned. In the process of my research analysis I sought to reveal the essences and the meanings of these women’s experiences of being in an interracial relationship. I became totally engaged and immersed in this discovery process and fully present with the women. I was connecting with similarities and differences in my own experience. I hoped to illuminate and become reflexive about each woman’s experience. This process included: remaining true, representing their voices, recognition that each was an individual and their experiences were unique. There may be some commonality in aspects of
their experiences, but there were also many differences which were influenced by their own family attachment, by social class and gender perceptions. I did not seek to find answers or make judgements but hoped to illuminate these experiences so that others may develop an understanding and new awareness of the essence of these experiences and how these may, or may not, impact on individuals in different ways. Throughout the process I was conscious of my own story. It was essential that I ensured I was receptive to every participant’s experience, although some I struggled with, and spent many hours on the interview transcriptions, listening to the interviews to ensure I saw their experience from their own perspective and experience. I tried hard to give all equal value - each interview had meaning and value and contributed to the essence of individuals’ experiences. The women held a range of beliefs as initially perceived by me as not being ‘aware’, to enlightened articulation and increased acceptance of how others are perceived, received and discussed issues of difference. I began to recognise that women’s different social experiences impacted on their perceptions of issues that I felt strongly about. This newly found self-awareness moved me further along the heuristic research process.

Stage 5 – Explication

According to Moustakas (1990) this is the time for the researcher “to fully examine what is awakened in consciousness in order to understand its various layers of meaning (p.31)”. This involves spending increasing time going through the interviews and the transcriptions and my own personal reflections and feelings as part of that process. At this stage, there evolved a deeper analysis of the themes and their qualities, making sense of the themes and noting any surprises. I also at this point created another collage to explore my conceptions and understandings of others, further feeling more at ease with the research process and methodology
and reflecting deeply on issues in the previous stage. During this period, there was a realisation of the impact of participants on myself and their mirroring my journey and how, coincidentally, the participants’ experiences ranged from my early past experiences of my ‘lack of racial awareness’, to an understanding similar to my present awareness, which was an enormous surprise as each woman in the cohort appeared to be a reflection of the continuum of development in my own journey of personal discovery. It was as if I was holding up a mirror of my life and my understanding of my own identity and life experience was being reflected back to me.

![Picture 6: Mirror image of stages of development](image)

**Stage 6 – Creative Synthesis**

This is seen as the final stage in a heuristic research method. This is about pulling all the evidence together in a creative format, which could be a picture, painting, a
poem or a collage, which, according to Moustakas (1990), “in this way the experience as a whole is presented and unlike most research studies, the individual persons remain intact” (p.51). This is about taking all the parts of the research experience and creating a whole synthesis of meaning:

“Learning that proceeds heuristically has a path of its own. It is self-directed, self-motivated and open to spontaneous shift. It defies the shackles of convention and tradition…..It pushes beyond the known, the expected or the merely possible. Without the restraining leash of formal hypotheses, and free from external methodological structures that limit awareness or channel it, the one who searches heuristically may draw on the perceptual powers afforded by…..direct experience” (Douglas and Moustakas, 1985, p.44).

Specific Methodological considerations

I felt I needed to consider in depth a number of important methodological issues related to engaging in the research process including my positionality as an insider, the relevance of self disclosure, the importance of reflexivity and emotion in research and also considering relational aspects of the interview process. According to Abell, Locke, Condor, Gibson and Stevenson (2006), the “construction of similarity between interviewer and respondent within the interview situation may be linked to the interviewer’s position as either an insider or an outsider” (p.223). This position will impact on what is shared or not shared within the interview situation, and how information and communication itself is conveyed, recognising that assumptions may be made about commonality and differences by both parties in the research relationship. Research by Song and Parker (1995) as well as Phoenix (1994) found assumptions were often made by the interviewees regarding the cultural identity of the researcher and this shaped the interview process either by the interviewees withholding or disclosing certain kinds of information based upon their assumptions of the researchers. This was found to be particularly so in assumptions of interviewees about researcher’s perceived
likely experiences of racism (Song and Parker, 1995). Constructions of similarity or dissimilarity can also make a difference ‘in reverse’ in terms of the assumptions of the researcher about the participants in the research and impact on what is asked and what is not asked and then subsequently how the data is analysed.

**Self disclosure**

Self-disclosure by the researcher may be useful in initiating a topic, building relationships and offering more of a feeling of reciprocity in the research relationship. To facilitate a sense of sharing and connectedness, some personal self-disclosure was involved. This was particularly so in the initial part of the meeting, where I believed, to enable participants to feel safe and secure, they needed to know of my personal interest in the research topic through being in an interracial relationship. This may go against the more traditional view of the research relationship where researchers are expected to ‘keep themselves out’ of the interview process and project high levels of ‘objectivity and personal distance’.

However, interviewer self-disclosure is advocated as an important aspect of the research enhancing relationship, particularly in topics around race and culture (Song and Parker, 1995). Self-disclosure enables the interviewer to build a bridge between themselves and the participant, stressing the importance of the interactional aspect of the relationship. Personal disclosure suggests a process of ‘being with’ rather than ‘taking from’ the individual, and acknowledges that both contribute equally to the interview process through a sharing and giving relationship. The women commented that it helped them to engage with the discussion knowing that my interest stemmed from my own personal experiences. This appeared to help them relax and provide more information through feeling less ‘judged’.
However, commonalties are not without difficulty. The difficulties of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’ were identified by Ramji (2008), who asserted the importance of not being blind to differences when these may blind us to commonalities. In my research, I constantly had to consider differences and sameness and linkage and ensure these did not unintentionally interfere and reduce my engagement and reflection on the process of the narrative data and analysis and identification of emerging themes. Reay (2012) identifies three crucial ‘Rs’ to consider in the research process, which are ‘recognises’, ‘respects’ and ‘responds to differences’ in a process of continuous interrogation or critical challenging of the self and others. With this, comes a realisation that the complexity of subjectivity requires enhanced levels of vigilance, reflexivity and knowing oneself as I became immersed in the very data under study and increasingly submerged in the process with growing levels of personal connection and increased emotions being uncovered.

‘Race’

The study of race has historically been about black people of African origin and researchers have recognised that ‘race’ of the interviewer may affect the research process and outcome (Ramji, 2009; Twine and Warren, 2000). An ‘outsider’ status may lead to mistrust or prohibit sharing. It has been ‘assumed’ or taken for granted that a black researcher will be more acceptable and knowledgeable to black participants. Some black researchers have challenged this perspective (Phoenix, 1994; Twine and Warren, 2000). In their experience, although being black gave them insider status, other variables such as class, education, marital status, affected the research process. They found it important to recognise the potential similarities of impact of ‘insider’ and differences of ‘outsider’ status (Warren and Twine, 2000). Also, Islam (2000) found although she was perceived
as an ‘insider’ by the white academic world, due to her being a Bangladeshi woman, the Bangladeshi community questioned this commonality of status because her research intent was to allow ‘outsiders’ to see their representation. This disclosure was perceived as allowing increased vulnerability, ‘public outing’ or betrayal. This left Islam (2000) questioning the actuality of perceived insider/outsider status influence and who the research was of value for. Therefore, I could not assume my status gave me automatic parity and connection. For example, I struggled in one interview where the woman held, what I perceived, as a colour-blind stance due to the nature of her social understanding. This is an example of the continued reflection and personal assessment of how my values, if not identified and acknowledged, could shape and potentially distort the research. Of particular significance was my opinion of the need for women in an interracial relationship to acknowledge the impact of racism on themselves, their partner, family and their relationships. I needed to be aware this may not be their view or experience and realised I had to manage my own assumptions about this. Whilst the impact of racism may be an issue that I am very much aware of, or in touch with, other people may not have given much thought to the impact of racism or had the experiences I have, or have processed them in the same way. From this, there arose differences in participant and researcher racial identity development, socio-political awareness and differences in the processing and acknowledging of experience. As well as the differences implied by the notion of ‘race’, my shared ‘whiteness’ with the participants needed to be explicitly considered in the process. An early writer, Frankenberg (1993) argued that for many white people, "colour-blindness - a mode of thinking about race organised around an effort to not see or acknowledge race differences – was the polite language of race" (p. 142). This was an issue that arose in some of my interviews and will be discussed later. According to Twine (2000):
“underpinning any research methodology will be concerns about how knowledge about how racial and social inequalities are produced and the instability and unnaturalness of ‘race’ and the uneven meanings can have methodological consequences, even when research is not directly focused on issues of race or racism” (p.27).

I needed to become increasingly and actively attentive in the interview to possible contradictions. Regardless, I had to develop empathy with the women's views and the way in which they had processed their experiences to make their own meanings of their experiences.

I did not wish to be yet another white researcher interviewing white respondents on issues of race and fail to acknowledge our ‘whiteness’ and the impact on ourselves of being white. With this in mind, De Vault (1995), states that “race and ethnicity are often relevant to research even when not explicit and hearing race and ethnicity in our talk with informants, requires active attention and analysis” (p.613). In providing some response to my dilemmas, the view of Young (2004) appears relevant. Young (2004) in Ramji (2008) states:

“while researchers cannot be in full control of how they are located by the people who they study, they can think about the fieldwork experience as involving an amalgamation of insider and outsider positionings that come together to open up, as well as resist, access to data. The challenge then is for researchers to strive to maintain a critical reflexivity” (p.66). This leads on to the importance of reflexivity in this research.

The importance of reflexivity in research

The emphasis in qualitative research is on researcher reflexivity as part of the process. Reflexivity in research involves a range of activities from checking for
personal bias to using oneself in the research process such as in autoethnography or heuristics (Ellis and Bochner, 1996; Moustakas 1985). Although autoethnography was not my chosen approach, I was influenced by the early writings of Douglas (1985) who talked about immersion and personal involvement in the research process and the importance of self understanding as a starting point before trying to understand participants. Douglas stressed the importance of constant self-reflection throughout the process to develop a balanced and emotionally attuned environment where there is mutual disclosure at a deep level of interaction. This I strived to achieve and needed to keep reminding myself of the importance to do so. As Etherington (2004) also identifies, reflexivity “requires self awareness, but is more than self-awareness in that it creates a dynamic process of interaction within and between ourselves and our participants, and the data that inform decisions, actions and interpretations at all stages of research” (p.36). Finlay and Gough (2003) go further to stress that part of critical self-reflection requires thoughts about the "ways in which researchers' social background, assumptions, positioning and behaviour impact on the research process" (p.ix). It would appear the importance of reflexivity cannot be underestimated from a qualitative methodological standpoint. However, placing myself in the research process comes with potential risks and also likely criticism, such as being seen as self-indulgent, lacking ‘objectivity’ or not being sufficiently scientifically rigorous. However, my experience in incorporating a reflexive approach in this research was that it felt more personally demanding and rigorous in interpretation of ‘the data’, than traditional methodological approaches (Schurich, 1995) in the emotion and personal linkage required to engage with the experiences of others on a topic I was personally connected with. My experience was one of the process of reflexivity providing deeper insight and critical scrutiny of all aspects of the research process. Throughout the process of interviewing, analysis and
discussion I constantly engaged in a reflexive process to ensure I maintained an ethical stance, challenging myself to question every aspect of my engagement in the process. Some examples are in Appendix 3. I also found being able to use creative forms of expression, I was engaging in a deeper reflexive process.

The process of reflexivity has become established and is now essential to any practice based qualitative research (Etherington, 2004a; Finlay and Gough, 2003; Fox, Martin and Green, 2007) particularly in a counselling related topic where I was essentially discovering information to provide improved awareness of need and focussed services for what may be a disenfranchised or marginalised group. In my research, I used reflexivity in various ways from checking for personal judgement, through to in-depth integration into methodology. This sometimes involved reflecting on the impact on myself of the individuals and their narratives, and the impact of myself on the participants. I saw the use of reflexivity as a thread woven through the tapestry of ‘the quilt’, an integral part of connecting the meaning of ‘the quilt’. As is an essential integral part of a heuristic study, I believed it important to ensure reflexivity contributed to the research process.

According to Etherington (2004b):

“We need to be aware of how our own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment and social and personal history inform us as we dialogue with participants, transcribe their conversations with us and write our representations of the work, then perhaps we come close to the rigour that is required of good qualitative research” (p.32).

As a therapist, the emphasis in my work is about building relationships, having core counselling process conditions in place to enable the client to be heard, enabling dialogue that occurs in the room and reflexive practice that takes place both inside and outside the counselling encounter. I am part of that relationship and bring with me my experiences, knowledge and commitment to understanding
contextual issues. I listen to my internal self in this process and the impact of the client’s story and the interconnection of our relationship on myself. This view allowed me to better understand my position in the insider/outsider debate and confirmed the need for a reflexive process to be involved as has been discussed.

**The place of emotion in academic research**

Emotions and personal experiences add another dimension to the research. With challenges, particularly from feminist researchers, the incorporation of different ways of interviewing, researcher reflexivity, and an ability to research ‘process’ appear to be more generally accepted. However, according to Widdowfield (2000) there is “less appreciation that there is a two way relationship in research; not only does the researcher affect the research process, but they themselves are affected by the process” (p.200). It was important to acknowledge that emotions were often an integral part of the process in this research. As Widdowfield argues, emotions not only affect the way research is carried out, but may contribute to whether it is actually completed. Indeed, I experienced what Widdowfield described as ‘paralysis’ where researchers, such as myself, on topics which they are emotionally linked to, have been unable to continue due to distressing or debilitating emotions arising out of the research process. I experienced this several times in the research process; sometimes wanting not to complete ‘the quilt’, sometimes wanting to unravel ‘the quilt’ to start again and sometimes wanting to permanently throw ‘the quilt’ away. According to Reissman (2002) intense contact with participants in interviews and with the data through repetitive reading and immersion, tends to promote some identification with participants and recognition in their role of sewing ‘the quilt’. This helped me move on in my attempt to connect with the participants and better manage my own emotions. For this, I was influenced by Stanko’s (1997) use of reflexivity to explore and cope with
her experiences of dealing with anger, fear, pain and frustration in her research process. Like Stanko, I found, working closer to participants in relationships that were emotional in content and close to my own personal experience had impact on my emotions and personal coping which would be less likely to occur in the more traditional, objective distance interview process. I needed to acknowledge my emotional reactions to my participants and the different relationships I developed with each one (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2007; Behar, 1996). I needed to notice any indecisions, tensions, experiences of empathy, rapport, identification, whether there was any distancing, whether there was boredom, whether there was frustration. For example, in my earlier example of acknowledged frustration with a participant I saw as ‘colour-blind’ and not processing her experiences in the same way as me, I later interpreted this was a protective way of coping for her, allowing her to survive her experienced oppression as though it did not happen. Was this an interpretation that sat better with my preferences and my protective way of coping? Regardless, I needed to become more empathically aware of the starting point of others and more tolerant and begin to recognise not all are at the same point, in the same place, with the same understanding, with the same availability of/access to analytical tools. Some are at different places on ‘the quilt’ and add different dimensions for contrast and dimension. The ‘quilt makers’ may not always work in harmony and may have different views in how to express their experiences as individuals and as a collective. This has been part of the challenge in collecting data by recognising that this is not a homogenous group of women, but women who have different realities and experiences and may well interpret issues differently from one another and myself and hence the value of the research process.
Interview perspectives and process

My chosen research approach is a qualitative heuristic paradigm appropriate for studying the lived experiences of white women in interracial relationships. The data is drawn from individual interviews and reflections on my own personal experiences as a white woman in an interracial relationship. Although some may view this personal position as potentially introducing research bias, as has been previously discussed, the inclusion and study of issues related to personal experiences is now seen as valid and a valuable enhancement of the research process (Oakley, 2000; Renzetti, 1997; Ribbens and Edwards, 1998; Abell, Locke, Condor, Gibson and Stevenson, 2006).

Many researchers may take for granted the use of the interview without considering all aspects of the process and hold uncritical beliefs that results are accurate and trustworthy and without bias (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). There is little written about the ambiguous nature of the interview (Fontana and Frey, 2005) or consideration that all interviews may not be as neutral as portrayed in standard qualitative research texts. As I considered the interview process in my research through engaging with participants, I realised I initially ‘took for granted’ the interview process. With further reflection, I now realise I naively thought I was competent at this. I then realised I needed to be more thoughtful and reflexive in this process to ensure an effective interview through considering aspects of engaging in dialogue, the use of self, building egalitarian relationships, power dynamics, the impact of gender, class and race, the effect of the venue, anonymity and the role of self-disclosure as part of this process (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). As a counsellor I believed I could establish rapport and build a relationship, but how should I competently transfer and link this to a research relationship without losing the important aspects of empathy, authenticity and egalitarianism?
Finlay (2011) is reassuring in relating the links between therapy and research in recognising that we often ‘re-search’ particular issues clients bring that are unknown to us and we ‘re-search’ for underlying meanings.

From this increased awareness, my approach to the interview evolved through a move away from the more traditional positivist approach, and evolved into the use of a creative, active and feminist influenced approach (Douglas, 1985; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Oakley, 2000; Tang, 2002). This emphasised an egalitarian relationship between researcher and participant, with reflexivity in the process, an understanding of contextual issues and an acknowledgement of the emotional impact of women’s experiences on the interview process, and my own experiences.

My own investment in the process through deciding to choose a subject that had personal relevance initiated an expectation, as part of the interview process, that I will be sharing my thoughts and feelings and experiences as an active participant in the sewing of ‘the quilt’ and would be open to my participants being curious about these experiences and my personal views. I was aware this was often a positive, enabling experience for the participant, but did, from time to time, inhibit their engagement due to my ‘apparent’ knowledge about the subject and the sharing of my own experiences. This may also have been about perceived power (Oakley, 2000; Edwards and Ribbens, 1998; Proctor, 2014).

I found I needed to take care not to direct conversations where I wanted them to go because of my own experiences, and take the time to allow people the choice of what they wished to talk about. What I perceived as an issue was not always the case for those people I was meeting with. In reflecting on this as part of the
interview process, Mishler (1986) made the important point that the role of the researcher should not be overlooked as how I had listened, attended, encouraged, interpreted, digressed, initiated and perhaps stopped or limited responses earlier than the interviewee intended influences a participant’s account. Thus, it was always important in my reflections to consider how I may have influenced, even if only unintentionally, a respondent’s account. This highlights how I may have brought my own bias and beliefs into the analysis. This process was acknowledged at the beginning in terms of subjectivity and power and is also part of the heuristic process acknowledgement, where the researcher shares similar and related experiences to that of the participants.

**Interviewer and interviewee relationships between women**

The use of communication styles can affect the content, interpretation and outcome of the interview (De Vault, 1990). I needed to be aware of the subtleties of language and demonstrate to the interviewee good understanding the nuances of class, race and gender. There was a need to capture the essence of the interview and what was being said. I found myself being careful not to use academic language to reinforce barriers, or hierarchical relationships or differences. Standing (1998) states “As feminist researchers, one of our roles is to translate between the private world of women and the public world of academia” (p.113). I also needed to ensure that meaning was not lost in translation. According to Standing (1998), it is essential not to lose the authenticity, emotion and vibrancy of women’s voices. The interviewer and participant may both be women, but their perceptions of each other from differences personal backgrounds will impact on the dynamics in the relationship and possibly affect research outcomes. I may feel I have made every effort to ensure an egalitarian and responsive ‘quilt sharing’ relationship was established, but the fact that I am a
'doctorate student', may have still affected the relationship in ways unspoken. I may have been perceived as ‘more knowledgeable’ and distanced despite the women being university degree educated themselves.

I quickly realised it was the responsibility of me, the interviewer, to engage in the developmental process, build a strong relationship and enable participants to engage fully in the process, whether that was retelling their experience or discovering new aspects or ‘re-searching’ themselves. For some it became affirming, for others, dependent on the nature of the topic, it appeared to become a therapeutic experience through being able to express deeply personal emotions (Goodrum et al, 2007; Birch and Miller, 2000).

**Ethical considerations**

I am complying with the BACP and University of Manchester ethical frameworks. I followed the formal structural procedures to gain ethical approval from the University to undertake this research. A copy of this is attached in Appendix 11. I recognise these are necessary in order to ensure protection and clarity, with a duty of care for the safety of my participants and myself in the research process. However, on exploring these principles in more depth, I realised there was more required than initially foreseen. My personal experience suggests many researchers, myself included, see ethics as a ‘hoop’ to jump through, filling out the form, getting approval from an ethics committee and then proceeding with the ‘real work’. I realised I needed to be constantly challenging and asking questions of myself throughout the whole process, from start to finish, acknowledging the importance of reflexivity as an ethical principle of practice (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) suggest there is no “direct relationship between ethic committee approval and what actually happens when the research
is undertaken” (p.269), particularly ‘everyday issues’ which may not be covered by a committee. With this in mind, Guillemin and Gillam (2004) separate ethics into two categories; procedural which involves seeking approval from the ethics committee, and ethics in practice, which involves process/interactional issues as a result of the practical aspects of the research which may not be covered by procedural processes. These are often dilemmas which may not be perceived as harmful, but could impact on both the researcher and participant as to how to respond when noticing changes in the participants, perhaps as a result of them having unpredictable emotional connections with the research content.

By integrating and ensuring reflexivity occurs throughout, I tried to ensure that ethical principles were held high on my agenda, and contributed to ensuring trustworthiness and validity in the findings. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) argued that “reflexivity is the bridge between procedural ethics and ethics in practice and that being reflexive in an ethical sense means acknowledging and being sensitised to the micro-ethical dimensions of research practice and be alert to dealing with ethical tensions” (p.278). I recognised a need to relate in a respectful and ethical way and that each interview offered an opportunity to discuss issues that perhaps were never shared in other contexts which, for some participants, was of value in itself; for others there was curiosity and others, a wish to help me in my process academically. I am aware that I have developed in my research experience and trust my participants have engaged with aspects of their own experiences through our interview. They shared what they needed or felt comfortable sharing at that point in time, for the purposes of their conversation with me. It is only as I became fully immersed, that I became fully aware of the importance that these were real people who gave their time and shared their experiences to inform my academic enquiry.
Although feminist principles challenge conventional positivist approaches and aim for egalitarianism and non-exploitative research relationships, the research is ultimately my ‘work’ and my interpretation and reflects my interests. I have recognised that everything is relational as well as being affected by context and that our own experiences and how we communicate in different settings will affect the whole process and, in turn, influence the data which is collected. No two interviewers will get the same information from the same participant. My aim has been to gain a holistic view of the phenomenon (experiences) by collecting data, interpreting and making sense of this from my own perspective. Using an interview as central to the research means that it is necessary to focus on relational ethics (Ellis, 2007) and “the knowledge that is constructed in the inter-subjective space” (Josselson and Lieblich, 2002). Josselson and Lieblich, (2002) talk about ‘moving across a border’ when we hear another person’s story. They stress the importance of recognising ourselves in the process of the interview and in the data and again the final written report. Josselson and Lieblich argue that with the researcher psychologically present in the research, readers are offered a richer and more human picture of ‘the other’, but it is important to recognise there will always be a barrier of bringing ‘the other’ across the space between them into the academic world with that barrier being one of ‘subjective translation’. From this, there are ethical implications about the ethical use of others’ lives for our academic purpose.

Noddings (2003) suggests that the feminine approach to ethics is rooted in the relationship of caring and being cared for, and this relies on a capacity for empathy and receptiveness to the experience of another, requiring affective and cognitive capacities. Noddings (2003) and Guillemin and Gillam (2004), emphasise that
whilst it is important to consider principles, there needed to be more focus on the ethics of relationships, thus recognising the importance of reciprocity, authenticity, transparency and care. This can only be achieved by constant reflexivity throughout the whole research process. Pressle and Han (2012) talk about the ethics of representation that researchers need to consider how their participants are represented in the final thesis or report, and cannot assume homogeneity because women hold different viewpoints, have different experiences and are affected by race, culture, class, sexual orientation and ability. From this perspective, Chase (1996) asked the question:

“Should participants be told that although we will listen to their story fully, the analysis will reduce and reframe their stories into a broader context and that informed consent should be specific to the methodological approach, rather than a general statement” (p.56).

For me, this has raised feelings of 'accuracy angst' about using other people’s stories as part of my research, and also 'commitment angst' in appreciating my participants’ commitment to me for this end and a need to reflect their views accurately.

What I have discovered in looking at ethical considerations was that I needed to be aware of not only procedural ethics (Guilemin and Gillam, 2004) but situational and culturally specific ethics, relational ethics, exiting ethics and the ethics of representation and that I need to ensure this through a constant process of self-reflexivity to ensure interpretation accuracy and a non-exploitative research relationship.
Chapter Four

Individual depictions and themes

I start this section by describing and introducing the background details of the eight women to enable the reader to gain some insight into the women's experiences and contextual situations. These descriptions will include an overview of the women’s background, their relationships, their sense of self and their hopes and fears for their children. In the process of analysis, I am seeking to reveal the essences and the meanings of these women’s experiences of being in an interracial relationship. I aim to be totally engaged in this process and fully present with the woman. Throughout, I am connecting with similarities and differences in my own experience. I hope to illuminate and be reflexive about each woman’s experience. This includes: remaining true, representing their voices, recognition that each is an individual and their experiences are unique. There may be some commonality in aspects of their experiences, but there are also many differences which may be influenced by their own family attachment, by social divisions and gender perceptions. I do not seek to find answers or make judgements, but hope to illuminate these experiences so that others may develop an understanding and new awareness of some of the issues and the essence of these experiences and how these may or may not impact on individuals in different ways.

Throughout the process, I am conscious of my own story and how these women’s narratives raised emotional issues within myself. It was essential that I ensured I was receptive to every participant’s experience, although some I struggled with, I spent many hours reading the interview transcriptions and listening to the interviews many times to see and engage with their reflections about their experiences from their own perspective. I tried hard to give all equal value. Each interview has meaning and value and contributes to the essence of the individuals’
experiences. Women held a range of beliefs from not being ‘racially aware’ to articulation of issues of difference, which I recognised reflected my own racial consciousness development over the years. I saw my own growth as developmental using the metaphor of the river, initially as a trickle, and then as a torrent of information seeking, moving from naiveté to developing an increasing racial awareness. For me, personally and professionally I saw this as an important insightful experience helping me understand some of my stuck moments and also my emotional internal struggles in developing my understanding of self and others.

Initially I symbolically gave each woman an image of a developing flower to illustrate my subjective perceptions of their racial awareness development (Frankenberg, 1993; Helms, 1990; O'Donoghue, 2004; Sweeney, 2008). This in turn connected with my own synchronistic awareness of my developmental positioning in racial awareness. In addition to what I saw as the individual positioning of the women, this creative depiction reflects my own personal journey of self-reflection, awareness and personal discovery; a flower initially unexposed and closed, then becoming more open and sensitised to experience of my own and others deeply felt emotions and productively processed experience. Essentially the image of a flower in various stages of growth offers a creative representation of my relationship with each woman as well as reflecting my own experiences over the years. Having spent time reflecting on my own experiences I could begin the process of organising the data for the purpose of analysis.

Moustakas (1990, 2001) gives an outline for organising the oral data, which I intend to follow. This will include discussing thematic structures and including words from the participants, so picking out the essential themes and reflecting these in their language. Secondly, I will include individual depictions which are the
individual portraits which will illustrate the subjective meanings and essence of what has been identified from the data. I have completed some collages following my immersion in the participants’ interviews. These offer a visual representation, a sensory response and an alternative way of expression. The use of symbolic images gives ‘a sense’ of something rather than a literal explanation. According to Butler-Kisber (2008), a collage gives a more embodied and alternative representational form where meaning is understood to be a construction of what the text represents (p.268). I present these collages to enhance understanding of the women’s stories, show poignancy and open up other avenues for reflection. As written texts need to go through numerous drafts and interpretations prior to completion, so too, according to Butler-Kisber (2008) “the collage process may go through a number of iterations before images are glued, but it results in a metaphorical product that is subject to, or available for different responses, providing alternate ways for interpreting both conscious and unconscious ideas” (p.269). I then pull this together into a comprehensive composite depiction of the women’s reflections on their experiences. An exemplary portrait was produced. Lastly a creative synthesis will be offered.

After a lengthy process of undertaking transcriptions, listening to tapes and many hours of immersion in these, reading, processing and making sense of each individual interview, I identified core themes. Clearly, there was always an element of my subjectiveness and understanding of the participants’ narratives which gave meaning and contributed to the emergence of these themes. Throughout, my emphasis was to ensure I kept each individual experience representative in meaning and whole. Moustakas (1990, 2001) talks of identifying the qualities and themes manifested in the data. Moustakas (2001) states “essential to the process of analysis is intimate knowledge of all the material for each participant” (p.269). I
read and re-read each interview and then identified what I thought were important aspects. I created a moveable collage for each participant which evolved and changed each time I returned to their words (Appendix 6). I also used images and creative art to enhance depictions and my own emotional engagement with expressed and underlying emotions and qualities contained in the narratives. I found there was no clear guidance in how to represent the findings; again, I searched for literature and other studies to gain some understanding as to how to structure my findings. Loewenthal (2007) gave some ideas about format. However, I found the way depictions were written lacked sufficient depth through only offering a list of quotes. I decided to incorporate women’s words within my overview of each woman which also incorporated the expressed themes. In addition, I include a thematic map which shows the complexity of the issues and the interwoven issues which thematically overlap.

The core essences that women expressed during the interviews included expression of deeply felt emotions, the importance of race/racism within their own relationships, the impact of responses from family relationships, people’s perceptions or stereotypes of them as women, the intersectionality of class, gender and race, the impact of having mixed-race children and their own identity, as a white woman and as a couple, including reactions from strangers, white men and black women. I am integrating these intersecting aspects in each individual woman’s depiction of their experiences. All the names are pseudonyms. Having reflected on the importance of ensuring each woman’s reflections remain whole, I found the process of reduction extremely difficult and uncomfortable feeling a sense of remorse and betrayal. These women had given their time and shared their personal experiences sometimes at great depth and here I felt pressured, due to external constraints, to have to leave out some personal reflections. I hope
however that the essence of their individuality and experiences will show through this process.

My own story is interwoven in this whole process. I am the thread that joins these stories together, and I see myself in each woman’s story and reflections of some of my own experiences over the years. Sometimes the thread is broken and not connecting, sometimes the thread is strong and clear. This is about my own social positioning change and development of awareness, moving away from social pressure, denigration and unfounded blame.

**Women’s individual stories**

The aim throughout is to illuminate the essential meanings and essence of the experiences from the data rather than a focus on individual characteristics of individual women. I attach an image of a flower in various stages of growth which offers a creative representation of my relationship with each woman. The images also represent my subjective perception of each woman in relation to their understanding and awareness of racial awareness (Frankenberg, 1993; Helms, 1990; O’Donoghue, 2004; Sweeney, 2008). This in turn connected with my own synchronistic awareness of my developmental positioning in racial awareness.
1. Susan

Susan is a white British woman in her forties. Her husband is black British with his family originating from the Caribbean. She is in the retail trade and he is in business. They have been together for thirteen years and have two young children aged ten and five. Susan came to the interview keen, but also uncertain as well as curious about the whole interview process. She was about to embark on a course of professional counsellor training. Throughout the interview I sensed unease and tentativeness, was this about my feelings or Susan's or both? However, on reflection and after numerous readings of the interview transcript trying to understand her position, I recognised her socialisation experience had been that of a white middle class person, who saw the world in that context, not considering the role and impact of race in her life. There may also be an underlying vulnerability and fragility when talking about these issues, because of external perceptions about her interracial relationship. I was surprised at my initial lack of tolerance, but realised this frustration was about my own unease when
looking back at my naivety years ago, when I too was unaware. It was like looking in a mirror and seeing an historical reflection of myself from many years ago. Susan began by reflecting on the meeting with her husband and what attracted her. She was uncomfortable about the use of the word ‘black’, saying “I find it hard saying black” to describe her husband. This may have been for several reasons, including feeling disloyal to her husband who says “I’m not black, I’m brown.” “So I’m more comfortable with brown.” There also may be gendered power related issues in deferral to her husband/male view. Later in the interview, she talked about “it’s a man’s world again.” She also indicated later that she was fearful of her partner’s response to her meeting with me for the interview. She seemed uncomfortable admitting her attraction to a black man; there were lots of hesitations. For example, “Erm, So I, I would say that, you know, there have been some brown men I’ve been attracted to, but not particularly, I wouldn’t say, you know, like these women that have always gone for black men.” Susan, later, talked about her partner’s physique and sportiness as the initial attraction. She became reflexive about his family, which is very complex and Susan was trying to make sense of the complexity of the family dynamics and their relationships, because they didn’t fit the white ‘norm’ of family. In my mind, I am wondering whether she was thinking about her own relationship in the context of her partner’s family, where there are a number of interracial relationships, including his mother who remarried a white man, but also his brothers who are in interracial relationships. “So there’s never been any black relationships carrying on down there really. Very mixed.”

When Susan introduced her partner to her family, she acknowledged there was some anxiety. Underlying this was an acknowledgement that maybe her family, particularly her father, may be prejudiced, “I did wonder what he might think.” “I
would have liked his approval.” “Maybe not what they wanted or possibly being frowned upon.” She feared the reactions of her father’s family in particular, who were angry and hurt because a family member had been killed by a black man. She was worried, anxious of how she may be judged by her family, bringing a black man into the family which might trigger racist views from them and from within herself. This led her on to reflecting about the historical context of her family’s racist views and acknowledging some continuing similarity in her own views.

Susan talked of race/racism as not being important in her daily life and in her own words “sounding shallow” acknowledging that for her, it is important to live in a white, middle class, affluent area, where there is little contact with black people, where people are well-educated, and she compared this situation to the possibility of being in a working-class area and where she believed they may experience more overt ‘looks’ or comments. She expressed some discomfort, stating she does not ‘want to go there’, because as the interview progressed, she was remembering more family related incidents and became very uncomfortable in acknowledging these because “they’ve almost disappeared and are irrelevant. I don’t need to go there, I don’t want to go there. You are almost prompting memories.” Susan did however reflect on a number of instances coming into consciousness as she thought about her experiences in more depth.

She started to talk of particularly strong feelings which were under the surface. At one point she talked about being “angry” about the thought that anyone could look at her partner in a negative way “It makes me want to stab them to be honest.” Despite showing strong feelings which lay beneath the surface, the issue of race/racism was not discussed or acknowledged as important within their
relationship. There were indicators that she had thought about some of the issues of being in an interracial relationship which she would not have considered if she had a white partner. For example, when she was having one of her children, being in an antenatal class and the midwife remarked 'it's amazing how all the children look like their mums', and she said "Is there any expectation? Are any of you wondering what they are going to look like? I put my hand up because I was wondering how dark he was going to be and all that, because obviously nobody knew then." This issue again came up later in the interview when we were talking about children’s identity and Susan actually asked if my children were darker than hers. The significance of having children of mixed heritage for her was focussed on them presenting as 'good looking boys with a fit dad, ex-footballer', seeing this as an advantage. Although the children had said things such as “Why can’t I be dark like daddy?” these were not issues that were discussed between them as parents or as a family. “I don’t feel I need to......Something that is not there at the moment.” Susan is not proactive in talking about these issues feeling this may ‘create negativity’ and she will ‘wait until something arises’. She talks about the boys being ‘good boys’. If the children are perceived as ‘good’ in terms of their behaviour, then she believes people will be more positive about the parents’ relationship.
2. Charlotte

Charlotte is a white British woman in her late 30s. She works part time as a teacher. Her husband is 50 and works as an educational consultant. He is black British and his family originate from the Caribbean. They have two children aged 6 and 4. Her husband had been in a previous relationship with a white woman and has a child from that relationship.

Charlotte spent her childhood, until she went to university, in a white middle-class area. She did not recall seeing black people where she lived, nor where she went to school. She described her family as being very close with the extended family living nearby in the local neighbourhood. University gave her the experience of meeting different people, but still she did not socialise with any black people.
Charlotte met her husband through professional contact in an educational setting. She described her attraction as being about his personality. Charlotte had some thoughts about him being black “in the back of my head I just didn’t want to get involved in any of ‘that’ (ex-relationship and child) but the black issue, it was in my head because I hadn’t come across any of that within my sort of family, and at the back of my head I sort of kept thinking to myself, ‘oh what will mum and dad think if I go out with a black man’? Charlotte was anxious about family responses and aware of the black male stereotype and perceived his previous relationship fitting that stereotype. This was because his ex-partner was a white woman who had several children with different black fathers. Following meeting her family, Charlotte again reflected “In the back of my mind, I was always thinking what my parents were going to think, but they were absolutely brilliant.” She did initially see their response as a bit of a surprise. Both Charlotte and her parents share a view that “the black issue isn’t an issue” and “they don’t look at (husband) as any different (to my white boyfriends).” During her reflections Charlotte says:

“It’s quite bizarre because I don’t’ see him as black, I don’t see him as that, he’s just who he is and he doesn’t socialise with any other black people.” This view appears to arise from her socialisation experience in a predominantly white world. She emphasises this throughout the interview by stating “I don’t see him as a colour” and “he’s like a white man in a black skin.”

Due to the complexity and difficult relationships within her husband’s family, there is no contact with the main family members, other than his sister, who is also in a mixed relationship. Charlotte has regrets about the children not having contact with the extended black family. Charlotte talked initially about the responsibility for caring for her partner’s daughter, who is of mixed heritage, as “big life changing.”
Charlotte did say that she worries about whether they (her children) will be treated differently and experience racism and whether/how she will be able to deal with this. She also recognises that “all they see is white.” So having a relationship with her husband’s sister and family is important (the identity of being a mixed family being seen as important). Charlotte talked about how she currently deals with the children’s identity and being of mixed heritage and uses ‘black chocolate, white chocolate and brown chocolate’ as the metaphor. Charlotte does recognise and emphasise the fact that they don’t see, or have connections with black people, so she does see the importance of her children meeting with her husband’s sister and her family, as an important part of their social development and understanding about themselves and connecting with black people. Charlotte was obviously reflecting about how they would be perceived as a family. “When we go out as a family, you know people are looking at your children…..Usually get comments about how beautiful they are……It’s a little bit different because they are different here.” “When we were a couple, early in the relationship, I was probably thinking why are people looking at me?.” A theme throughout the interview was her stressing “we work” which was mentioned on numerous occasions, and emphasised very strongly. I’m not sure whether that was about convincing me of ‘social credibility/value’ or convincing herself, which again may be related to people’s perceptions about these relationships ‘not working’. “But it works between us. We never argue”, “Never argue!, “Very rarely do we argue”, “We just work, it just works, it just works” three times on one line. Again, possibly she has underlying feelings which are related to perceptions of these relationships not working. “We are normal, we are really happy, we are really happy.” Although Charlotte talked of not experiencing overt negative comments from friends, when she started to talk about a colleague, there were the beginnings of a recognition and reflection that people may have strong negative views and “probably look at
my relationship as ‘how come?.... My dad wouldn’t be approving of that.” So you do get comments.” Again, there may be an underlying fear that she may be perceived in a negative way and she does reflect “Is that what they see as our relationship?” She emphasised again that “Our relationship is so positive and we are happy and we love each other.”

Charlotte also carefully selected who she was friends with and, sometimes, if she was walking down the street and saw another interracial couple “We smile and you smile at each other and there is that connection when we are out..” Charlotte then talked about social class as being an important issue. “We’re middle-class aren’t we?” and this was followed by mentioning the social context view of a white woman who goes with a lot of black men and questioned me “Do they look at you in the same way?” Again, Charlotte emphasised that she looked for connection, but there are other social context issues which were important, such as being a middle-class family, a professional family, two professional workers with mixed-race children, then there was a connection. Again later, “But when you go out and see another family who look like you do. That’s really nice.” So for Charlotte, class was important, professional status was important and education was very important, but also recognising that there was a connection with other families, which may reduce and help to manage feelings of isolation, feelings of being different, by connecting with someone who looked the same, or a family which was similar.

Again, for Charlotte, how the children behaved in public was seen to reflect on how people might perceive a couple in an interracial relationship. “Being out, having a meal, look really happy together….having a great time and your kids are really good.” “Two middle-class people look, well, actually they’re nice, they’re not
all bad. Then you get a nice little smile, but you know what they are thinking." A recognition that people may perceive interracial couples in a disapproving way and this was seen to be challenged by having well-behaved children.

There was no discussion regarding race or racism between Charlotte and her partner, or at least very rarely. They have talked about the fact that he is the only black man where they live and he has said that people would look at him, but Charlotte feels that doesn’t happen now “I don’t think anybody gives a …… No one even bats an eyelid.” Charlotte recognises that because her partner has a difficult family history, there was no cultural identity link within the family, no ‘black cooking’ or images relating to background heritage. Charlotte sees the challenge as sometimes related to him as a person, because he is very private and closed, a survivor. “That’s the challenge for me. He has difficulty talking about family stuff. Must be quite painful, and he wants to distance himself.”
3. Maria

Maria is in her forties, white British and working in the voluntary sector. Her husband is in his forties, working in a theological setting. He is black British and his family are of Jamaican heritage. They have been married twenty-seven years and have three children, aged 25, 23 and 20.

Maria started her story of meeting with her husband, which including fine detail on reflections of the beginning of her relationship, which took some time, involving a ‘match making’ process through mutual friends while they were at college together. There was a softness in her voice and ‘ahh’ warmly reflecting on this. He was her first black boyfriend and, at the time, she had clear criteria for a boyfriend which were, she “did not want to go out with anybody who looked like a minister, and he didn’t.” They were at a theological college at the time. This social perception was more important to her “I don’t think I’d really looked at colour or skin.” It felt as if this particular setting was a bubble with many international students, but with
similar vocational interests, educational focus and middle-class social context. Maria was aware of differences in culture and backgrounds and acknowledged herself as being curious about the range of people she was at college with. There was laughter throughout the interview, which appeared to be variable in causation, sometimes discomfort about content, uncertainty about the interview process and later, a way of dealing with disconfirming and hostile experiences.

Maria had been brought up in a predominantly white environment. When she told her family they were “shocked. No denying that.” There was an anxiety about telling her mother. “There was a silence at the end of the phone.” Maria talked of a realisation of the implications and the consequences of being in this relationship had risen into her awareness. “I can’t remember what she said, but probably something implying that she wasn’t too happy, and putting the phone down.”

During the story of her family’s reactions to her relationship, Maria spent time reflecting and making sense of what racism meant and how her family viewed black people and where these views originated from, that is, the media and sport.

During married life there was an evolving recognition about being perceived as distinct and controversial because of their relationship, and being noticed in areas where there were few black people. Interestingly, she stressed that they lived in the middle of the road, which is often where white women may symbolically be placed or perceived as on the borders between two cultures (Dalmage, 2001). She talked about having moments “when I don’t know which camp I’m in” and some uncertainty where she fits, followed by “I feel comfortable in both camps really, so it doesn’t matter which one I’m in”, as a white woman needing to adjust between the white world and the black world. She spent some time thinking about their
living environments, which led her to reflect on the presence of black people in these areas. Where were they? Where did they live? She had noted a higher presence of black and mixed-race children in the children’s schools, but not obviously visible in the neighbourhood. She viewed this as a positive experience for her children in school, because of the ethnic mix.

Coming to a large ethnically diverse city felt more comfortable and acceptable for Maria. She was “conscious that people weren’t looking at us in a way that they would in other areas we’d lived in.” This led to reflecting on ‘the look’, particularly in white areas, and usually the comments that were made, often related to the children being ‘sweet’, maybe because others were unable to express their views about the relationship or again, that because children are seen as ‘sweet and good’. She questioned and hoped there was a growing acceptance of the interracial relationship being ‘okay’, more socially acceptable, therefore challenging the perceived stereotypes that ‘these relationships do not work’ and that the ‘children are negatively affected by them’.

Maria made reference to how she may be perceived as a white woman in an interracial relationship throughout her story. “I am conscious of being looked at and being a white woman in Jamaica as well, and in church.” She talked about the invisibility of being a white woman and that the black man is noticed. For example, noticing others discomfort about using the word ‘black man’ in conversations. She also reflected on how black people, particularly black women, may see her. “I don’t come up to standard” and “I’m conscious”, I can’t invite them, (black women) round. I couldn’t cook the right food. I didn’t quite measure up.”
It was important for Maria to be accepted into her husband’s black family. She received support from her husband’s mum, with practical things such as cooking, hair and culture. Then there was an acceptance that she could cook the Saturday soup. The acceptance into her husband’s black family led to Maria’s own immersion and interest in cultural aspects taking on some aspects of Jamaican culture. She stressed the importance for her of being perceived as part of the black community and receiving what she felt were positive comments from her husband expressing his view that she was more black than some black women.

Maria’s story also talked about some of the struggles against stereotypes and dealing with perceptions of a white woman in a relationship with a black man. And as she has got older, she has come to the realisation that “(the fact) you are different will never go away, but I’m more comfortable in that I’m not fighting that stereotype so much as I get older.” Maria uses humour to deal with these perceptions and openly talks about it with her husband. Maria ends the interview with a yearning for life without complexity and returning to the ‘white world’.

As a couple, they talk about many issues. A particular issue which led to much heated discussion was the difference in cultural perspectives regarding physical discipline of children. Also, what came with these social context issues, was the realisation that this was not just about them as parents who dealt with discipline, but in the Jamaican family, all members had the right to physically chastise for any perceived misdemeanours without confirmation from the parents.

Throughout Maria reflected on her children’s identity. Initially, there was a confident response about “the children being well adjusted”, but saying it aloud appeared to bring about some hesitancy and reflections about how they self-
identified and the differences between her daughters and her son. The girls saw themselves as black and the son "black verging on white." He did not have black friends and had a white girlfriend. The middle daughter had been to South Africa and worked as a volunteer in townships. Maria showed an awareness of some of the dilemmas of a white mother bringing up three children of mixed heritage, and that her upbringing of white middle-class privilege, had not equipped her for some of the issues faced by the children. The children certainly expressed views about everybody looking at them and Maria had said to them "I understand that I don’t understand what you’re going through. I walk down a street and I don’t even think about it. Whereas you’re constantly thinking about it."

Reflecting on the impact of being in an interracial relationship, Maria felt she had changed in that she understood social issues better and was “far more accepting of other cultures.” But “It’s not to say that I wouldn’t like to go back to living a very white, nice, comfortable area sometimes, but that comes from being able to walk along the seafront and not be looked at.”

Throughout the interview, I find I am reflecting on aspects of my own experiences relating to the anxiety of telling my family and not feeling comfortable in the white world I had grown up in, living in Birmingham, having some comfort in living in an ethnically diverse city but also an underlying developing unease about where I belonged. I did not have the support of a black family so felt completely lacking in some areas. I felt an envy of Maria’s connection with her mother in-law
4. Joanne

Joanne, a white British woman, age 25 is married to a black African from the Gambia. They have two young children. She is currently training as a social worker and her partner is a psychiatric nurse. She met her husband through mutual friends and made, what she described, as a huge decision to change her university in order to live with him. She was attracted to his cultural difference "I love people who are different" and they connected through lengthy conversations which she had not experienced before. Entering this relationship brought tensions within the family, whilst her mother was more accepting, her father and brother ‘are very prejudiced’ and she was always told "never to go with a black man." Her father and brother refused to speak to her or discuss her relationship. Joanne lived her early life in Liverpool and her experience was that it is ‘a divided’ place with some areas being described as extremely racist and remembers “when you finish school the white children go on one street and the black children go on another.” She has subsequently rebuilt her relationship with her brother following the birth of
her first child. She describes the experience as “his loss” and now “he doesn’t see
colour.” It hurt knowing her family were so negative even her mother saying “you
know people are going to say things.” Shortly after moving in with her partner she
became pregnant. Anticipatory excitement conflicted with the realisation of
increasing tensions within the family and between them on reaching agreement on
issues such as naming the child. Her husband is Muslim and had very clear
cultural and religious views about naming. "It was so stressful." This threw her into
conflict about wishing to honour this cultural expectation, but wanting to involve
her own family in the process, but also not feeling her mother would accept the
chosen Muslim name. She felt torn and under pressure to conform. Joanne felt
isolated and alone during this process. With their second child, there was more
negotiation about names and the cultural importance of male circumcision. She
wanted her children to feel part of both families but as a consequence, she keeps
them separate. This, Joanne reflects, is hard, can be isolating and she laments on
being “caught between two different cultures.” Joanne recounts how people have
looked at her “with disgust” initially at her and her partner, and then when she was
with her children. Comments about “that’s not your child” and benign comments
about how “good of her to take someone else’s child out” and she could not
possibly be her daughter’s mum. Joanne too has comments from black people.
Joanne shared her concerns about her children for the future as her daughter has
already received negative comments in school from other children. She tries to
prepare her children by explaining positives aspects of their identity and talk in
developmentally appropriate ways about ‘difference.’

Joanne tries to balance the impact of her experiences but recognises it has been
stressful, full of tension and often having to compromise. She talks of painful,
emotional experiences she has had to deal with as a consequence of being in an
interracial relationship, but also recognises that she has extended her knowledge, particularly about African culture and also Islam, but at some personal cost because she has a ‘split’ family. However, she ends with saying “I truly believe that your experiences make you a better person, so whilst I am going through pain and anguish, I try to look to the future”. However, “I think I am quite alone” and sometimes “I think I am two different people”
5. Jane

Jane is a white British woman in her late forties, and her husband identifies as Indian, although his family originate from Tibet. He is in his early fifties. Jane is a teacher and her husband is in the hospitality business. They have three children aged 17, 12 and 10. They have been together for 22 years. Jane has been in a previous interracial relationship.

Jane’s story began with the initial stages of their meeting and building a relationship, which occurred over a period of two to three years. It seemed important for her to spend time reflecting on this period as there was much richness in the narrative. It felt as if she needed to go through a process of understanding their relationship and her attraction and make sense of why she was in this relationship at the start of the interview. Her words describing this relationship included, "whirlwind romance", "very, very romantic", "but very volatile", "always a challenging relationship", "a bit edgy, probably not very good for me."
They met when Jane was doing voluntary work abroad. There was excitement and an adrenalin rush with the activities involved in their relationship, “it was a very exciting relationship.” Very different to her life in the UK. So the attraction was very physical, very loving, kind but volatile, "he had a temper." They came to live in England and in her words “it went horribly, horribly wrong. He was uncomfortable. My family didn’t really understand him." The pattern of their relationship was established with emotional and cultural misperceptions resulting in personal expectation conflicts. "There were tensions. He was uncomfortable, restless, like a fish out of water and angry. He had cultural expectations as a guest. He needed to be the centre of attention, made to feel special," but Jane’s family and friends “didn’t understand what was going on and why he was reacting." He became angry and left, but soon came back into her life, “He was like a draw really, but I couldn’t…… even though I knew there was no way I could ever say I didn’t know what he was like before I married him. But maybe I have to accept that’s why I married him.” In addition, he had had a difficult early life which led to Jane developing an understanding of the reasons for his behaviours. She took on a role of a care taker, “if everybody turns their back on people who need somebody like me.” Jane recognised the contrasting experience of her own childhood which had been stable, with secure relationships with her parents and siblings growing up together and being privileged. She often took on the responsibility of mediating between her husband and family, explaining to others and making allowances by accepting perceived insecurity and providing stability that may have been absent in her husband’s early years.

Jane felt the early days were difficult for her family, “I'm sure they must have been horrified when we got back together.” Some of this may have been due to the
volatile nature of the relationship, but also “It was just this sort of embedded lack of understanding and lack of tolerance. They had no experiences themselves of ….. no friends from other cultural backgrounds..” Jane talks about a big rift in her family and this occurs later in the interview as well. Changes have occurred over time, and Jane feels she has become “better at understanding and how to manage him in those situations.”

In the next part of the story, Jane is reflecting on her pregnancy and the final returning home to the UK. Some of the tensions and the difficulties are related to her view “he wouldn’t have chosen to come to England." He felt that other people’s perceptions of him are that they “look at him as somebody who sponges off his wife. I’m the ticket to the UK which is not true because he is a wealthy businessman, but he does not want to be here." Jane’s family did not understand, in the early days, when the hotel was not doing well “this is where the tension in the family would have been." “Why doesn't he get a job? And to my family, that was a barrier. Who does he think he is? There’s poor Jane going out to work."

There were culture and gender differences in the relationship. For example, not looking after their daughter when she was born “even though he was at home." He had very strong gender views. “Asian men are more traditional, less Westernised and therefore more oppressive of women." Jane often finds herself justifying her chosen partner, explaining and mitigating circumstances “I have to mitigate his circumstances to other people. I have to explain this to other people so that they can understand his behaviour." Jane acknowledges that her husband has changed over time, particularly with child care and doing the school run which was a big issue. Jane considered whether this change was due to an improving
outlook for her husband related to better business prospects and ‘settling’ into a different environment, or a general shift in his cultural perspective.

Jane went on to talk about how people may perceive her as a white woman with an oriental Asian man “I don’t think I get the same judgements made of me that other women in ethnic combinations get, for example, white women with black men, being in a relationship for sex. They can’t work us out.” “I remember this guy saying ‘Ooh, that sounds really exotic, a more unusual (and therefore acceptable) combination’. Jane’s comments on "white women with black men, being in a relationship for sex" typify the demoralising stereotype that she too is aware of.

Jane talked about legitimacy of the relationship as they had more children. “So, when my second daughter was born, I felt we looked more legitimate. When there was just me and him and the first daughter, it was almost like ‘Oh, ooh’, that’s what I felt, they were looking at us thinking ‘oh you know’. But when there were two, it was ‘Oh, so it’s a real relationship’. And then ‘Oh, they’ve got 3’. That’s my perception." Then she repeats, “so one is a holiday romance when two and three, it’s more likely they really must like each other, it’s permanent.” Jane’s perspective suggests that the experience of denigrating social perspectives can become internalised and may have a subversive impact on their relationship.

Jane shared “there is an assumption that mixed-race children are beautiful. I think some of it is a little bit uncomfortable. It annoys me that automatic assumption that they will be beautiful because you’ve crossed some sort of boundary.” Continuing and raising her voice “The other thing, they don’t look like my children. I’ve had people say ‘Have you adopted them? In front of the children. Outrageous! Or ‘Aren’t they nice, have you adopted them?’ or ‘You’ve got a nice matching set’.”
This may have an undermining impact on the children's identity and sense of self, making them socially conscious feeling 'odd and different.' Jane further described how her children identify themselves and believed her eldest had more awareness of her dual heritage and Jane wondered whether she talked more with her. Both girls have only white friends and no Asian or black friends, and so align themselves with white girls. The youngest child has autism, so tends to be very factual. For example he regularly asked "How did you get me? Dad is from India and you are from here, how did you get me? Trying to make sense of who he is and how he fits in." Jane further stated "He has also been subjected to name calling, such as “paper face” which Jane believed was because his face appeared flatter than most European children’s faces. Jane talked about people looking at them as a family. “They start with looking at me, then him, and then the children and then back at me. You are like an object of curiosity. In India too, but it is more blatant, people stop and stare for extended periods of time."

Jane also talked of the differences and the importance of social class, affluence and education, and the degree of this making a difference to overt/covert responses. Where they live there is population diversity, but not significant diversity in relationships. She talked about the fact that her husband is not educated and her view that this had implications for their friendships.

Jane saw compromise as the main challenge of her relationship. She talked about the isolation of being in an interracial relationship and having no friends, and how lonely that was. She finished with “It is harder when your partner comes from another country. I wouldn’t recommend an interracial relationship. Actually that’s a really hard thing to say, because I think it brings a lot of things as well. You sort of feel as an individual, the experiences that you’ve gained through the
compromises, through the arguments. I’m sure it’s made me a better person as a result of that.” Jane’s view was that she “wouldn’t recommend an interracial relationship” due to the struggles experienced in their relationship.
The interview with Ann was very interactive, with two women meeting with a similar passion for the topic and similar views and shared understandings of some of the issues regarding their experiences.

Ann is white British in her early sixties and has just retired from working in education as a teacher and consultant. Her partner is also in his early sixties and is black African, in business. His family originate from West Africa, but his childhood and education were in the UK. They have been together 28 years and have one son aged 18.

Ann’s employment role over the past fifteen years has been as part of a team with responsibility for supporting schools through antiracist work and engaging with schools about their curriculum and ways of working with children and families from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds. This has included working with children
of mixed-race, and their parents, specifically on the issues and barriers they experience. The work has included presenting at the National Conference, talking about issues around mixed heritage, which she described as “scary, being a white woman standing up in a room of black people who are predominantly men." Her interest is also in supporting women and families, “something I feel passionate about.” As Ann talked about her passion I found myself getting excited and animated knowing there was a common connection and really looking forward to this interview. I believe this was about not having to explain my position or the rationale for this research as Ann engaged in the flow, and 'gets it’ without questioning.

This led to Ann exploring the issue of stereotypes of a “white woman going with a black man. “I am under no illusions as to what most people think." How they dealt with this as a couple was by making 'choices' about where they went and who they socialised with because “it is just too much hard work." This also included choices about where they have holidays and where they live. Ann goes on to talk about feeling exposed in the relationship, “You put your relationship on the slab for people to dissect." This theme came up throughout her narrative.

Ann reflected on the story of their meeting and her own experience at that time was one of coming out of a divorce with a white middle-class teacher and then meeting her current partner. Ann also reflected on responses to her partner from others. Ann talked about her family’s responses which were positive due to her father’s occupation involving travelling the world. Responses from colleagues and the neighbourhood have been varied. Whilst recalling the different responses from colleagues, the neighbourhood and strangers, Ann stated “Now call me naïve but after 28 years of being part of a black family, when I have a moment, or we have a
moment, I am still surprised” (talking about how people react to their relationship). Ann talked about the wider social perceptions of women in mixed relationships, and how they are perceived, and then went on to look at the reactions from white men. She recounted some of the other moments that have occurred, and, as she said, there were too many to mention, but she recalled one recent experience with humour. Ann normally shopped on her own in a particular shop for their meat but took her husband with her on one occasion, and ordered the meat and handed over the money. The butcher handed over the wrapped meat and her partner went to take the package. Surprisingly, the butcher hung onto the package as if ‘this black man wasn’t with this white woman’. Other moments which have been quite difficult or surprising had been within a health setting and from health professionals, where they have experienced numerous disconfirming experiences and disapproving attitudes expressed towards them as a couple.

As a couple, they have always talked about issues of race/racism, which have been integral to their relationship with frank and open discussions between themselves and also with their son. They have been able to laugh about some of the situations they have found themselves in. Their shared humour at these experiences has helped support their relationship. Ann talked about the responsibility of having a child of mixed-race and said “I did not enter into having a child in a mixed relationship light-heartedly. I had to check out for myself if I had that strength and I still draw on that strength on a daily or weekly basis, because I know that my experience as a mother would be very different if my son was white.” Ann then gives some examples of how she has been treated differently because of her child. Ann finishes this by saying “I have extra layers of worry that I wouldn’t have if he was white.” Ann talks about having a son which brought a whole range of new challenges and issues, and again “I was not just a partner of a black
person, but the mother of a black boy, as opposed to a black girl, because I think they’re different experiences."

Ann talked at length about dealing with racism and her child and how difficult that has been when one’s child is hurting as a result of being called demeaning racist names or experiencing children not wanting to sit next to him in class because "I’ve got a brown skin." As part of this, Ann shows empathy for other women, particularly where there is no support from their partner, and where the women are having to deal with social disapproval and adversity on their own.

Ann talked about the constant surprise of other’s social response, even though her level of awareness appeared significantly higher than most of the other participants. She has learned much from her partner saying "I was learning more from my partner, from the family, from being in that family, in that relationship, (than from) all my experiences on a day-to-day basis." She talks about her awareness development being a continual journey and that she is always learning new things about herself and about her family and "how we fit in society, but I will always be, I will still be constantly surprised when other people don’t get us." Ann says "it’s almost like having a schizophrenic personality, because you have lived your life as this well-educated, middle-class white woman who was a teacher, and that's who you kind of were, but then you get this other identity and so when you are you, not in your home, people treat you in this way, and then you are you with your family and you get treated very different, and then you are you with just you and your partner, different again, you and your child, different again. So actually, you have to end up adapting to all these different…… You cannot just be the one self and you tune in and become very sensitive and very aware and pick up on things."
Ann recognised that it has been hard for her to be in this relationship and there have been many times of frustration and tears, “It’s taken an awful lot of work, but both of us wanted to do that and both of us were saying that our relationship at another time would never have lasted six months. I think it was the right time for us. If we were younger it probably wouldn’t have worked.” Again, talking later about the number of occasions where she could easily have said that carrying on was too difficult, it was very hard work, it takes up a lot of energy dealing with so much disapproval and deprecation. But one of the things they do as a couple is to talk openly and frankly and they also have a good sense of humour. Ann feels that this shared sense of humour has been important and has been the saviour of their relationship, because they can laugh at some of the incidents, such as the incident in the butcher's shop. Sometimes there have been compromises on both sides, having to adapt to the differences between them. One example is the classic 'sense of time' issue, where she has to adapt to that African concept of 'extended time'. She has also had to cope with exceptional condemnation from black women towards her being in a relationship with a black man.

Ann ended by reflecting about the future, and in particular, reflections on life changing events, such as her retirement, her partner's wish to still continue with higher education and doing a doctorate, and also contemplated future experience of growing old as a mixed couple.
This was a very powerful story of a woman who loved African culture, having lived in Nigeria and undertaken research with women for her PhD, who was open and wanted to help, holding a belief in equality, who expected difficulties, but found the experience quite a burden and was shocked with the extent of her husband’s perceived over-dependence. Throughout the conversation there was a developing realisation of shaky relationship ground and a gradual deepening of sadness, disappointment and an emptiness in the relationship investment.

Liz is 59, a white Scottish woman, living in a rural community, who was recovering from an accidental physical injury, and was previously a social science researcher. Her husband is African from the Gambia, aged 40. He is a factory worker. Liz has been in a relationship with her African partner for four years. Liz has a daughter in her twenties from a previous relationship. Liz has been in previous interracial relationships. Liz describes their meeting as “probably not typical.” They met while she and her daughter were on holiday but “I was definitely not looking for a
relationship or for any kind of social relationship. End of." She reflects that she was not the stereotype of 'older white woman, seeking young black African man' often described as a 'sex tourist'. She had an immediate rapport, but also had another social agenda of wishing to help a local family in the community. She had a yearning to get back into African community life as she had spent some time in Africa previously undertaking her own research. Liz and her daughter went to Liz's partner's home to meet the family and this led to the development of their relationship.

Liz wanted to help him come to the UK and went through various attempts to get visas all to no avail. “A young black Muslim male coming on a visitor visa, forget it.” So they legitimised their relationship by getting married. Liz claimed it was not what she wanted at the time, as she did not want to cement their relationship before commitment. “You get sucked into it. I wanted to be with him, so there was no choice. I had reservations about the ethics and disparities of wealth……but I wanted to be with him.” There was a lot of risk attached “could have been a lot of social approbation and could affect my reputation.” I followed my heart, but a lot of misgivings, it was a risky thing, but he is caring and met my emotional needs and we have a sexual relationship too, lots of misgivings, disparities in wealth, education and age and head versus heart conflicts.”

Liz's daughter found the relationship very difficult. Liz described her daughter as very angry and not happy “we had a huge row. Although she liked him and his family, she was still less than happy about it.” So there were conflicts from the beginning with her grown up daughter. Liz was reluctant to explore the detail of the nature of the unhappiness with her daughter; was this to do with age discrepancies, or based on a view her mother was being exploited or that her
mother was entering into a relationship with outcomes that had potential high unforeseen risk?

Liz stated that on his arrival in the UK “I was shocked. I tried to put him off.” “I under-estimated how difficult it was going to be for him to integrate. In his own environment he seemed resourceful, dynamic, energetic and caring. Here he was like a fish out of water.” They experienced continuing conflict about money priorities and building a house in the Gambia. There were cultural differences and big clashes around honesty, kind of confirming a stereotype for Liz, “that these Gambian men are liars and just out for money.” So there was a start of feeling less positive towards her husband and she developed a psychological block, refusing to learn his home language of Mandinka when living in Gambia. She felt manipulated around the house and angry with the financial conflict. The conflict increased until she was at a point of separating, but they patched things up and his family became involved in mediating the renewal of their relationship. They returned to Scotland. There were many cultural differences resulting in her husband finding it difficult to integrate and settle.

There were beginnings of cracks in the relationship and Liz felt she was developing a change in attitude towards him and African culture. Her altruistic views were continually challenged. The challenges were about her own sense of self and political-social justice views. Ambivalence was appearing in their relationship. There were evolving changes in her identity as a result of these differences. Liz did recognise the importance of differing context between Africa and the UK. She was experiencing increased personal frustrations with her husband's perceived lack of economic and personal development resourcefulness and increasing dependence on her. As a result of these frustrations, their
relationship grew further apart. Contributing to this was her increasing sense of responsibility, guilt, frustration, his perceived social withdrawal, feeling worn down, struggling and, battling with lack of trust, interpersonal conflict, particularly over money, dependency, exhaustion and feeling burdened.

Although recognising and reflecting on their common interests, there was a great divide and resentment which became more prominent and mutual resentment was building up. She reported her relationship with her husband had challenged her ideals, values and social outlook. She had to move from a position of 'missionary', wanting 'to save', to one of 'independent woman', realising that she had become too enmeshed in 'saving' and was depleting her own sense of self in the increasing level of dependency. There was a sadness and sense of loss. There were also external social challenges which impacted. For example, the all white rural social context, other people’s attitudes, and the difference between women’s and men’s attitudes to her relationship with her husband. She found that women were more positive but tended to be quite flirty. She talked about her husband being perceived as an 'African trophy', exotic and gave the example of the art class with her husband being asked to pose as a model, and how she felt vulnerable about that situation. Liz and her husband separated, but at the point of our interview, had reunited.
8. Helen

Helen is in her forties, white British and worked in a university setting. She is also an author. Helen is married to a black British male whose family originate from the Caribbean. He is in his early fifties. They have two children aged twenty-five and sixteen. Helen has been in a previous interracial relationship. I found Helen dynamic, engaging, politically aware of social context issues and these interviews challenged me to think about the interview purpose and my engagement with my participants. Aspects of our conversation were related to wider contextual issues such as the nature of prejudice, language and terminology. As Helen is a ‘professional story teller’, I expected a full narrative which included many stories of her experiences from early life to present day.

Her own background was ‘quite significant’ which she described as predominantly white, colonialist in perspective, and sometimes outright racist. “My family were institutionally racist.” She talked of these early memories and her limited contact
with black people having a significant impact on her. She described these experiences/attitudes from her family as “intense” and they actually thought “black people were not as good as them” and they held a view that “black people en masse are very different from an individual black person.” She accepts that she “probably articulated some of their prejudices.”

Following university, Helen went to southern Europe where she had her first relationship with an African, and she seemed to have been shocked and horrified about the treatment of black Africans as “It challenged my views and expectations” that even a black university lecturer "lived in the ghetto, there was nowhere else he could live, the Portuguese were so racist." It was the time she received overt hostile reactions, “being spat on. That was pretty bad. And not just one person. I mean, repeatedly spat on. If he’d been on his own, he wouldn’t have been spat on. No no. It was because we were together. I’m with one of ‘their women’ of course." There was a realisation of the experience of entrenched racism which she also linked to her family who “would never spit on anybody, but metaphorically they would.” “I never went back to Essex.”

Memories of Helen meeting her current partner involved seeing him as very different due to "being smart" because the rest of her friends were "hippy types, so he made quite an impact on me. This incredibly well-groomed black man. There was an immediate connection and curiosity. He didn’t fit the image of the group." Over time they built a relationship. “He was fun and he was lovely to me. He was the nicest that any man had been to me in terms of caring. That was quite a shock……and that was probably what made me fall in love. Being nice, being lovely, it just didn’t stop. Then I got pregnant.” When Helen told her family, their response was “Terrible, they cut me off, didn’t speak to us. That was the end. It
was a massive shock." Every single moral boundary had been broken as far as they were concerned. Her father shouted “Get out of my house. How could you do this to me? Anyway, they did get back in touch and we went on holiday. Disastrous. We had huge rows. We didn’t speak until the baby was born.”

Helen notes at the time the responsibility of becoming a parent was more important, although she and her partner had conversations about being a mixed-race couple, particularly in light of media representations of interracial couples. She also received overt hostile responses from black women who “intensely slagged me off.” So having conversations with her husband and trying to make sense of this hostility and understanding a black woman’s standpoint of “there aren’t many good black men. I was naïve about these issues.” Helen also expressed strong feminist views about “there aren’t that many good men. I’ve just got one of the good men.” She reflects on her naiveté on some of these issues and how she was “rudely disabused of my naiveté” about racism and social context issues.

They did talk as a couple and then as parents, about these issues of race/racism, and their own differences; for example, language/patois. Interestingly, Helen’s mother developed a positive relationship with Helen’s husband over the years, but Helen felt this was due to his patience and respect, which Helen described as “disarming.” Helen described much respect for the way he managed her mother. There was a sense of Helen having some underlying pleasure in seeing her mother have such a good relationship with a black man, “possibly challenging her racist views because he did not fit the stereotype she held.” “I think they learned about not being racist in front of him.” Helen did not think her mother generalised these new views/behaviours to how she viewed other black people, “She just saw
this sea of savages, you know, coming towards her. Taking over her country, taking over her culture. She felt threatened." "It was deeper with my father, just white supremacy ingrained." Again, a recognition of social context issues and white privilege was developed by Helen.

Helen had real concerns about her daughter and how she could be perceived by black men and how they may treat her. Helen reflected on her own experiences of sexualised behaviour from black men, particularly in Jamaica, even though she was with her husband, and their general lack of respect. Helen also recounted the story of an old fisherman on the beach and his sexualised behaviour towards her. Her experience in Jamaica was not positive. "The women would also snub me because I was white with a brown baby, and wouldn’t even serve me in the shop."

There were also generalised feelings of disappointment when visiting Africa, because of the way women were treated, particularly lesbians, as her daughter is a lesbian, and there was a great fear if they visited the country that her daughter would be raped. Helen then went on to talk about “this kind of black male libido, even though I’m with a black man who is utterly respectful who has never treated me badly, whose never forced me or coerced me, has only ever been tender and loving, and yet I think I have an over-arching fear of that kind of, the threat of black male libido, and it scares me."

During our second interview, we talked about the impact of having a child of mixed-race and coming to the realisation that others see you differently. Helen gave an example recounting a story of a woman’s reaction in the post office. "Initially I hadn’t spoken and she kept looking at me and the baby and when I did speak and she heard my accent and realised I wasn’t what she thought I was, she leaned across and put her hand on my forearm and said ‘Oh, you foster’, I went
‘No’. ‘Oh, I thought you must be a foster parent’, and it all slotted into place at that moment, the realisation of what people may be thinking but not saying.”

Helen went on to talk about racism and children, her children’s identity, how her daughter identified as white culturally, and Helen believed that her social class and education actually contributed to this identification, which led to a general discussion about class and her own middle-class experience and also about social racial stereotypes and the influence of media. Helen gave an example of “Wayne and Waynetta and the images of girls who had brown babies.” Helen also gave an example of how health professionals perceived their relationship and talked about a situation where the professionals made biased assumptions about domestic abuse in whispered tones and out of her husband’s presence, when she was attending for some other medical reason. She also talked about other women in the neighbourhood who had black babies and their gravitation to her and recounted some stories there. Helen is very aware in terms of race, class, gender and prejudice and there were lengthy discussions during our dialogue around some of these issues as well as our personal conflicts in experiences as white women.
I will now consider the participant’s themes identified through a lengthy immersion process in the interview narratives. I liken the whole process of growing plants from seed involving a lengthy process of preparation, seeding, weeding, thinning and then watching the seeds gradually grow into flourishing flowers, much like my earlier creative depiction for each woman. It is a lengthy process involving many nurturing tasks before theme cultivation.

The identification of themes was an organic, evolving process involving initial reading of transcripts to gain first impressions, identifying common and unique issues, rereading and being more specific line by line selection, systematically sorting, identifying key words, looking for similarities and differences, clustering into groups, re-reading, allowing time for incubation and then reconsidering and finding aspects that I had not initially seen or reflection to reaffirm themes, patterns and connections that had been identified in the earlier process. I was conscious I
needed to ensure I did not try ‘to fit’ the data to my own perceptions. It was tiring and emotional, constantly revisiting the transcripts and interviews, ensuring I did justice to the women’s experiences.

I found the process of ‘reduction and construction’ extremely difficult, but I liken this to ‘pruning’ in the garden; sometimes I have to cut a ‘stem’ off to gain a blossoming plant. I occasionally struggled with keeping data collection, analysis, findings and themes separate from interpretation, particularly when I was less connected with my participant. To keep these steps separate to aid understanding, I provide a thematic map constructed during this process of discovery. Whilst there are ‘overarching’ or primary themes, I discovered many were interlinked and therefore difficult to separate.
After many attempts of deconstructing and reconstructing this map, I did not feel this adequately reflected the essence of the participant women’s experiences. I returned to my metaphor of ‘the quilt’ to view these essences individually and then viewed them ‘sewn together’ as a meaningful whole. I will discuss the overarching theme of ‘intense emotional expression,’ followed by sub themes of ‘how come
you and you are together? who am I? and where do I belong? I'm not racist but and what about the children?’

Themes 2

Emotional Expression

The overarching theme which is ‘the thread’ throughout the women’s stories or narratives and underpins the women’s reflections is that of ‘intense emotional expression.’ I am aware that my own feelings are often strong, passionate and may be perceived as excessive. Women expressed a range of positive reflections about their experiences of being in interracial relationships which included “excitement, amazing, fun, proud and feeling special”, often emphasising that attraction was similar to those experienced by women in interracial relationships.

Examples of this overarching theme include:

- “He made quite an impact on me….incredibly well groomed black man ….we were having fun…he was caring” “I felt special.”
- “The most caring, thoughtful kind person….quite a cool guy.”
- “He was physically attractive, kind. Loving….I was hooked”,

but other women talked of the attraction to difference
- “I’ve always been interested in people who aren’t like me. I love people who are different.”

Women talked about their experiences as enabling growth, a recognition of white privilege and the meaning of experiencing the impact of discrimination, exploring intolerance and their developing an understanding of different cultures. One woman described her newly found experience of cultural difference of the African-Caribbean funeral and bereavement process as “understanding black death has been a learning experience for me….a different cultural perspective” and “it has opened my eyes to difference.”

The interviews generated strong and deep emotions about the women’s experiences within their relationships and families, internally and externally. There was a recognition that whilst trying to live lives at a personal level, this was impacted by many external social processes which affected white women in interracial relationships at a deep emotional level. Many experiences were impacted as invalidating and disaffirming, and for women were part of daily living struggles that were humiliating, exhausting and intense.
I completed this image following my reading of transcripts and connecting with women’s expressed feelings. For me, this tumultuous image reflected not only the turbulent intensity of predominant emotions expressed, but also how I felt when reflecting on these feelings of inner turmoil and anger, expressed by the women, and reflecting those which I often felt. In addition, the emotional impact of reading transcripts and hearing the women’s voices and how these emotions were integral to the lived experience of white women in interracial relationships greatly affected me and my increased sense of connection to them. These feelings were clustered into the following groups: ‘crossing the boundary’ captured in the following comments from Joanne and Maria “being part of both worlds”, “I feel I have to keep the families divided”, “I am caught between two different cultures”, “I felt the tensions between different cultural expectations”, “I do have moments when I don’t know which camp I am in.”
'Intensity, risks and pain' were expressed in response to the realisation of the implications of being in an interracial relationship. For example, Liz expressed there was “a lot of risk attached, I had a lot of misgivings… I underestimated how difficult this was going to be…. huge disparities…. it was wearing me down …I felt guilt.”

Jane reflected on the “Ups and downs….tensions…uncomfortable..where we have conflict is around social situations …..you live with compromise all the time. I wouldn’t recommend it.” Joanne comments that “I made sacrifices …..it was huge….it was stressful….really isolating… alone it’s very hard …pain and anguish.”

A weariness reflected by Ann about the impact was “it is too much hard work…have to choose who we socialise with and where…put your relationship on a slab for people to dissect…from the beginning I knew it wasn’t going to be easy…many negative moments… I was angry….extra layers of worry.” Lastly, Helen spoke about the constant intensity “It was intense….challenged my views and expectations….I found it stressful women were nasty to me because I was white and sexualised behaviour from men…the threat of black male libido scares me….balancing….choices.”

I cannot do justice to all the extent and depth of emotion expressed by the women, but in attempting to do so, I have produced a further image below containing all the intense emotive words taken from the transcripts. In addition, a comprehensive list is attached in Appendix 8.
There is considerable overlap in some of the following themes. This has come about as a natural consequence of the emotionally driven, entangled cognitions of the women which do not ‘fit tidily’ under compartmentalised thematic headings.

*How come you and you are together?*

All the women, in varying degrees described how white women in interracial relationships were often perceived although some recognised their external social acceptability had improved through less overt comments being made. This may have been related to the older ages of some women allowing for less perceived sexualised elements to socially intrude into the interpretations of the reasons for being together. However, all women had experienced hostility towards their
relationships right up to current times. All the women reflected on these stereotypes, as expressed by one woman “of a white woman who marries a black man is a bit of a hussy, loose woman and the black man is on drugs …..as we get older not having to fight that stereotype its more comfortable.” Ann succinctly said “I am absolutely under no illusions as to what most people think……the whole attitude was that I was a stupid white woman being forced by a powerful black man ….we felt that the fact we were a mixed couple, erm, stereotype of black man forcing this on a stupid, probably uneducated white woman” and “they perceive you in a negative way as some kind of slut, the most polite word I could use, but the fact you are in a relationship with a black man, somehow you are degrading yourself.”

All the women had stories about experiences and comments from others about their relationships, how people may often dismiss interracial relationships as having little or low social worth and seeing these relationships as unnatural and non-traditional and socially awkward and unacceptable. There was a regularly occurring discourse about others’ perceptions of their relationships, described by one woman as ”you put your relationship on the slab for people to dissect.” Racialised, stereotypical comments about women’s partners were also received such as Liz experienced when visiting the hairdressers and receiving unexpected suggestive comments about the sexual prowess of her partner “keeping her warm in cold weather.” She then became aware she had been the subject of much discussion as this was not her regular hairdresser and this was in a neighbouring village. Some of the participants had painful comments from white men, citing examples of how they behaved antagonistically towards them being with a black man. All women talked about what could be described as ‘The Look’. My interpretation of this experience is portrayed in the picture below.
This collage had an enormous impact on me and touched my own sense of hyper-vigilance from persecutory feelings that ‘everybody holds a negative, judgemental opinion about me’ as a white woman. This collage reflects that intensity that I shared with the participants as expressed by them.

What women were describing were feelings of being publicly exposed and a sense that everybody had openly and publicly dissected their personal relationships and formed an inaccurate and intrusive view of their personal relationship. Women were conscious of people turning and staring, not just once, but several times, as if scrutinising them, their partners and children, being subjected to dismissive facial expressions, hearing “tutting in disapproval” and having critical comments made in their presence, but not necessarily directly, as if they were objects. What emerged
was the constant sense of being watched with ‘The Look’ as if “You are an object of curiosity” which often led to an internal cauldron of intense feelings expressed along a continuum from fragility, frustration through to anger. As a consequence of these experiences, women talked of ways they coped, sometimes through laughter, staring back or ignoring. The impact of being constantly under scrutiny meant that women felt they had to choose carefully where they went, who they shared their personal lives with and they learned to carefully scrutinise people’s perceptions, verbal and non verbal communication. Some women talked of the amount of emotional energy used in dealing with these negative experiences “I can remember them all vividly ….they always still surprise me…..now call me naïve, but after 28 years of being part of a black family when I have a moment or we have a moment I’m still surprised…. (later) I’m always surprised.”

As a consequence of this intrusive, overwhelming scrutiny, the women stressed the importance of behaving in public in a way so as not to draw attention or allow the confirmation of stereotypes, particularly in regards to their children. Susan and Charlotte felt if the children behaved well, and showed good manners, this would challenge the stereotype of mixed-race children having intrinsic problems. Again, it was apparent women had an awareness of the devaluing perceptions others had about their relationships.

Some women identified an experience of social isolation as a consequence of being in an interracial relationship and, as stated earlier, having to “choose” where they went and who they socialised with. Women coped with this layer of social pressure by high levels of perseverance and ensuring they prioritised the protection of their children. As expressed by Charlotte and Jane, “When you go out and see another family who looks like you, that’s really nice.” The women
incorporated this protective script into their conversations with their children. This was seen as attempting to ‘normalise’ the family, and reduce the impact of ‘the critical gaze’ of being ‘different’.

'Where do I belong?'.....and/or 'Who am I?'

This theme was heavily influenced by factors of gender, social class and education which contributed significantly to the women’s self-awareness and individual identity. I became increasingly aware during the analysis process that the women could be viewed as being at various stages of racial awareness in line with the racial identity development stages as discussed in the literature review which fitted with my views of the importance of being aware of racial identity models. However this was not the main focus of this research. Quite coincidentally, as depicted by the flowers, I found each woman mirrored my own process of racial awareness development over the years. How race informed the women’s lives ranged on a continuum from ‘colour-blind’ to an ‘active anti-racist stance’ as also identified in research on racial identity. This was also influenced by the social context of white culture and how this informed white women’s perceptions and views about their own white identity and their partner’s racial identity. For example, Liz, Ann and Helen identified ‘white privilege’ as an important issue in understanding themselves in relation to others. This awareness enabled an open communication between the women and their partners. For other women, the perception of ‘white privilege’ was not expressed as important. This may be due to their living in predominantly white areas, accepting whiteness and ‘white privilege’ as their ‘norm’ and therefore not yet being open to the analysis of this experience. Helen, Liz, Joanne and Ann had very strong political, feminist views compared to the other four women who did not express any particular ‘politically informed’ views.
Being in a relationship with a black man impacted differently on the women. Some expressed being affected by their personal experiences and realisation of the daily impact of racism on their partners, stirring strong feelings and realisations within themselves and their identity as a white woman. For those women who clearly recognised racism, this appeared to impact on their individual identities, requiring the development of a ‘joint identity’ linked to their black partner. This may relate to women’s relational positions in society generally. For example, living in ‘both worlds’ but not feeling as if they belonged in either. For some women, this was described as feeling they were ‘bi-racial’, being able to move from one experience to another, as though having a fluid sense of identity.

Some women recognised there were additional layers of stress in their relationship as a couple and as an individual. Ann described this as “I remember explaining that it was almost like having a schizophrenic personality, because you lived your life as this well educated, middle class white woman who was a teacher, and that was who you kind of were, but then you got this other identity. And so when you are ‘you’ not in your home, people treat you in this way and then you are ‘you’ with your family and you get treated very different, and then you are ‘you’ with just you and your partner, different again, you and your child, different again, so you actually end up adapting to all these different…..you cannot just be that one self, and you tune in and become very sensitive and aware and pick up on things.” Ann further said “Sometimes people stop seeing you, looking right through you and not recognising me as being in any way connected with him or perceive you in a negative way.”
For some women, other social experiences were seen as more important in their lived experiences than race and its impact on their social positioning. For example, Susan and Charlotte identified more with a dominant white middle class culture because of their experience of living and socialising in white areas. So, although they recognised that racialised oppression existed, it was outside their own daily experiences and social context. "I think that’s because of where we live. We don’t socialise with any black people. All of the children’s friends are white……so our circle of friends is predominantly white." Ann, Liz and Helen were very conscious of such issues; for example, stating that “racism has been a subject that we have discussed from the earliest time." Jane and Ann had chosen to work in careers which involved encouraging an antiracist perspective in organisations. They therefore recognised the importance of an antiracist, proactive stance personally and professionally.

In contrast, Charlotte, Maria and Susan did not feel the issue of race or colour was as important commenting “I don’t see him as black” or “I don’t think I looked at colour of skin, I don’t think I consider that” but for Ann, Jane and Liz issues of race and racism were part of the day-to-day essence of being in an interracial relationship. Charlotte, Maria and Susan were sensitive to their partner’s personal histories and their partner’s sometimes difficult family backgrounds, rather than their partner’s experiences of racism, but Linda, Jane and Ann were more attuned and aware of their partner’s experiences of racism and openly discussed these issues with their partners. Some women, Liz, Joanne, Ann and Jane, showed a depth of feeling about racial and cultural differences which were discussed with their partners and integral to the development of their relationships. All women were aware of ‘difference’ at different levels and whilst some thought it was not important, or personally relevant, others felt it was important to prepare their
children for the possibility they would experience racialised comments on the basis of the colour of their skin. Ann, Helen, Jane and Joanne had consolidated a positive racial identity and incorporated differing cultural aspects into their life experience, whilst for others the main emphasis was on education and developing white middle class values. Ann, Helen, Jane and Joanne could be described as proactive in preparation of their children, whereas Susan and Charlotte could be seen as reactive, that is waiting for a ‘racist’ incident to occur before dealing with the situation.

Thus for some women, such as Susan and Charlotte, their relationship did not consequently lead to increased recognition of race and racism or their own racialised identity. For others, Maria, Liz, Joanne, Helen and Jane, increased recognition and understanding of race and racism had a profound impact. “I was learning more from my partner, from the family, from being in that family, in that relationship, .... on a day to day basis” stated Ann.

Ann, Liz and Helen were aware of white privilege and expressed strong views on how this informed their view of racial issues. For Maria and Joanne, this evolved and developed as a consequence of being in an interracial relationship, through experiencing prejudice, hearing their partner’s experiences and for some women, the distressing experiences of hearing their children’s experiences of racism. As a consequence, there were clear racial identity change developments and these women, Ann, Liz and Helen were able to articulate the challenges as a white woman. Others, Susan and Charlotte, were unable to contextualise these issues because ‘race’ was not perceived to have as much relevance due to their social context of living in predominantly white areas and seeing whiteness as the ‘norm’, and not having discussions with their partners about the impact of race to enable
sufficient development of their understandings of race and its social impact. Additionally, some women felt race made ‘no difference’ within the relationship, for example Charlotte, Maria and Susan did not feel the issue of race or colour was important commenting “I don’t see him as black” or “I don’t think I looked at colour of skin, I don’t think I consider that.”

**Connecting/disconnecting with others in the quilt**

For some women, race only became relevant outside the home when treated differently, or for others, race was more about cultural differences within the relationship. As part of their awareness development, women had varied experiences of being able to integrate black culture into their lives. For Susan and Charlotte, this was not perceived as having much relevance due to their partners distance from their own family and living in a white community. Others, Maria and Joanne, became more culturally aware through social connection with their partners and their families. Liz, Helen, Ann and Jane were already interested in other cultures through music, food and travel. As Liz stated, “I had immersed myself in West African culture.”

Women expressed different experiences with their partners’ families and some, like Maria, felt they didn’t quite “measure up” or “have I got the right clothes on…..I don’t have the hat, the white gloves…I don’t come up to standard…..I couldn’t cook the right food…..” But increasing acceptance for Maria came as she learnt to cook “West Indian Saturday soup” or with Ann who incorporated West African foods into daily menus, using yam and sweet potato alongside sprouts. Maria’s connection with her mother-in-law was strong, learning about preparing dumplings and black hair care and receiving a great deal of practical support. Helen, however, felt she didn’t quite meet expectations “I wasn’t what his mother
expected me to be …she would have loved a daughter in law who would turn up at the house with a big pot of curried goat.....and say I’ve made you some patties.......I’m just not the type.”

Most of the women experienced tensions and hostility from black women as expressed by Ann "some very challenging experiences, very, very challenging experiences.....the body language was very clear.....she ripped into me” and Helen “We had gone to West Indian club. All the girls spoke dense patois on purpose so I couldn’t understand them...the black women ...intensely slagged me off..." Ann asked her partner what the women were saying and his response was “they weren’t being very nice about you! I remember feeling very cross. I felt it again when we went to Jamaica the women were nasty to me because I was white with a brown baby…I got snubbed …if (my partner) wasn’t with me they wouldn’t serve me in the shop.”

Many women were aware of how class, gender and levels of education intersect in terms of viewing a white woman in an interracial relationship, and also the impact on the relationship. The emphasis on each aspect appeared dependant on the influence of differing social contexts and personal meanings. For Helen, gender issues were stronger influences. Jane and Joanne experienced difficulties in cross-cultural communication which included negotiating how their partner’s perceived a woman’s role within the relationship. Both women discussed this as needing to compromise their views in order for the relationship to continue. Both Liz and Jane discussed the pressure when there was a great divide in educational experience. Liz identified “a disparity in education which created a greater divide.”
Liz and Jane had partners who lived in their country of origin until they were adults. These women talked of greater differences impacting on the relationship, such as cultural expectations about the roles of men and women and dealing with their partner’s feelings of displacement, experiencing racism and complete culture shock. For example, Liz’s husband had been in hospital with what was described as ‘racial melancholia’, often experienced by those who came to UK as adults (Lipsedge and Littlewood, 2006). Liz and Jane spoke of additional pressures of financial demands, seeking immigration status to remain in this country. Although being aware of disparities of wealth, education and age and having many misgivings, because they were immersed in their partner’s particular African culture and aware of social context issues, the women felt they were better placed to support their partners. Although as Liz commented, “I really underestimated how difficult it was going to be him to integrate here.”

*I’m not racist but.......?*

When white women enter interracial relationships as with any new relationship the initial focus is on ‘attention and attraction’. As the relationship deepens and appears to become serious, then the reality of thinking about family reactions comes to the fore.

The initial meetings took place in a variety of settings, at social events, in work environments, at college, on holiday and on the internet. All the women spent some time reflecting on their first meetings and what had attracted them initially and long term. This ranged from clear physical attractions “his physique attracted me.” For some it was “visceral, primal, earthy and primitive excitement” and for others it was that “he was genuinely a nice person who wants to look after me” and “his personality; him. The most caring, thoughtful, kind person.” For Charlotte,
Susan and, to some extent Maria and Joanne, there was a strong emphasis on ‘marrying the person’, not the ‘black man.’ For others, there was a clear attraction to ‘blackness’ and cultural aspects, particularly those women in relationships with African men. Most women initially held a strong belief that despite clear cultural differences, the relationship was possible. Some women reflected later in the relationship, they had growing doubts or recognised the extra emotional energy demanded in dealing with cultural and educational differences and the impact racism may have. Some suggested, if this had been experienced at a different time and age, this would not have enabled the relationship to succeed.

All women reflected anxiety of differing degrees about informing their families of being in a relationship with a black man, expressed through statements such as “I sort of kept thinking to myself what will mum and dad think if I go out with a black man?” and “I would have liked his (dad’s) approval.” The reactions of families ranged from immediate acceptance to shock or disbelief. Maria reflected “they were shocked and there was silence at the end of the phone” through to Helen’s experience of it being “terrible. That was it. They cut me off. They cut us off. They didn’t speak to us. That was the end, they didn’t talk to us.” Most of the women did manage to reconnect with their families; some with an uneasy peace, some with compromise. Jane found herself being the mediator between her family and her partner, “I feel I have to mitigate his circumstances to other people. I have to explain.” For many, it was the personality of their partner that broke down any barriers with the family. For others it was the recognition by the family of the permanence of the relationship and the arrival of children. For some families, it would appear they reacted with a unconscious resistant reflex reaction to the ‘idea’ of their daughter having an interracial relationship which changed on meeting the man as occurred with Helen and Maria.
Often, white women and their families experienced negative comments from educational and health professionals. Jane spoke of bullying in her son’s school “they called him paper face.” Joanne and Ann had experiences where their children had received negative comments and these had not been sufficiently dealt with as schools often had a colour-blind approach, suggesting “we treat all the children the same” and not addressing racism as a form of bullying. In her professional role, Joanne spoke of spending many hours visiting nurseries to ensure the organisations recognised these issues as important. Both Ann and Helen spoke about their experiences with health professionals. For example, on seeing a consultant about her son, Ann recounts that “his attitude was shocking....it was just loaded with so much else......the whole attitude from this guy was that I was a stupid white woman who was being forced into having my son circumcised by this powerful black man...it was appalling the way he spoke to us.” Ann felt strongly that the consultant’s whole attitude was because they were a mixed couple with “the stereotypical view of me being a stupid uneducated white woman being forced to do something.” Helen also shared her experience of hospital staff making assumptions when she was taken in by her husband with severe back pains, they asked her husband to leave the room and the nurse said “you are safe now, has he hurt you?” Again, an underlying assumption was that she was a “stupid white woman who was being beaten up by her black partner!”

What about the children?

Women expressed different views about their children’s identity. Differences between the women related to whether these issues were discussed between the parents and with the children, or not seeing this as important through to those women who actively integrated this topic into everyday conversations. For
example, Susan stressed the importance of her children being ‘good looking’ as being an advantage in getting on in life. Although Susan's children had asked questions such as “why can’t I be dark like daddy?” Susan did not feel the need to talk to her children about this issue as “it’s almost like promoting something that is not there.” On the other end of the continuum, Ann describes spending hours and hours talking with her son about various issues concerning identity and dealing with racism. “Racism has been a subject that we have discussed from the earliest time...the first time he told us he was only three.....there had been an incident at the nursery when a child refused to sit next to him because of the colour of his skin.” Ann further shared “when it is your child who is hurt, it hurts so much.” At age eight, her son, in discussion said “this is unfair.” Ann also shared she “did not enter into a mixed relationship lightly ...I had to check this out for myself. I had the strength because I knew that my experience as a mother would be very different if my son was white...I have those extra layers of worry that I wouldn’t have if he was white. I was not just the partner of a black person, but the mother of a black boy as opposed to a black girl.” This indicated a heightened awareness in Ann of the experiences children of mixed-race encounter. Even mothers who did not express their fears as vividly as Ann were certainly aware of these issues. For Susan and Charlotte the importance of the children being ‘good in public’ was important, being aware that other people’s perceptions of children of mixed-heritage may be unfavourable and invalidating. Most women shared their anxious concerns of how their children may be perceived and treated, some actively talking about this with their children with varying degrees of emphasis and incorporating discussions around gender expectations in perceptions as well. Jane was “uncomfortable and worried for my daughter and how she will be perceived particularly by white men.” Helen too had concerns for her daughter and “how black men are always coming on to her.”
The women were aware they did not physically resemble their children and this often resulted in various reactions from outsiders with assumptions made about being foster carers or adoptive parents. Helen was approached by a woman who invited her to a ‘brown baby club’ assuming a commonality through having an interracial relationship, although Helen perceived significant differences such as class and education between her and the other women reducing the significance of ‘brown baby commonality’. For some women, as mothers, the experience of not looking like their children triggered exaggerated attention or undesired emphasis from strangers about their children’s looks such as ‘exotic or beautiful.’ Many mothers were proud of the compliments, whereas others gave more thought to the underlying sinister reasons behind this curiosity and public comment.

Maria, Jane and Helen articulated their awareness of not having had the experience of what their children experienced, and being uncertain how to deal with this. Ann talked about her feelings of frustration, hurt and anger when her child had experienced racism or been stopped by the police or being followed in shops and having to prepare him for this by telling him not to put his hands in his pockets due to other people’s possible stereotyped perceptions about him. The discussion about children highlighted the intensity of emotion women felt, the injustices and extra layers of worry that being a mother of a child of mixed-race brought into the parenting experience.

**Composite Depiction**

The composite depiction is a reflexive, holistic representation of the collective core essence of the phenomena experienced by the participants including that of my own personal and research process experience. Initially I wrote a composite
narrative (appendix 8) that covered elements of the participants experiences, including mine but decided a visual depiction would have more impact. I have produced two collages to holistically represent the collective participant group experiences.

Picture 11: Representation of the research process

The first picture has the quilt as a foundation which represents the whole process of undertaking the research. The flowers represent a symbolic representation of my relationship with the women during the interviews. Alongside the collage, I
have graphically depicted my subjective experience during the women's interviews. Each participant is joined by a golden thread, symbolic of their engagement in the research and illustrates examples of interconnections through sharing experiences much like women's historical traditional quilt making social process. The white cloth symbolises recognition that whiteness is integrated into women’s daily sense of self and part of their anchoring socialisation process, placing them in unforeseen social positions. This has conflicting implications for their experiences of self and their development and changed relationships within their families and the women's experiences of acted out social perceptions of them as white women in interracial relationships.
This picture represents a cathartic emotionally laden journey and the experience of being in a liminal space. At times, feeling the excitement and fun of a new exploration of a different world, but sometimes being hit with feelings of increasing intensity of anger, frustration, hurt, sadness, resulting in a struggle to cope with tensions from the external world where the 'spotlight' is on us. Often, the experience is one of being caught between two opposing worlds, travelling through a canyon, not being able to climb the cliffs to reach the bridge to connect with these often separate and conflicting worlds. There is a sense of floating in between that is challenging, anxiety provoking having to face the unknown, where will this experience take me? There are questions about what happens when you move out of your comfort zone and ways of making sense of the world are challenged. You have to be able to tolerate the uncertainty and ambivalence, live in an ambiguous world ‘a betwixt and between’ experience before moving forward and embracing the new experiences. A white woman may be perceived by white others as having betrayed her white identity, and by black others as taking their males from their community and seen as ‘morally loose’ by all. This experience can cause growing tensions internally and externally and create an overwhelming feeling of isolation.

The woman has to become more assertive, resilient and passionate about challenging perceptions and unfairness. Many faced and overcame obstacles or challenges about themselves, their partners and their children as represented in the collage. Sometimes, the process of personal development was one of making choices about which unknown path to follow, with unknown and unforeseen consequences, having to compromise and be aware and accept there may be losses as well as gains through making the journey through uncharted territory. Initially the challenge is about finding alternative means to remain in the liminal
space, find a new security, see the world through different eyes and relax with the unfamiliar experience. For some women this transition may create feelings of fear, disappointment and they may therefore resist that change, clinging to the familiar, although others may find the challenge liberating as they embrace the whole process.

**Creative Synthesis**

![Creative Synthesis Image](image)

**Picture 13: Creative Synthesis**

This is my subjective creative artwork which symbolically expresses aspects of my experience participating in this research process. I completed the work and then reflected on the image and followed this up by seeking some understanding of its potential symbolic meaning from a Book of Symbols (Ronnberg, 2010). It is a mandala, a symbol of wholeness and is like a wheel with continuous movement
around the centre. This represents the growth, development and movement I have felt engaging in the heuristic research process around myself, the academic process and with the participants- a movement towards becoming whole. I used the metaphor of ‘the quilt’ as a way of making connections and joining together with the participants. It is a collage, again this has been a creative medium throughout. This also involved a putting together of pieces to make a complete picture. There are two halves to the mandala, reflecting the realisation that my participants were at different points in their own development and personal awareness and this has coincidentally reflected my own experience over the years as a white woman in an interracial relationship. Thus one half, representing my participants, the other a reflection- myself. It also represents balance, synthesis and synchronicity.

Mandalas are used by many different cultural groups as a key to self healing and knowledge enhancing oneself holistically and to bring unity. The Tibetan Buddhists, Native Americans, Indians, Indonesians and, symbolically in Europe, Christianity recognise this and thus it felt appropriate to embrace the essence of this synthesis due to the cross-cultural meaning element. Aspects of the image worth mentioning are the centre of the mandala being the symbol yin/yang. This represents opposing forces black/white, internal/external, male/female. It is all about creating balance. Different experiences, emotions and qualities are expressed through the various symbols e.g. flowers represent the feminine unfolding from bud to full bloom, growth; they are natural mandalas, resilient to forces of nature representing women’s growth and development and resilience to negative forces. The jewels are precious aspects, partner, children and positives in relationships. The peacock has the seeing ‘eyes’ in its tail but it also has to maintain balance, carrying the weight of its tail.
Surrounding the mandala are other symbols that contain the mandala and represent movement and journeying e.g. sunrise/sunset, day/night. The ship is on a journey and there are hidden depths. The shells offer protection and one can choose to come out to explore, or stay hidden within. The lighthouse represents isolation as well as guiding light, nature, air, water, land and sky to enable growth. The elephants are strong, maternal, offer care and protection, gentleness, warmth, wisdom and perseverance. In looking at the image, I noticed the two elephants look as though they are carrying the weight of the mandala; perhaps representing that sometimes white women in interracial relationships carry a heavy weight beyond that which they have naturally been prepared for, and this ability needs to be developed through experience and reflection.
Chapter Six

Discussion

I will start this chapter with reflecting on my own experiences of how I may be perceived dependant on the social context. I will then explore the socio-cultural contexts and multiple social systems in which white women live and how these may influence or constrain a white woman’s overall development. I will then consider the main findings of significance as a consequence of this research and then discuss the implications of this research for counsellors and other professionals working with interracial families.

Picture 14: My family
This picture offers snapshots of my family which I believe offers a challenge to common negative social perceptions of a mixed-race family, in particular the socially negating view expressed by the Daily Mail article (28th July, 2012). So, Daily Mail, here is the middle class educated family!

My experiences are far too numerous to mention, but what still stands out for me, is how I am perceived in different contexts dependent on whether I am on my own, with my partner, with my children or together as a family. On my own, I am perceived as a white, middle class, woman, privileged and educated. However, I am different to the assumptions inherent in these labels; I know I do not fit that ‘norm’. Many assume I have a white partner because they cannot believe I have ‘transcended into a different world.’ The wish to counter stereotypes feels a burden. This brings a range of emotions such as feeling misunderstood, shocked, frustrated, excluded, isolated, vulnerable and angry but it has enabled growth, awareness of difference, strength, determination and passion. These emotions underpin the issues that have arisen during the process of undertaking this research.

A number of significant issues have arisen as a result of undertaking this research which will be discussed in this chapter. These are:

1) ‘Does race matter?’ The importance of race, the social context of race, the impact on individual women, partners and children and whether race matters or not and implications;

2) ‘The good white girl’ – the impact of gender stereotypes on white women through being in an interracial relationship;
3) ‘The perfect mother’ - Issues regarding parenting mixed-race children including identity, preparation for experiencing racism, importance of open family communication about issues of race;

4) Who am I? Identity issues;

Existing UK research (Harman, 2010; Okitikpi, 2009; Twine, 2010; Cabellero and Edwards, 2008; Alibhai-Brown, 2001), and the research undertaken for this doctorate, highlight that racism still exists in the 21st century and is experienced by those in mixed-race families individually, and as a collective. Whilst there has been a significant increase in interracial families (Census, 2011), there is little evidence from this research, and other British research (Harman, 2010, 2012; Okitikpi, 2009), that there is a significant improvement in the wider negative perceptions associated with mixed families. According to Twine (1998), “a nuanced analysis of contemporary racism and anti-racism must include the experiences of white parents of non-white children... Trans-racial mothers i.e. mothers who self identify or are socially classified as members of a racial category that is presumed to be distinct from that of their birth children, can disrupt hierarchies of inequality by challenging ideologies of white supremacy and of racial differences” (p.238). At the heart of this inequality is the notion that skin colour does matter in society and, although there is a need to consider intersectionality of class, gender, religion and race, my experience is sometimes that race gets ‘lost’, ‘minimised’ or ‘diluted’ due to the often heightened ‘emotional’ context relating to race or its avoidance for fear of being perceived as racist by raising the issue as having contemporary relevance. Collins (2000) argues that “race intersects with class to such a degree that race often stands as proxy for class” (p.181).
Before discussing specific aspects it is important to recognise the socio-cultural contexts and multiple social systems in which white women live and how these may influence or constrain their development. These are multi layered systems of oppression and difference, usually experienced when an ascribed characteristic such as race marginalises a group of people, reflecting different origins and social experiences and creating additional pressures for white women. Although these labels may accentuate differences, there may be social similarities such as religion, education and class which provide a limited matrix of connectedness (Collins, 2000; McKenzie, 2013; Harman, 2010; Twine, 2010).
Diagram 5 illustrates the range of influences and pressures that might be placed on women in interracial relationships and families on how they feel about and experience themselves, and how others perceive them. White women’s lived experiences are affected by the intersection of multiple identities such as gender and class, but race/racialised identity development will also have an impact on white women whether they recognise this or not (Helms, 1990; Harman, 2010; Twine, 2010; Sue, 2010). For many, this may well be their first direct experience of the social significance of race and their early/prior life experience will often allow
them little understanding of what is to come or how to make sense of this tacit
tacit experience and integrate this into new understandings. This is sometimes
expressed by women in this research through their emphasis on being middle
class or ‘not being like those women who go with black men’ (expressed by the
participants Susan, Charlotte) or not identifying with ‘brown baby club’ (expressed
by the participant Helen). Much like me, some white women have experienced
embedded dominant identities of ‘whiteness’ and ‘heterosexual’ which pro-

vides them with a privileged social status, but gender subordinated. So what happens
when faced with racialised experiences, whether they acknowledge or ignore
these experiences, being in an interracial relationship and facing negative and
disapproving reactions from family, community and society will bring one face to
face with this experience? As I experienced, the participants in this study talk of a
loss of social status and the unsettling impact individually, as a couple and as a
family or employ other strategies to avoid dealing with this.

Having set a context for the women’s experiences in this research, I will now
continue the discussion in relation to the identified themes.

1) Does Race matter?
The interracial relationship can bring to the fore issues about race that otherwise
may be unseen, that is, racialised and sexualised stereotypes that exist in
contemporary Britain. Whilst this current research is not meant to be complete or
conclusive, it introduces aspects of racially nuanced lived experiences of white
women who have crossed racialised boundaries. The women describe
experiences of dynamic social processes which are constantly actively re-
examined or repressed as a result of their changed social status through being in
an interracial relationship. There may be a multiplicity of strategies employed on
an ongoing basis. For example, one minute one may do one's best to ignore a microaggression, on another occasion one may feel one has to confront this, and at another time, one might miss it entirely or feel too overwhelmed. Examples include Maria and Ann’s use of humour to deflect and reflect discomfort and anxiety expressed by all women in informing their families of their relationships.

This research supports other studies (Okitikpi, 2009; Rosenblatt, Karis, and Powell, 1999; Killian, 2012; Sweeney, 2008) identifying a range of views about white women along a continuum from ‘passive colour-blindness’ to ‘actively anti-racist’. Women develop different strategies in dealing with sublimity and maintaining respect whereas others hold an antiracist stance engaging in challenging racism. However, from my own experience, this can be exhausting so I choose my ‘moments’. Some women claimed that race did not matter in their lives (expressed by the participants Susan, Charlotte, Maria) and emphasised being ‘ordinary’ or ‘boring’ particularly in their private worlds, but recognised that external perceptions about their relationships were different. This shaped and influenced their behaviour when they were outside in order to not be perceived as similar to unfavourable stereotypes e.g. needing to be seen as united and together as a family and, ensuring children were perceived as well behaved. This showed evidence of an implicit awareness of the unfavourable views held by others. For other women, race was seen as central to their identity as a couple and as a family with discussions about where to live and where to send children to school and challenging racist attitudes (expressed by the participants Ann, Joanne, Jane, Helen, Liz). To try to understand the ‘colour-blind stance’ Killian (2012) suggests this is “a protective response to negative stereotypes”, similar to the psychological defence of denial, with couples using other cultural and social positioning norms to mask the issue of race. Karis (2003) also found that women who say ‘race does not matter’ used responses such as “I don’t see a black man” as a protective
response to the negative black male stereotype. Killian (2012) also refers to this as ‘de-prioritising and decentralising’ the significance of race by the distraction of focussing on some other axis of social positioning such as class or gender as a means of minimising the importance of race. Although some women in my research denied the importance of racism and stereotypes, all women could draw on experiences of invalidating comments, and critical looks that influenced their behaviours. Thus, there was some recognition, even if at an unconscious level, of these racialised social experiences and how they affected their behaviours. Other women who were more cognisant about issues of race (expressed by the participants Ann, Jane, Joanne) could more easily consider the impact of racism and how this would influence their behaviours such as where they could socialise and who they mixed with.

There were a range of responses from the women regarding the importance of discussions about race, from those who did not talk about the importance of race in their lives as partners of black men, through to those who recognised the salience of race to themselves, and were also able to acknowledge, empathise and discuss the pain and frustration of their partner’s experiences as well as their own and their children’s experiences. One could ask the question, are black partners silenced through this avoidance of such a significant factor? Or, because of the sensitivity of discussion regarding the nature of racism, this may lead to inhibitions effecting difficult conversations and frustrations (such as Susan identifying the questions in the interview as ‘bringing up negative memories she had forgotten’) or the black partner wishing to protect the white woman from hearing about their own painful experiences. Thus, the woman may inadvertently silence their partner, not through a colour-blind perspective, but more a ‘colour-mute’ stance. For those women who do engage in communication about race, lack
of communication may bring up an expression of high emotion of anger, frustration and helplessness. De-emphasising, avoidance and unawareness may, of course, bring other tensions into the relationship. The couple may also co-construct their relationship through not having what they may experience as 'difficult conversations'. This was not a focus of exploration in this study as only the women were interviewed. According to Killian (2012) the ‘code of silence’ effecting a colour-blind and, by implication, my own notion of the ‘colour-mute’ stance could serve as a protective function because of the fears of how open discussion might affect the relationship.

When reflecting on my own experiences of being in an interracial relationship, I am aware I have developed my racial awareness from a position of naivety to being antiracist in line with the stages of the white racial identity models identified by Helms (1990) and Sweeney (2008) and as creatively depicted in my representation of flowers. This development of my racial awareness has involved understanding the realities of racism, white privilege and being resilient enough to challenge others and ensure that these issues are recognised and responded to as a practitioner, trainer and educator. It has been hypothesised by some (Sweeney, 2008; Song, 2009) that intimate contact between white people and black people will lead to greater racial awareness and social integration. However, Sweeney (2008), in her USA research with seventeen white women (seven of whom were in interracial relationships), found that women held a range of beliefs about race along a continuum from colour-blind to antiracist and that whilst women in interracial relationships were more likely to have greater awareness of the impact of racism on black people, they did not tend to recognise their own privilege or necessarily challenge inequality. Similarly, the participants in this research also held a range of beliefs; for some women, being in an interracial relationship and
parenting mixed-race children had an impact on the women’s racial awareness and enabled shifts in personal understanding about the impact of race on their lives, added knowledge of different cultural aspects such as cooking, rituals in death and cultural etiquette (expressed by the participants Maria, Joanne). For others, a political awareness of white privilege, racialised and sexualised stereotypes led these women to challenge these racist and oppressive ideologies and undertake work from an antiracist perspective (expressed by the participants Jane, Ann, Liz, Helen).

2) ‘The good white girl’

For me growing up white and middle class came with inherent expectations of how I should behave, the education I received and what my future would look like. I was expected to have a professional job, marry ‘one of my own (white) kind’ settle down, live in a suburban area and have good children. These were all deemed to be ‘respectable’ and desirable expectations. Being ‘a good white girl’ meant not challenging or questioning these expectations. Being in an interracial relationship did challenge explicitly held beliefs in my family of what was acceptable. What I found was people often engaging with me with an initial perception that I met these white norm assumptions and beliefs, but there were subtle changes in their engagement when they discovered my personal situation was different to their expectations. Then, I experienced the subtle non verbal signs and reactions, ‘the look’, raised eyebrows, intakes of breath, the curiosity! Suddenly I did not fit the assumed social positioning. People struggled with connecting a white middle class woman in a relationship with a black man, due to their own conflicting and contradictory perceptions of white women in mixed relationships. Telling my family was difficult. I had expected some emotional reactions, but not the intensity. To be called a “prostitute” indicating I was lowering expected standards and a perception
that I was sexually loose and other offensive language was hurtful, wounding and painful. I was told I had brought shame and degradation on the family, challenging their rules of 'respectability'. I was no longer the 'good white girl'. This left me with feelings of being alone, rejected and uncertain of my identity and where I belonged. This was the start of a different personal journey into the unknown.

From my reflections on this experience, the relevance of skin colour cannot be underestimated. This visible difference can feed into people’s subjective views, historical and social contexts and symbolic imagery (Dalal, 2006). According to Tummal-Narra (2007), light skin colour is often associated with power and dominance and influences attitudes and behaviour towards those with darker skin tones in both black and white groups. Various psychological tests have shown light skin colour influences and elicits positive responses and contributes to attitudes of social difference based on colour and tone (Thompson and Keith, 2001; Rowe, 2002). Symbolic imagery of skin colour can influence views of attractiveness contributing to racialised gender stereotypes (Thompson and Keith, 2001; Hill, 2002). For example, the idealisation of light skin colour and white facial and body features as indicators of beauty and the devaluing of black skin and African facial and body features (Dalal, 2006; Morrison, 1993; Tummala-Narra, 2007; Jones and Shorter Gooden, 2003). This often is expressed when children make damaging and pejorative comments about black skin 'being dirty' or looking 'like poo'. Ann spoke about instances when her child, as early as age three, had returned home upset because another child refused to sit next to him because “his skin was dirty.” Other women shared experiences of their children being the focus of derogatory name calling and other children not wishing to sit next to them due to the colour of their skin. This feels like a ‘language of skin’ exists to position people through a coloured lens which may trigger a range of feelings including fear, hatred and
suspicion. As Dalal (2006) noted, through subjective and perceived social value, our relationships become judged according to these differences of skin colour.

The earlier work of Frankenberg (1993) also has significance. Frankenberg considered historical UK and USA contexts regarding perceptions of white and black people. These included “the (elite) white woman being perceived as frail, vulnerable, delicate, sexually pure and at times easily led astray and therefore needing protection from her weakness. This image was in contrast to the ‘poor white' woman who was perceived as ‘trash’ and sexually promiscuous. A further image is one of the white man who is perceived as a strong dominant, self-designated protector of white womanhood and defender of the nation. The black man is perceived as sexually rapacious, seducer and predatory, usually towards white women. The black woman is seen as seductress, sexually eager, dirty, unhygienic and overly fertile (p.11-12).” Frankenberg’s racialised images of masculinity and femininity were examples of how social attitudes, perceptions and stereotypes of different ethnic groups were formed. They appear to have relevance to this current research as those women who openly saw the significance of ‘colour’ in their relationships had to fight against the stereotype image of ‘poor white woman as trash’; yet all were aware that this was an image that was expressed about white women in interracial relationships. Some women distanced themselves by emphasising respectability, unity and behaviour. Furthermore, they had to fight against the other deprecating associated stereotypes in supporting their family members. Byrne (2006) suggests the ideals of femininity and beauty of blonde, blue eyes and straight hair are due to the dominance of whiteness norms. This however does not explain white social hostility to mixed-race relationships until one considers the social processes involved. When a white woman chooses a partner who is visibly different, white
men’s masculinity is said to be challenged, resulting in comments about a black male’s sexual prowess and size of penis being made or a dissecting of the moral validity of the woman’s choices and intrusive questioning ‘why not a white man?’ (Frankenburg, 1993; Okitikpi, 2009). This then leads on to derogatory comments about the white woman and the dubious moral validity of her choices. The image of the ‘big black man’ brings a duality of meaning, that of menace and threat, confirming suspicion, unease and arousing feelings of ‘we should be fearful’ and in contrast, evoking images of exotic/vibrant and leading to feelings of excitement. Not all the women were able to make sufficient meaning of their experiences to sufficiently understand the psychological and political implications and hence the disparity in their white racial identity development in line with the theoretical postulations of Helms (1990), Sweeney (2008) and O’Donoghue (2004).

Entering an interracial relationship may mean a white woman gains high racialised visibility by association with her partner, albeit an unfavourable and adverse association, being perceived as betraying whiteness. The relationship is perceived as socially provocative and challenges the ‘good white girl’ image of virtue, decency and respectability (Britton, 2013). She becomes a ‘norm’ breaker and for some women (participants Joanne, Helen) this was identified as bringing scandal and shame on the family with their family’s initial response often being a refusal to speak. For these women this increased isolation, and was distressing and painful and brought many losses and changes in their relationships with family members. Frankenberg (1993) identified that “interracial sexuality is a key theme to setting and marking racial boundaries” (p.99). A realisation that as a white woman she has transgressed racialised and gendered norms by ‘crossing boundaries, and thus is perceived as tainted and there is no going back can be profound, but can also enable a developmental growth. From my own experiences in my first
relationship, I was initially unable to withstand the pressures and found myself crumbling. However, in my second relationship I was able to rise above societal and familial pressures and develop further as an individual. The implications go beyond the woman’s experiences with the whole family having to adjust and revise its racialised status and review assumptions held about morality and respectability.

Whilst some women may not openly or consciously acknowledge the beliefs about stereotypes, loss of respectability and betrayal of whiteness, the women in this research were aware how their relationship may be perceived externally and did monitor their own behaviour and presentation to counter possible criticisms. Additionally, all the women recognised they had developed anxiety about telling their families with this ‘telling’ seen as a significant event that needed preparation and careful timing. There were questions about the possibility/anticipation of disapproval and opposition so there was expressed caution about ‘telling’. How families reacted varied from acceptance to the participant women being ‘cut off’ and rejected. As a consequence, women had to make decisions about further contact with their families, some threatening to discontinue contact if racist behaviour was not changed, some staying ‘caught between’ and keeping separate contact with both families, others compromising and acting as mediators, whilst other women negotiated different ways of relating to their families.

Additionally, some white women began to recognise themselves as living a ‘dual reality’ (Rosenblatt, 1995) which created a tension between the desire to be ordinary and awareness that she had now become ‘altered’ and ‘distinct’ by being socially different due to her perceived ‘deviant’ relationship. Whilst some women did not consciously acknowledge beliefs about white privilege, they did tend to monitor their behaviour to ensure the portrayal of respectability and ‘prove and
affirm' they were still a 'good white girl'. Self focused comments like "not like one of those women who go with black men" or "treating everybody equally" or "not seeing race" may mean they are still 'a good white girl', not wishing to be perceived as 'low class' or without moral standing or lacking virtue. Although for some women, there were significant changes and losses in their connections with their families, for many there were significant gains. The women in this research identified becoming more resilient, robust and stronger in the face of adversity through challenging their pre-existing values; being more conscious of issues of race and oppression, developing a reflexive awareness of white privilege, being more comfortable in both worlds and expanding their cultural awareness. For the women, their narratives gave a ‘felt sense’ of having the confidence to ‘dare to be different’ as illustrated in the following picture which hangs in my office.

Picture 15: Dare To Be Different
3) The Perfect White Mother

What is a perfect white mother? She is married, heterosexual and her husband is white and has a similar social background. In contrast to this perceived ideal, being a white woman in an interracial relationship and having mixed-race children is seen to transgress socially expected norms (Phoenix et al, 1991; Britton, 2013). In addition to the joy of becoming a parent, being a white mother of mixed-race children brings additional and unforeseen emotional experiences with a new identity which challenges the expectations of being a perfect white mother. I recall the overwhelming feelings of responsibility and shift in my identity from ‘not mother’ to ‘mother’ and the implications for my future life. Questions arose not only about my competence as a mother, but additional questions of would I be able to ensure and provide a secure environment to enable my children to form positive self concepts and appreciation of their mixed heritage as well as adequately prepare them for dealing with racism? When I had my children, a racialised political debate, particularly about transracial adoption, was prevalent and raised a general debate of ‘could white women parent mixed-race children?’ This created anxiety and fear as the implication was that as a mother of mixed-race children, I could not provide an adequate or positive environment to support their development and specific identity needs. Some researchers still question this issue of whether white mothers have sufficient ‘racial literacy’ and whether white women, due to white privilege, are able to suitably prepare their children (O'Donoghue, 2004; Twine, 2004, 2010). O'Donoghue (2004) does recognise that in some families, the presence of a black parent, can serve as a mediating influence. As a mother, it is important to hear how mixed-race young people feel about their upbringing and what has helped and what further needs to be done.
Participant Ann stated that “racism has been a subject we have discussed from the earliest time” which has led them as a family to discuss these issues openly. As a mother, I have had to confront the realities of how my children will be perceived in the external social world and try my utmost to prepare them. I realised that often I had been reflecting on my own learning at the same time as attempting to enable my children’s growth. This often created tensions for me in recognition that my children were placed in a position of transgressing boundaries by virtue of their birth into an interracial family. Without doubt, all the women in this research were concerned about their children and how they may be socially perceived and responded to. However, the women were at different racial identity and awareness stages and dealt with these issues in different ways. Some were proactive, like participant Ann, whilst other participants, Susan and Charlotte, were reactive, waiting for something to happen, fearful that raising the issues may create unnecessary problems.

Specific issues for mothers may include:

a) A change of social status.

Whilst there are social, gendered views about the role and expectations of being a white mother, when a white woman enters an interracial relationship and has children, she moves out of the ‘norm’ to another socially positioned place, that of ‘racialised motherhood’. One participant, Ann, stated this concern succinctly “I had to check out for myself ... whether I had the strength because I knew that my experience as a mother would be very different if my son was white...I have those extra layers of worry that I wouldn’t have if he was white. I was not just the partner of a black person, but the mother of a black boy as opposed to a black girl.” This was being due to perceived stereotypes and experiences of black men and Ann feeling she needed to have heightened awareness of these issues as a parent of a
black boy. In reflecting this view, Collins (1994) argued that “motherhood occurs in specific historical contexts framed by interlocking structures of race, class and gender contexts where the sons of white mothers have every opportunity and protection and ‘coloured’ sons of racial ethnic mothers know not their fate” (p.57).
So, where does this notion place mixed-race sons of white mothers? The complexity of issues regarding race will affect decisions mothers make about where to live, who they socialise with and where to send children to school. The experience of entering an interracial relationship often alters a white woman’s place in society due to the assumptions made through stereotypical views and she becomes marked as ‘other’ (Collins, 1994; Frankenberg, 1993; Rosenblatt, 1995; Twine, 2010; Harman, 2010, 2013) losing her previously held social status.

b) Maternal competence
For the participants, maternal competence in skills was questioned exclusively by black family members regarding practical skin and hair care and providing ‘culturally embedded’ meals reflecting their partner’s family traditions. Some participant women discussed how they felt scrutinised (Maria, Helen, Joanne) and were not perceived as reaching expected standards. However some women found support through their family connections and received help with the practical tasks of hair and skin care. Traditionally, mothers are engaged in providing the care for their children and so have a greater responsibility for passing on knowledge and cultural awareness through food, hair and skin care, music and cultural practices (Twine, 2010; Harman, 2010, 2013). This does have implications for white women whose social context experiences have been predominantly white, middle class environments and where they have had little or no experience of racism and may struggle to understand or satisfactorily empathise with their child’s experiences.
For some women, additional pressures arose when dealing with cultural and religious differences within the family. In this research, one woman had to deal with the dilemmas of choosing their children’s names, and whether to have her son circumcised as part of balancing the Muslim faith with her own beliefs. This can create additional tensions for the woman, and between the couple, in attempting to negotiate and ensure the best experience for them as a family. So, how do white mothers help their children develop sufficient resilience and robust skills to understand and cope with racism and sexism without internalising oppression? Internalisation of oppression can be a consequence if not addressed through offering knowledge of cultural connections, instilling feelings of racial pride, having positive visual images in the home, through food, books and toys to celebrate their children’s heritage. Many researchers have identified that approaches to parenting and enabling mixed-race children to gain a positive sense of identity will vary according to the social experiences and individual identity development of their mothers (Twine, 2010; Harman, 2004, 2013; O’Donoghue, 2004; Edwards et al, 2012). According to Edwards et al (2010), provision of positive culturally connected experiences inform parenting approaches to dealing with the impact of racialised oppression. These approaches included instilling notions of ‘open individualised’ where identity is seen as more general, emphasising an ‘inner, organic’ potential and a belief that children can choose their identity. Parenting approaches involving a ‘mixed collective’ perspective are where children’s ethnic background is an integral part of their identity and ‘single collective’ is where only one aspect is stressed and a sense of belonging is emphasised through, for example, choosing a category of African or Muslim as the main identity factor.
Robinson-Wood (2011) states emphatically that “white mothers who do not initiate conversations about race... or who do not have sustained interaction with racially different people may not do enough to equip their children with tools to develop racial identities” (p.341). From my own experience, I am aware this is a fluid, changing and developing process, gaining confidence, knowledge and learning from experience to ensure I provided this for my children. Many women in this study were aware that their families were 'different' and often raised this in conversation with their children, particularly when in public and pointed out observed connections and similarities with other mixed-race families to support their children's racial identity development. Likewise, mothers also felt they had to present images of highly competent and functional family relationships to others as a challenge to negative stereotypes. For white mothers of mixed-race children, there often needs to be a gathering up of inner strength and development of resilience to face the looks and invalidating comments when being challenged on whether they are ‘good enough’ mothers.

c) Mothers are ‘other’ to their children

White mothers often do not look like their children due to differences in skin colour, facial features and hair texture. This has implications for the personal, emotional internalised feelings of both mother and child as well as how one is perceived by strangers, family and community. White mothers all shared experiences of others being curious about their connection and relationship with their child and disclosed receiving comments about whether their children were adopted or fostered. Object Relations (Winnicott, 1971) considers the power and value of skin particularly as identification to ‘others’ as an object of attachment. Winnicott (1971) suggests the mother’s face is like a mirror to the child:
“…..What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother’s face? I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself” (p.151).

A mixed race child may not see its physical similarity in the mother’s face. The way this difference may influence identity, attachment processes and interacting relationships through sensory experiences has yet to be explored in the literature in the context of parenting a mixed race child.

Skin colour therefore provides direct information to the external world of an individual’s membership to social group, as well as a direct communication of connection with a mother and an interconnecting relationship with one’s mother as ‘other’. The role of skin in the mother/child relationship is a sensory experience, using all five senses, which can evoke the joy of love, but also the pain of recognition that your child may be exposed to difficult experiences due to the colour of their skin. I remember my daughter talking about her wishes to grow up and look like me leading to a conversation about aspects that could be the same, but valuing our differences. One research participant, Susan at ante natal class, following hearing the health professional’s comments about children looking like their mums, wondered how dark her child’s skin would be, perhaps already conscious of skin tone and how her child may be perceived by others. Having a mixed-race child often brings comments about their physical appearance, seen as ‘best of both worlds,’ exotic, healthier and more attractive. For some mothers, this raised concerns about how their daughters, in particular, may be perceived by men, black and white, as sexual objects of desire.

The mothers were proud of their children, although some mothers described their children in uncritically examined, stereotypical ways e.g. “having a skin to die for”;
“two beautiful mixed children.” Thus, skin colour can evoke a range of feelings from fear, hatred, alienation through to love, from a close connection and mutual togetherness to distance.

4) Identity

According to Erikson (1959, 1980) establishing a secure and rooted identity is a central task in human development. Who we are, how we see ourselves, how others see us and how we connect with others are all aspects of identity
development. This process is not static, it is fluid and constantly evolving as new situations and challenges arise. Our belief systems adjust and change to assimilate these new experiences. Sometimes these new ideas are added to existing beliefs and sometimes individuals achieve a developmental transition in their sense of self. Identity is multi-factorial including race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender and class (Collins, 2000; Byrne, 2006). These factors may be given differential emphasis by individuals according to external influences from families and social environments, their ability to reconcile this with existing learning and the perceived importance of current experience. As a white woman in an interracial relationship, I have undergone a continuous process of deconstruction and reconstruction of a developing identity to define my experience of connecting to a different social group. This is still ‘work in progress’, as I still struggle to know where I belong along a racialised continuum. I cannot ‘go back’ as I am no longer a ‘good white girl’. I am not black, so I guess I have had to redefine my sense of belonging, still feeling ‘in between’ which at times can be a lonely and isolated place. Whilst I recognise there have been some losses, there has also been growth in parts of me that light the passion for what I believe in. This feeling is described by Luke (1994) as moving from “being insiders within their own dominant culture to becoming an outsider within” (p.59). I am not just an outsider in my own culture, but also an outsider within the ‘other’ culture. Some women may try to compensate by embracing black identity, immersing in all things African (participant Liz) or Jamaican as identified in other research with white women on a council estate (McKenzie, 2013) to gain status in the community.

White women can experience changes in identity as a consequence of being in an interracial relationship, but this a process which evolves over time. This current research highlights that these changes occur over time and individual strategies
differ. Using Helms' (1990) model as a guide, women in this research could be depicted at different levels of awareness about their racial identity and being able to articulate and come to terms with the impact of being in an interracial relationship. These levels ranged from minimal awareness, seeing the world through, using Helms' terminology, a ‘colour-blind’ lens (participants Susan, Charlotte) through to women who had a more coherent narrative about the impact of racism and how it affected many aspects of their lives, the importance of being proactive in having open discussions with their partners and children and an awareness and realisation of their own white identity together with the privileges their whiteness affords them (participants Liz, Ann). I have come to recognise for me this has been a growth and developmental process over time. Much like me, all of the women underwent a process, at differing levels of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of identity based on their experiences in an interracial relationship. Luke (1994) suggests the "sense of selfhood white women in interracial families experience is a continual decentring and recentering within intersecting discourses which are fundamentally premised on identity divisions and boundaries" (p.68). Ann described her experience as a continuing journey during which she will always be learning things about herself and ‘others’:

"It’s like having a schizophrenic personality because you lived your life as a white middle class woman who was a teacher and that was who you were but then you get this identity and so when you are you not in your home people treat you in this way and then you are you with your family and you get treated different and then you are you with just you and your partner, different again, you and your child different again. So you have to end up adapting to all the different ‘yous’...you cannot just be that one self."

Ann's experience gives a sense of the exceptional social and personal pressure that women experience from feeling under constant critical social surveillance and negative comment, where when by themselves they can feel as an anonymous white woman, yet when with their partners or families, and/or when known by
others in a social context, their sense of self and historically unchallenged and affirmed 'white membership' is under threat by negative social response, covert or overt, requiring a constant review of white self as 'belonging' or a deconstructed and reconstructed white self as 'other'. Here white identity, as perceived by others, is fragile and, as such, makes the women's sense of self vulnerable. This fits with my own experience where I had to formulate strategies for coping with and deflecting social hostilities.

Entering an interracial relationship involves a number of challenges and changes in identity for the white woman including a shifting of reference group orientation, a recognition that she will be treated differently if she is on her own or with her partner and will be scrutinised as a woman and as a mother. Other challenges involved facing questions about her morality and valid membership of the dominant white group. For some women, there were accompanying positive changes recognising they had developed heightened awareness about racial issues, increased knowledge of different cultures and religions, having more understanding of black issues, becoming more aware of social injustices and discrimination. For those women whose partners came to UK as adults, there was a development of understanding of the impact of cultural shock and hostility experienced and the social impact on their relationships.
Chapter Seven

Implications For Counsellors Working With white Women In Interracial Relationships

I will start with a brief reflection of my own personal and professional racial awareness development. This involved delving into and reflecting on my personal experiences which, at times was emotional, painful and exposing. As a counsellor, and as a researcher, I expect people to reach deep into themselves and share experiences and innermost feelings and I should not expect anything less reflexive of myself. Through exploring my story, I have been able to understand the context of my experiences and by doing this I have developed personally and professionally and have become more engaged, empathic enabling me to more effectively hear stories of ‘others’. I have had to challenge culturally embedded ideas, beliefs, values and concepts that I held. It is this process which is essential for all counsellors to undertake to become more culturally competent. Issues of race cannot be reflected on in isolation, other socio-political intersecting positions involving gender, class, sexual orientation and disabilities need consideration at depth. I liken my experience to the growth of a tree, from the planting of a seed to a tree which continues to grow through the ages.
My own personal and professional racial awareness development.

A pictorial analogy of my personal development would be similar to the above picture. This depicts the seed underground which is hidden, deep and unknown. Initially I too was ‘hidden’ and unaware of racial issues. Personally, I was secure in my white world oblivious to ‘others’ experiences.

The seed, much as my awareness, started to grow. I was beginning to be aware but totally naive, conforming to a majority white view. On a personal level, I entered a relationship with a black man, but I still held colour-blind, not colour-mute, views. Eventually, I began to notice I was being perceived and responded to differently and indirectly and directly experienced racism through the experiences of my partner.
The sapling started to grow and establish roots. I began to acknowledge whiteness and experienced feelings of shame, guilt and anger at injustices. I became more open at a personal level and often became passionate about injustices. I was ashamed of my ignorance and lack of awareness and the possible hurt I may have contributed to through my ignorance. As identified by Sweeney (2008), a close relationship has now contributed to a growth in understandings of racism.

Similarly to a small tree beginning to establish itself, I began to recognise my own biases and my privileges as a white woman. I acknowledge differences and start to understand ‘others’ perspectives. With growth and more established roots from which to draw nourishment, I started to challenge racism. With further reflexive experience, I increased my knowledge and confidence informing my practice and personal development.

As the tree flourished and produced fruit, I too became more confident, developing an antiracist stance, able to acknowledge my whiteness and noticed the impact of micro-aggressions and become more knowledgeable. Personally, I also produced fruit; my children, an experience that included joy but fear about my competence to prepare them for the future.

The tree continues to grow as do I. I hope with my growth I have been able to pass on ‘seeds’ of knowledge to others to enable further growth and support others who may face injustices in their daily lives.

Just as the tree may have had to endure obstacles to its growth, such as inclement weather, stony ground and people damaging its branches, there are obstacles to racial consciousness development such as fear of the unknown,
facing the opposition of normative views and organisational racism. However, as a tree may grow despite obstacles, the development of self awareness, reflexivity and an openness to understanding the worldview of culturally different clients can enable personal and professional growth. Having considered some aspects of my personal and professional development, I will now consider specific implications for counsellors working with white women in interracial relationships.

The next section considers implications for both white and black counsellors working with white women in interracial relationships. Black counsellors are included because being black, from the experiences of the women, was not experienced or perceived as a guarantee of openness, understanding or sensitivity as the women had experienced hostility from both black and white communities.

**Implications for white and black counsellors working with white women**

In the USA counselling literature, where there is a focus on issues relating to interracial families, the emphasis is predominantly on work with couples (Killian, 2001a, Killian 2001b, 2004, 2012; Sullivan and Rocco Cottone, 2006; Kenney and Kenney, 2009). Throughout the USA literature there is an emphasis on the importance of delivering a culturally competent and sensitive service and adhering to cultural counselling competencies. The American Counselling Association (ACA) published a set of thirty-two highly specific multicultural counselling competencies (2002), whereas in the UK, counselling organisations appear to keep the notion of cultural competency on a very general basis, making this appear more as an issue of a ‘difference in values’ or at best ‘cultural awareness’. For example, the BACP states “The provision of culturally sensitive and appropriate services is also a fundamental ethical concern. Cultural factors are often more easily understood and responded to in terms of values.” Lago (2006)
has attempted to summarise these thirty-two highly specific multicultural counselling competencies taken from the ACA and incorporate these in his writings about race, culture and counselling (attached in Appendix 8).

Lago (2006) identified key recommendations for multi-culturally skilled counsellors’ which incorporate counsellor "awareness of assumptions, values and biases, understanding the world view of the culturally different client and developing appropriate intervention strategies and techniques"(p.24-25). This was then separated further into "beliefs and attitudes, knowledge and skills." The emphasis throughout is the need for self-awareness development by counsellors to understand their own biases and stereotypical views. Lago (2011) discussed the dialectic tension that exists between the ‘universalist’ approach of working with everybody the same, "whatever their origins, or identity” and a “client diversity” approach. Lago reinforced the need for a counsellor’s self awareness of their own cultural experiences and how these may inform their own views and values, the need to be aware of their own identity development as well as that of their clients and the need to consider whether their approach is culturally relevant. From my research, counsellors working with white women in interracial relationships should expand their professional and personal self-awareness through considering how they may unconsciously perceive white women, mixed couples and mixed-race families. This could be done in group consultation or with a suitable supervisor. Literature about working therapeutically with interracial couples (Killian, 2001a; Killian 2001b, 2004, 2012; Karis, 2003; Sullivan and Rocco Cottone, 2006; Kenney and Kenney, 2009) suggests counsellors who wish to work effectively should develop their understanding of the client’s world view as a woman, partner and mother, and in addition, developing knowledge about other social positions involving class and gender.
From my research, counsellors will need to develop sensitive skills to both challenge and empathise with white women's understanding of their social positioning. Race and its impact may be an unspoken, unidentified influence in white women's social experience. As a group, white women in interracial relationships may not be able to easily acknowledge themselves or their experiences as different, or be able to explicitly attach any relevance of race to their world view or social experience. Although white women may not bring race issues into the counselling context, for the counsellor to be effective, it is important for counsellors to be aware of the negative societal reactions to white women in interracial relationships and how women deal with these pressures will differ depending on their ability to process experiences. How women manage this social pressure is important for meaningful relationships and positive parenting. The emotional impact of these racialised negative experiences could well be beneath the surface, unexplored and have an undermining impact on the woman's sense of self, maternal competence and psychological functioning. There may be destabilising consequences related to experiences of social disapproval.

Counsellors providing an opportunity in a safe and aware environment may enable the deconstruction of racist narratives by enabling the woman to understand the social contexts to decrease any self blame and developing anxiety. In order to effectively enable this process, it is essential that counsellors develop their knowledge and self-awareness about issues of race and the experiences of white women in interracial relationships to effect sensitive conversations about racism and identity. Part of that process is the counsellor's recognition of their own discomfort about race, a process which may be challenging, but can also be self empowering. A guided and reflexive exploration of the counsellor's own racial
identity development, be they black or white, is also important as part of this process. Again, this may need to take place in specialist training or supervision contexts.

Racial identity is part of a complex matrix of intersecting identities that is contextually relevant and fluid, but often overlooked due to high level of emotional difficulty (Lago, 2006). An understanding of these interlinked dynamics offers clients the opportunity to discuss issues and reflect on the significance of these on their social experience. This is best conveyed through an empathic awareness and acceptance of difference. Rather than a perspective of ‘I treat everyone the same’, a recognition that white women’s experiences in interracial relationships are likely to be ‘different’ is required. Without an understanding of this, responding to white women as ‘the same’ adds, even if unintentionally, to their oppression through a lack of consideration and acknowledgement of their unique and distinct experience.

Although counsellors may see themselves as open, clients will notice if that self-awareness work has not been completed, picking up innuendos, nuances of language and non-verbal, as well as verbal, expression of comfort or discomfort about race and culture related subjects (Sue, 2010). To be effective, the counsellor should invite exploration and enable critical reflection of aspects of racialised experiences. This may enable opportunities to provide what women have not had; the opportunity to actively process experiences. Before entering counselling, clients may not have engaged in discussion about negative racial experiences due to previous experiences of disapproval. Opening up a supportive space to share, may allow women the opportunity to explore and reflect on these issues in-depth. Counsellors aiming to be sensitive to these distinct
client needs should notice both specific or generalised comments by the client which may afford the opportunity to look at deeper, underlying issues than could be previously acknowledged, for example, “I don’t see black”. As identified in the section on ‘Themes’, some women did not overtly see race as an issue and did not openly discuss this in the family. Five women did discuss the impact of racism in their lives. From this, women did need help to comprehend their altered social positions. The counsellor may need to actively enable the white woman in an interracial relationship to explore their experiences to enable the white woman to unpack and make sense of what has happened to them and their family members within a racially politicised social context. Again, to be able to offer this effectively, and not cause damage to the client’s sense of self, counsellors will require specialist training and informed supervision.

My research, in line with existing theory (Lago, 2006, 2011; Sue, 2010) supports the view of what is needed as being (1) a genuine respect, awareness and comfort in discussions which may be race related and ability to detect when this is the case. Counsellors also need to be comfortable and able to talk openly about racial issues to put the client at ease in the process of exploration. From this; (2) cultural empathy is required, and that is an ability to step into the client’s racial world view and acknowledge, explore, develop and validate that experience. In summary, this requires deep and accurate reflection on the white counsellor’s own racial experience and privilege and their own contribution to oppression; (3) counsellors should become knowledgeable about historical and societal contexts which impact on the woman’s experiences to enable the white woman to understand these influential contexts; (4) counsellors should develop the ability to sensitively acknowledge the reality of racism and (5) importantly for white counsellors, there should be increased reflections about the social positioning and meaning of
whiteness and privilege (Ryde, 2010), and specifically for black counsellors, an exploration of any internalised biases, stereotypes, hostile emotions and reflecting on their own experiences of having to counter racism and the pain of racism and how this may have handicapped their personal and professional development (Helms, 1991; Sue, 2010).

Furthermore, counsellors should critically reflect on the validity of their preferred counselling orientation for different client groups. Bhugra and De Silva (2000) raised the issue that therapeutic approaches tend to be Eurocentric in focus and counsellors should consider how they may need to adapt their intervention when working with women whose partners are African or Indian. Two women (Jane and Liz) identified specific cultural stressors for their partners who came to UK as adults, with one partner admitted to hospital as a consequence. These women found it difficult to comprehend the stresses their partners faced and thus felt disempowered in supporting their partners. Due to having little prior experience of racism prior to their interracial relationship, the white woman may not be sufficiently aware and sophisticated to make sense of the racially politicised environment on her relationship. The degree to which she is aware will be dependent on her stage of racial awareness, stemming from the processing and meaning making of her experiences (Helms, 1991; Sweeney, 2008). A culturally competent counsellor will need to sensitively help the woman disengage and distance herself from any feelings of self-blame, guilt or social devaluation. Hill and Thomas (2000) emphasise the use of “a dialogue process to socially construct empowering stories and identities in place of oppressive narratives” (p.31). The process involved may be one of combining a psycho-educational stance together with informed responses to address any internalised socially constructed blame (Biever, Bobele and North, 2002; Killian, 2003).
Using narratives or stories as part of the therapeutic encounter is an approach suggested for work with interracial couples (Hill and Thomas, 2000; Biever, Bobele and North, 2002; Killian, 2003; Semmler and Williams, 2000) as it draws on social constructionist and feminist theories with an emphasis on empowerment. According to McLeod (2006), “stories and storytelling present primary points of connection between what goes on in therapy, whether contemporary psychotherapy or traditional healing – and what goes on in culture as a whole.”

The telling of personal stories, tales of who I am, what I want to be or what troubles me, to a listener mandated to hear such stories is an essential mechanism” (p.2). Many therapists have become interested in the narrative approach (White and Epston, 1990), which involves clients telling their stories, making sense of them by externalising aspects and reconstructing new meanings. Narrative therapy “reflects an underlying assumption that reality is socially constructed and people co-create truths based on social interaction” (White and Epston, 1990). In this approach, therapists are interested in the client's private story as well as a broader societal context. Working with white women in interracial relationships, with this approach, may enable women to better understand and recognise the impact of gender, race, class and other social constructs on their identities as well as dealing with feeling ‘ordinary’ when society may see them as personally at variance with social expectations.

The use of narratives may be an enabling process for understanding the impact of negative, stereotypical messages on self and, according to Biever et al (2002), may “be seen as getting directly to the heart of internalised racism through focussing on deconstructing dominant culture narratives and ...be liberating for individuals” (p.79) thus allowing individuals to consider other possibilities. From
this, the counsellor working with white women in interracial relationships will be more effective in providing the required support and therapeutic qualities to enable growth and development in the white woman’s sense of self and understanding of her social positioning in a politically racialised social context.
Chapter Eight

Reflections on undertaking a heuristic research study

This has been a challenging process throughout with initial questions about whether this is a legitimate means of methodology and would the process be acceptable to the academic world. Although there is growing interest and acceptance of exploration about self (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000) and the use of more creative methods in the research process (Knowles and Cole, 2008) the heuristic process initially raised more questions than answers for me. To begin to explore and answer some of these questions, I attended a creative methods workshop in 2013 run by Birmingham University and Westminster University. I was surprised at the cross-section of participants from various courses including business, medicine and geography integrating a variety of creative methods as part of their research. I attended the Lego workshop. Picture 18 reflects my preparation to take the risk and ‘jump in’ which gave me an impetus to continue.

Picture 18: Lego Image
Richardson (2000) stated that the self is always present in research no matter how hard we may try to suppress this. How we choose our topic, our approach, whether it is qualitative or quantitative comes from our experiences and interests. There is openness in heuristic methodology which acknowledges the importance and value of the researcher’s experience, and an emphasis on relational experiences and the use of reflexivity and creativity as part of the process. Although this approach was a challenge to traditional ways of undertaking research there is value for the researcher, and ultimately, the reader to consider wider aspects, such as does this study make connections with my personal experiences, or to think about ‘taking for granted’ issues from a different social perspective. Some discomfort arose due to this study being an emotive topic and touching on my emotions and exploring uncomfortable aspects of myself. For me this is often recognising the emotions of guilt and shame, particularly around issues of racism. In this research, I found I was also feeling guilty about making decisions about inclusion/exclusion of aspects of women’s stories. How could I remain true and accurate in including their experiences when I am bound by a word count which meant leaving some experiences out? Did I choose to represent some aspects of the women's stories to validate my own experiences? However, I did recognise the interpretation of meaning and finding the essence of research is essentially reliant on the researcher’s subjective interpretation of participants' experience. The heuristic methodology allowed my personal experience to be incorporated into the research process with this dimension likely to increase interpretative transparency, and decrease the need of inaccurate or skewed representations of the participants' experiences through a specific acknowledgement of my experience. The question Moustakas (1990) asks is
“Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one’s own rigorous, exhaustive self searching ... present comprehensively, vividly and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience? This judgement is made by the primary researcher who is the only person in the investigation who has undergone the heuristic inquiry from the beginning” (p.32). The more informal nature of the interview had the potential for digression, but it also allowed for a more fluid discussion of experiences. There was ’rhythm and choice’ in our interviews, with the rhythm of choice determined chiefly by the participants.

There were many tensions engaging in this heuristic research process including having to change my writing style from a free flowing creative style to a more formal academic style for chapters on literature review and themes, a conflict between creating a fluid, spontaneous artistic genre with a tension of producing a formal academic writing piece. With these tensions, I recollected Sela-Smith’s critique of heuristic research (2002). I found I did, at times, drift to looking at external contextual factors rather than my internal emotional connection with my experiences. A necessary process, but I believe I actively returned to my internal process to meet heuristic research requirements.

The strengths of engaging in this approach lay in having the opportunity and freedom to be more creative, although this was also a situation of me facing my fears, that is embracing creativity, a personal writing style and looking more closely at self. This could be viewed as self indulgent; however it is actually more difficult than following an ‘objective’ structure. It has been a challenging journey on personal, professional and academic levels. As a methodology, heuristics is often perceived as ‘unstructured’, but I found it had a rigorous structure that involved a need to be disciplined in order to stay with the process and, on occasions, I was
tempted to give up and engage in a more 'straight forward' or more directive approach such as thematic analysis. I found more depth was required through a heuristic approach and I was challenged to think 'outside the box' offering the opportunity to be creative, engage in self exploration and have the opportunity for deeper reflection about a subject which I have personal experience of. It was important to have clarity about my experiences and the essential experiences of others who were in interracial relationships to ensure the end product, 'the quilt', had symmetry and balance and accurately reflected participant narratives.

Limitations of this research

I have taken a critical perspective throughout my study and have attempted to integrate notions of my research limitations throughout as this arose. As such, this section is a summary of those issues and should also be read in the context of the previous Section of Chapter 8 on 'Reflections on undertaking a heuristic research study' and my perspectives in Chapter 3 in 'The importance of reflexivity in research' Section and in the context of Chapter 2 under the Section heading of Transferability.

Some may say that one of the limitations is a lack of transferability, although it was stressed that in this study I made no claim to imply transferability and highlighted the women's individual subjective experiences. This was a small explorative study of a specific, purposeful group of white women in interracial relationships. For me this was the beginning of a process, not a final end point, offering and opening questions about these women’s experiences to hear what women had to say. The heuristic methodological approach to research promoted an emphasis on the importance of subjectivity, through a holistic approach to using reflexivity. Both explicitly and implicitly attempts to address issues of a potential of power
imbalance were considered and addressed. Some examples from my reflexive log in appendix 3 highlight my dilemmas and questions about these issues. This has been done through my constant reflecting and processing from start to finish and my dialogue with participants, professionals, personal connections, the use of the supervisory process and discussion with other women who are in interracial relationships.

One of the criticisms of using a heuristic approach is that it may be perceived as self-indulgent through its process of positioning myself in the research process. However, heuristics encourages active and equal engagement, not self indulgence, with ‘participants’ as co-participants, thus integrating the self of the researcher with others, the co-participants. There were shared stories and connections during this process which felt affirming, empowering and enabling, thus enriching and enhancing the data provided by the co-participants and myself. This felt respectful of Moustakas’s foundational heuristic approach and values, as well as honouring feminist and antiracist principles. I tried to remain true to this methodological process, showing respect through reflexivity, dialogue and giving voice to a group of women who may often feel marginalised, thus making the ‘invisible’ more ‘visible’. This approach may also be criticised for its subjectivity, although using this approach may trigger additional questions, through the insight of subjectivity, and further discussion, leading to further recognition of white women’s lived experiences told in their own words.

In further considering myself within the research process, my use of reflexivity throughout the research process, involved a range of activities from checking for and acknowledging my personal bias/standpoint in using myself in the research process and reflecting on the sometimes differing opinions of the participants and
acknowledging this process in myself in reflection of my own personal journey. Douglas (1985) stressed the importance of constant self-reflection throughout the research process to develop a balanced and emotionally attuned environment where there could be mutual disclosure at a deep level of interaction. This I strived to achieve and needed to keep reminding myself of the importance to do so. As Finlay and Gough (2003) stress, critical self-reflection requires thoughts about the "ways in which researchers’ social background, assumptions, positioning and behaviour impact on the research process" (p.ix). Placing myself in the research process came with potential risks and also potential criticism, such as being seen as self-indulgent, lacking ‘objectivity’ or not being sufficiently scientifically rigorous. However, my experience in incorporating and integrating a reflexive approach in this research was that it felt more a personally demanding and rigorous in interpretation of ‘the data’, than traditional methodological approaches (Scheurich, 1995) in the emotion and personal linkage required to engage with the experiences of others on a topic I was personally connected with. My experience was one of a process of reflexivity providing deeper insight and critical scrutiny of all aspects of the research process. Throughout the process of interviewing, analysis and discussion, I constantly engaged in a reflexive process to ensure I maintained an ethical stance, challenging myself to question every aspect of my engagement in the process.

In further reflecting on placing myself in the interview process, Mishler (1986) made the important point that the role of the researcher should not be overlooked. How I had listened, attended, encouraged, interpreted, digressed, initiated and perhaps limited or stopped participant responses earlier than the participants intended, is an important part of the research influencing process and outcome.
Thus, it was always important in my reflections to consider how I may have influenced, even if only unintentionally, a respondent’s account.

Another possible criticism, from a feminist research perspective, is that it could be argued that I should have referred the analysis of the transcripts and themes back to the participants for their views. The women were offered an opportunity to meet, four of whom took this up, but were more interested in continuing to tell their stories rather than being involved in or critiquing the analysis. This may be because of the trust stemming from the heuristic research process through having a lived and acknowledged subjective connection. Regardless, it could still be argued that the women’s research contribution could have been further expanded by my giving feedback about my analysis. This highlights how I may have brought my own bias and beliefs into the analysis. This process was acknowledged at the beginning in terms of subjectivity and power. As Proctor (2014) argued, it is one’s personal history and experience which will influence how individuals relate to each other in relationships.

A further issue arises about interpretation of the respondents’ discourse. In any qualitative study, as Foreshaw (2007) has argued, multiple interpretations of the interview data can exist and are equally valid. Offering interpretations is different from making claims on ‘truth’. However, Willig (2013) also makes the important point:

“…. It is important to understand that while offering interpretations is different from making truth claims, method most certainly is implicated in interpretation and understanding. The difference between a methodological interpretation of a text, such as an interview transcript, and the researcher’s subjective view of it, is that the former is based upon a systematic, cyclical process of critical reflection and
challenge of the interpreter’s own emerging interpretations, whereas the latter is the produce of the author’s unmediated associations and reactions” (p.174-175).

With this in mind, I take the view that this research was a systematic and cyclical process of reflection and a constant challenging of myself in the interpretations. The reviewed literature provided me with increased insight and understanding of my own experiences in the social political context of power relations and intersectionality with race and gender. That which is researched, in my exploration of the white women’s experience, is relevant in its past and present political and social context to this group of women where similarities and history, politics and lived experience exist and are relevant to the quilt of common experience.

A further potential limitation was one of not offering a formal definition of social class. This may reflect an assumption that the “significance of class is dwindling” but according to Ballinger and Wright (2007) this “absence may reflect difficulties in defining class rather than its disappearance” (p.157). I acknowledge a lack of clarity regarding my discussion of social class with no specified definition. I relied on my own experience and perception, in particular equating middle class with education. On reflection, it appears I have adopted a subjective assumption that this intended meaning will be clear to those who read my research. This highlights where subjectivity also needs transparency to ensure meaning is not confused. On reflection, my ‘working definition’ of the social class of the women I wished to interview was related to having higher education qualifications or being in the process of higher education. On further reflection, did this confuse social class with educational achievement? The two are not without links (Biress and Nunn, 2013). The difference and overlap between middle-class, education, professional
training and status, could have been developed but as stated earlier, I chose to focus on gender and race due to my own research interests.

In my appraisal of the research, that which is included has sufficient information to be of use in aiding my understanding of my own experience and the broader social and politicised personal experience of white women in the UK. I offer these findings to the reader for them to decide on the results' application for their particular research or practice based need. I saw the findings speak to and resonate with my experiences as a white woman in an interracial relationship.

**Suggestions for further research**

The research is explorative and may lay the groundwork for further research and implementation in counselling for better comprehending the needs of white women in interracial relationships. Specific areas to be considered could include an in-depth study regarding mothers' identity development, mothers' strategies for social survival, support needs for white women in mixed race families and their children and consideration of counsellors' cultural awareness when working with mixed race families. Exploration of these issues could help improve both counsellor awareness and service delivery. One question I ask myself is one of what would I do differently in this research? With hindsight, I may have chosen a more specific aspect to consider such as the impact of visible differences of skin colour and the underlying symbolism and meaning that people attach to this, or considered a study with mothers and children together. Other research could develop studies with other groups such as black women with white partners or the experiences of men in interracial relationships. I did not explicitly look at the role of education and the role of professional training in the women's experiences and how this may have influenced their ideas and understanding of their social positions. Some had
experienced antiracist training as part of their work role. How this influenced the women's ideas was not directly explored. This could be a focus for further research.

I may not have initially chosen to undertake a heuristic study, but having done so, it has enabled a more expansive approach of looking at the phenomenon of lived experiences from the participants’ subjective viewpoints, rather than an objective, distanced researcher.

**Final Thoughts**

As the journey comes to an end I look back and consider the process of undertaking this research. This study involved hearing the lived experiences of white women in interracial relationships and understanding how their personal social experiences of the external world influenced and affected them as women, partners and mothers. The purpose of the research was to give meaning to women’s perspectives, without judgement or challenge. I also wished to illuminate women’s experiences to provide professionals improved connections with women in interracial relationships to challenge any devaluing beliefs and stereotypes, to enable an acknowledgement of the women’s unique experiences, and to present these women’s voices beyond ‘taken for granted’ assumptions. Listening to the women’s stories evoked feelings of familiarity, rekindling memories of my own experiences, some prominent, others buried deep, those feelings of guilt, shame and hurt, being misunderstood and not recognised. Placing myself in the heuristic process has enabled me to give more thought to my experiences and how these may influence my interactions with others about their views and assumptions. Through the heuristic process, I have been enabled to connect with internal experiences as well as the external reality of others. I am a racialised being, aware of the privilege and power I hold as a white woman, but also aware I
experience oppression due to my choice of relationship. I recognise that a subjective and objective connection with race in my professional and personal life is meaningful and essential, but brings its inherent frustrations. I notice a theme in my reflexive log is often about my frustrations with professionals who are unable to hear. I have had to learn to be patient and have hope that the world will become a more equal and balanced place to live. I have found a creative voice and learnt to be kinder to myself during this process.

The journey continues........
References


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Appendix 1

Terms Used to Describe People of 'Mixed-Race':

Past and Present (2009)

The following phrases are just some of the terms that have been used to describe people of 'mixed-race'. Decide which of these terms you consider to be acceptable and appropriate language for our time.

'U' denotes terms typically used in the USA
'0' denotes terms that are generally considered to be out-dated and offensive
'N' denotes more recent, but equally offensive terms
'P' denotes terms that young people of Multiple Heritage say they prefer - as indicated by recent research undertaken by the Project Bi-racial

Of two races
black: Is not a real skin colour - tends to be used a 'political identity' for non-white people who suffer discrimination on the grounds of race

Borderliner: (D)

Bounty: (0) Traditionally, someone 'black' who 'acts white'

Breed (Half-breed): (D) 'Street' term for people of mixed-race - suggests there are 'pure breeds' or races that are contaminated or watered down when people 'mix'.

Brownie: (0) Street term for mixed-race girls

Chequerboard: (D)

Coconut : (0) same as 'Bounty'

Coloured : (D) In South Africa, this term refers to a 'mixed' group of people with African and European ancestry. In UK, is generally considered outdated and inappropriate as all people are considered to have a 'colour'.

Coolie: (0) This term is used to refer to people of Asian descent. The indentured slave labourers with Indian origins were called this in the Caribbean.
Coon: (D) An extremely offensive term for a ‘person of colour’
Confused.com : (N) People of mixed-race are often (incorrectly) assumed to confused about their identity.
Creole: In most of Latin America, Creole generally refers to people of mixed Spanish or Portuguese decent and in Brazil it is a slang word for black individuals. The term has also been used to denote someone whose ancestry is so mixed that they do not belong to the any other categories.
Dual Heritage: (P) However, some young people dislike the notion of only referring to two backgrounds. (See ‘Shared Heritage’)
Dusky: To describe a person with an off-white complexion.
Eurasian: A term that refers to those of European and Asian parentage.
Fair-skinned: A light complexion.
Grey: (D) A shade you get when black is mixed with white.
Half-black *1: (D)
Half-breed *1: (D) See ‘Breed’
Halt-caste*: (D) In India, the population was divided into four hierarchical castes according to what they were good at, that is, priests, warriors, trades people and manual workers. Once a person is born in a ‘lower’ caste, he or she cannot move up to another ‘higher’ caste - nor can they marry into other castes. Children born out of wedlock from liaisons between the castes are known as ‘half caste’. The higher caste Indians of course used that as an excuse to keep the lower caste down using ‘Institutional Casteism’.
Half - chat *1: (D) Slang for half-caste
Half-pure: (D) perpetuates notion of there being ‘pure races’ that are tainted or sullied where ‘mixed-race’ people exist
Half-white *1: (D)
Hexadecaroon *2: (D) One sixth black
High yellow: (D) Jamaican, and old USA term for people of fair complexion.
Hovis (N) ‘best of both’: implies that pure races exist (of black and white) exist
Hybrid: Generally refers to something of mixed origin or composition - a mix of two different species
Mango: ¾ black ¼ white
Marranos: (D) Probably comes from the Arabic word for moharrama or muharram or mahram meaning “a forbidden thing”. The term ‘marrano’ can also refer to a “swine“ or something “filthy”.
Meamelouc: 7% black 93% white
Metis: (0) French and related to the Spanish word mestizo but basically means ‘mixed blood’. Portuguese for dog.
Metis: (D) Masculine and Metisse is feminine
Mixed Blood: (D) Historically, there has been controversy over interracial couples, which still exists in some contexts, such as fears of “racial impurity” when people have children of ‘mixed blood’.
Mixed Heritage: (P) Parents from different heritage backgrounds. Often used as a modern academic term to describe mixed-race people.

Mixed Parentage: (P) A slightly out dated version of Multiple Heritage, not widely used.

Mixed Race: (P) At the time of writing, this appears to be the most popular term used by young people of mixed-race to describe themselves.

**Mix-d: (P)** Our term to describe a modern 'lived' mixed-race experience

Mongrel: (0) Of mixed breed or origin, relates to dogs.

Mulatto: (0) Term meaning 'small mule' in Spanish - someone ashamed of both races.

Mule: (0) Offspring of any two creatures specifically a male donkey and female horse

Multiethnic (U) Used more commonly in the US

Multiple Heritage (P) Similar to 'mixed-heritage'

Multiracial: (U) Of many races

Mutt: (0) Slang for a mongrel dog

No Nation: (N) Obviously intimates that people of mixed-race belong nowhere

Octoroon 2 : (0) One eighth black blood

Pick 'n' Mix: (N) Like selecting sweets, implies 'pure races' can be 'mixed'

Quadroon 2 : (0) One quarter black blood

Quarter caste: Term for a person who has one 'mono-heritage' parent and one 'mixed-race' parent

Quintoon 2 : Offspring of an Octoroon and a European, basically it means having ancestry that is one-sixteenth African

Red skin: (0) Caribbean slang for people with fair skin

Sambo: 7/8 black 1/8 white

Shared Heritage: Where one of the child's parents comes from a mixed heritage themselves.

Simpsons : (N) This yellow, animated family is meant to allude to the 'yellowness' of mixed race people.

Spurious person: (0) Not legitimate or genuine - used to describe mixed-race people in American around mid 1800's

Waki: (N) A person with one white parent and one Pakistani parent white: Not a true skin colour (see 'black')

Wigga: (0) A 'white' person who 'acts black'

* any term making use of the word 'half' suggests any incomplete person

* an old law in the Southern States of America racially categorised people according to how much 'black blood' they had in them
## Appendix 2

### Population Statistics

Ethnic groups 2001 and 2011, England and Wales

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Irish</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gypsy or Irish traveller</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other white</td>
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<td>4.4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>Mixed/multiple ethnic groups</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>white and black Caribbean</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white and Asian</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white and black African</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Mixed</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asian/Asian British</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
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<td>Chinese1</td>
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<td>0.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black/ African/ Caribbean/Black British</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carribean</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other black</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other ethnic group</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Any other ethnic group</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Comparability issues exist between these ethnic groups for the 2001 and 2011 Census

2. No comparable data exists for these ethnic groups in 2001 Census

Source: Census 2001 and 2011, Office for National Statistics
Appendix 3

Examples from a Reflexive Log

Strong emotions are rising to the surface I find I am often challenging other professionals or raising these issues, but often feel I am perceived as having a chip on my shoulder or finding that people ‘switch off’.

Looking at my reflections there appears a theme of frustration with other professionals

I am frequently surprised and shocked at disparaging views from professionals’ in the twenty first century regarding issues of race and interracial relationships. I often feel I am a lone voice, or in an isolated position, challenging people to consider white women’s experiences of continuing cynicism and lack of understanding. It is an emotive subject because I am personally involved in this social position and believe some willingness from others to consider my lived experience would feel encouraging.

I often find myself having explosive moments when I start discussing these issues, particularly when faced with ideas which I may well have held and have long since let go of. So my anger maybe directed towards myself, but also towards others who I feel ‘should know better’, particularly with white professional counsellors who are working with diverse communities and show little awareness of the existence of racism. I felt myself emotionally driven to include anything and everything to justify this emotional connection and my choice of subject. However it was all consuming and emotionally overwhelming.
Questions but not answers!!!!

So many questions running round my head!

I am having to consider my emotional reactions to participants. I have undergone a continuous process of challenging myself around any indecisions, tensions, recognition of different relationships and experiences of empathy, social engagement, rapport and identification.

Also, I had reflected on any potential for distancing or any negative emotions such as boredom or frustration. Does this affect the analysis, i.e. judgemental versus non-judgemental? During the whole process I have constantly asked myself questions to which I do not always have answers, but hope this has enabled me to consider issues from many angles. These included:

Can I be a researcher and be empathic? Is there any over involvement? The process engaged me at a subjective level so I could not be detached. I am part of ‘the quilt’. My emotional reactions are important as part of ‘the data’. Does this impinge or enhance the process? Can my transparency of emotional reaction affect how someone tells their story? For example, are important aspects left out or added to?

How does my position/role as researcher affect the participants? Does the need to accurately tell the stories of others contradict my personal self?
More questions I needed to ask of myself were: How do I manage these emotions and personal beliefs in the interview process? How do I manage inequalities? How do I encourage and facilitate people I interview to give their view of their worlds without personal judgement? How do race, gender and class shape their views and values and inform my own? I began to realise that inevitably these differences in perspective are present in the research process and should not be denied. To do so would be attempting to hide their existence and create further tension in their management. I reached an increasing realisation that if my personal values were not identified, acknowledged or articulated, they may come to distort any interaction and thwart the essence of congruence and personal integrity in the research process. To not acknowledge my own personal values as part of the process would be dishonest and unethical.

Further questions arose for me, am I an outsider due to the nature of the meeting, i.e. a research interview, or am I an insider because I am a white woman in an inter-racial relationship? Am I missing important nuances of communication details that are said or implied because of my personal assumptions? Do participants not engage in open discussion about race and racism because of our unshared, unacknowledged potentially different experiences/understanding? Is my subjective perspective cued into by participants who become more reticent and reserved in sharing their views? I then moved forward to a personal place where I became further aware of my own standpoint and perceived development/understanding through discussion, reading and writing, and realised I often made my standpoint conscious and this may inhibit the views of others being openly expressed. I acknowledged the impact of the force of my views acting as a potential, unintended censoring process to the views of others. With this, continued the increasing awareness of the need to facilitate the views of others and not curtail
In any attempt to make linkage, my constant dialogue with myself included ‘am I respecting the differences participants present?’ For example, with the women’s experiences and the way they describe their lives, ‘am I giving a full and honest account of their views and interpretations and where do I position myself?’ I could not subjectively, uncritically assume my experience as a white woman in an inter-racial relationship was the same lived experience as that of the women I am interviewing.

Questions arose such as: Could I see life from the perspectives of others during our meeting? I could not assume that our whiteness was a common connection or that we are both white women in inter-racial relationships with an exact, shared and mutually understood connection. There existed some similarity of experiences, but also many differences. I had to take into account differences of language use, culture, class and age. It was important to recognise that different aspects of social identity were present and differentially magnified at different times during the interview.
I needed to deeply consider whether this affected my analysis. Was I being judgemental or non-judgemental? Could I be a researcher and also be empathic? Was I over-involved with some participants and under-involved with others? The whole process engaged me deeply at a subjective level. I realised that I could not be detached and had to acknowledge my emotional reactions were important as part of the research approach, process and ‘data analysis’. I had to consider whether my emotions and beliefs impeded or enhanced that process. Could my transparency of emotional reaction affect how someone tells their story? Were there things that were left out or added to as a consequence of my engagement in the interview? How did my position/role as researcher ‘affect the participants’ and did this contradict my personal self or my stance as a counsellor? This research is socially positioned as a relationship study, these are relationships and I am part of those relationships and my experiences will be present through the intense contact with the participants in the interviews and in my immersion in the data and interpretation of this at different stages.
It is only as I became fully immersed, that I became fully aware of the importance that these were real people who gave their time and shared their experiences to inform my academic enquiry. Some of the questions I asked myself included, did I give due consideration to ethical issues such as anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, particularly as this was not discussed in great depth again after the initial meeting and the signing of forms. I also worried about the true representations of content, particularly when this was being condensed. Another aspect that was linked with informed consent was that of how does this affect the partners of the women who are talking about them? In addition, because I wanted to represent a whole story, were these participants recognisable in the thesis discussion of results, even with pseudonyms? Was there greater exposure and vulnerability in my approach for the participants? I asked myself who the research was for? What is written is my interpretation, and ultimately my voice as I was able to choose what I left in and took out. What was relevant to me in my perception of the phenomenon? So we know the question is one of ‘Is it a true representation of my participants?’ The writing can never contain a whole person, so every act of writing a person’s life is inevitably a violation or reduction. This led me to thinking about how I felt about writing about others. Sometimes this was with discomfort, sometimes with excitement. I ask myself, have I harmed anybody, and I don’t think so, but one or two participants may have been uncomfortable in their exploration. Was this discomfort/harm or part of an emotional growth process? Was that about me, or was that reflexive of the material that we discussed? Was I using participants to support my views? I came to realise that this research process was more ethically complex than I initially thought.
Appendix 4

A summary of the core concepts of heuristic enquiry

Moustakas identified seven core concepts in the process of heuristic enquiry.

- Identifying the focus of enquiry, that is living it, understanding my own experience,
- Self-dialogue. This involves an openness with self, challenging self. For example, doubts as well as affirmations such as using a visual journal as part of that reflexive process,
- Tacit knowing. This is an internal knowledge that we cannot describe and can guide the researcher into untapped directions. This leads to…
- Intuition which is the bridge between explicit and tacit knowledge. For me, creative aspects enabled me to reach deeper parts,
- Indwelling. That is turning inward (the emotional experience of the phenomenon),
- Focusing. This is deeper, conscious insight, recognising elements of own experience as well as recognising the elements of the participants’ experiences of similarity and difference,
- Internal frame of reference. This is the outcome of the process of development, the knowledge is placed in the context of the researchers’ understanding of their own internal experience rather than an external experience which leads to greater understanding of others.
### Appendix 5 Identity Models


**Identity Development Model in Relation to black Racial Identity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-encounter</th>
<th>Encounter</th>
<th>Immersion and Emersion</th>
<th>Internalisation</th>
<th>Internalisation-Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The unaware person</td>
<td>Catalysed by profound events resulting in increased awareness</td>
<td>Initially characterised by withdrawal from the dominant culture</td>
<td>Development of an integrated more positive self-image</td>
<td>Commitment of the new self to meaningful action for the benefit of the minority community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of oppression as justified</td>
<td>Rejection of oppression</td>
<td>Immersion in one's heritage</td>
<td>Adoption of a pluralistic, non-racist perspective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values assimilation into the majority culture</td>
<td>Some feelings of guilt and anger</td>
<td>Hostility towards whites</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative self-concept</td>
<td></td>
<td>Eventual greater cognitive flexibility and pride emerge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rowe et al (1994)

Rowe et al argued that the Helms/Hardiman models did not describe identity development at all but white people’s awareness and sensitivity to others. They suggest that the Helms model was developed in relation to interaction with blacks rather than a stand alone white racial identity development model. Rowe et al called their model a white consciousness model, that is in ‘one’s awareness of being white and what that implies in relation to those who do not share white group membership’ (pp 133-134). They had two distinct sections. One was ‘unachieved white racial consciousness which has three columns underneath it and the other one is ‘achieved white racial consciousness, which has four columns underneath it. (Rowe, W., Bennett, S., and Atkinson, D., (1994), White Racial Identity Models: A critique and alternative proposal, The Counselling Psychologist, 1994, 22: 129.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unachieved white Racial Consciousness</th>
<th>Achieved white Racial Consciousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoidant type</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dependent Type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No consideration of white identity</td>
<td>Committed to a set of attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>towards race but superficial and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not internalised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Type</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dissonant Type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed to a set of attitudes</td>
<td>Uncertain about his/her white racial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>towards race but superficial and</td>
<td>consciousness and ethnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not internalised</td>
<td>concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dominative Type</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conflictive Type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnocentric</td>
<td>Opposed to overt racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reactive Type</strong></td>
<td><strong>Integrative Type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of the significance of</td>
<td>Pragmatic view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**No consciousness about racial</td>
<td><strong>Looks to peers for ideas</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Denial about racism</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tends to conform to the majority</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>view</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Conflicting views</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lack of awareness of historical</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>factors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>'I don’t believe whites shouldn’t</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>get jobs if they’ve got better</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>qualifications'</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>An embarrassment to be white</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Values whiteness</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- "I don’t know what all the fuss is about, they’ve got as many opportunities as us"
- Doesn’t see similarities between groups
- May over-identify with black culture
- Comfortable interacting with others

- Reluctant to interact
Hardiman (1982)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Naivety</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
<th>Resistance</th>
<th>Redefinition</th>
<th>Internalisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little or no awareness</td>
<td>Belief that all people have equal opportunities to succeed</td>
<td>Events destroy the denial system, for example, friendship with a black person or observance of discrimination, therefore the individual is no longer able to deny the realities of oppression</td>
<td>The individual confronts own biases</td>
<td>Development of a non-racist identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little contact with ethnic groups</td>
<td>If people don’t succeed that is due to personal deficits, for example, lack of motivation</td>
<td>Beginning to acknowledge own 'whiteness'</td>
<td>Accepts responsibility for one’s 'whiteness'</td>
<td>Actively works to eradicate racism and oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curious</td>
<td>Tendency to blame the 'victim'</td>
<td>Identify own racism</td>
<td>Recognition of how one has benefited from being white and how that has negatively impacted on black people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May hold negative views</td>
<td>Feelings of anger, pain, frustration</td>
<td></td>
<td>More comfortable with mixing with different cultures/heritages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypical biases</td>
<td>May feel awkward around black people. Fear of saying or doing something that could be seen as racist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sue and Sue (1999) suggested development of a healthy white racial identity requires movement through two phases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abandonment of racism</th>
<th>Defining a non-racist identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Contact</strong></td>
<td><strong>Defining a non-racist identity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of awareness</td>
<td>Abandonment of racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition of ‘whiteness’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Idealisation of own group (white) and intolerant of other groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intellectualised commitment to one’s own socio racial group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An understanding of racism and one’s participation in a racist society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educating self about ‘whiteness’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oblivious to racism</td>
<td>May feel guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May focus on issues such as reverse discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not fully tolerant of people from other groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May include racial activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letting go of privileged status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambivalence about racial issues. For example, not telling racist jokes but may not be able to challenge others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With having little empathy or understanding of others’ ‘experiences’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May attempt to help others from other groups, which may appear paternalistic and deny the full extent of others’ cultures. For example ‘I don’t have a problem with black people but I feel nervous when a black man gets into the lift or am walking down the street past a group of black young people’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition of benefits of being white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commitment to pluralistic society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial factors may affect life decisions. For example, where they live, children going to school</td>
<td>May see work in a mixed area/communit y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lack of awareness
- Recognition of ‘whiteness’
- Idealisation of own group (white) and intolerant of other groups
- Intellectualised commitment to one’s own socio racial group
- An understanding of racism and one’s participation in a racist society
- Educating self about ‘whiteness’

Oblivious to racism
- May feel guilt
- May focus on issues such as reverse discrimination
- Not fully tolerant of people from other groups
- May include racial activism
- Letting go of privileged status

Ambivalence about racial issues. For example, not telling racist jokes but may not be able to challenge others
- With having little empathy or understanding of others’ ‘experiences’
- May attempt to help others from other groups, which may appear paternalistic and deny the full extent of others’ cultures. For example ‘I don’t have a problem with black people but I feel nervous when a black man gets into the lift or am walking down the street past a group of black young people’.
- Recognition of benefits of being white
- Commitment to pluralistic society
Appendix 6 Interview Collages

Susan
Maria
Jane
Capturing Emotions
Critical Gaze
Heightened and intense emotions
Representation of the research process
A Liminal Space
Creative Synthesis
Appendix 8

Reflections on my experiences as a white woman in an interracial relationship.

My first thoughts are that this has been a journey which at times has been an emotional rollercoaster. At times, feeling the excitement and fun, sometimes wondering what emotional quicksand I had got into, sometimes being hit with feelings of intensity, anger, frustration, hurt, sadness, struggle, tensions and at other times just getting on with 'normal, ordinary' activities such as the washing up, or cooking the dinner, but being aware that not far away, is the presence of other's perceptions of me, my partner and my children. In the external world the 'spotlight' is on us. The question I often asked myself is 'do I suppress my feelings and ignore what may be going on around me, or do I challenge these experiences?

Initially I may have been naïve enough to believe 'things have changed' and these invalidating perceptions no longer exist, but as my growth in personal awareness develops, I can no longer ignore my inner felt sense of angst. I become more assertive and passionate about challenging perceptions and the unfairness. I am under no illusion about what people think of me as a white woman in this relationship, that I may be perceived as crossing a clear and firm boundary, sexually 'easy or loose', have had a difficult background or rebelling against societal norms and my partner is deviant or seeking to gain status by having a white woman and of course, he has 'lost his 'black' identity' according to some members of the black community. What do they know, why do they judge without knowing. I have seen the 'look' and heard the 'tuts' and even been asked whether I was a foster carer or 'adopted these poor unfortunate children' because they don’t look like me. We are objects of curiosity, people wonder 'how come somebody like you met somebody like him, where in the world could that possibly
happen?’, it is almost like you have to put your relationship on the table for people to dissect! Why do I have to consider where we socialise and who we socialise with?, so over the years I have had to become extra vigilant and take notice of body language, patterns of speech, the ‘erms’ and the stuttering of discomfort, the covert microaggressions that were shown. I suppose deep down, right from the beginning, I knew that this was not going to be easy. I am very careful, but it can be tiring and exhausting because this is around me wherever I go. Even with the number of years I have been in this relationship, I am still surprised by people’s attitudes and perceptions of a white woman in an interracial relationship. So when people say ‘things have changed’ unfortunately, the legacy of history remains with us and nobody thinks to check this out with me, as a woman, in this relationship. How does it feel when the shopkeeper refuses to give the change for our shopping, or the meat we had purchased, to my partner when he held his hand out, or my child is being followed around the shop. This kind of experience evokes anger and frustration because people stop seeing you, as a person, as if you are invisible, and only see your partner, unable to see a connection between you and only perceiving negative images and thoughts.

This leads to my reflections on meeting my partner; it was exciting, fun, different, but as the relationship developed, there were thoughts about ‘how will my family react? Will they like him? Can they see beyond their entrenched racist views?’ There is shock and surprise but some family members are overtly rejecting, but over time, there is a shift in engagement and acceptance, particularly when children arrive. There are losses and disbelief that one’s own family can react in this way. With some family members, it is just not the same again, and there are significant feelings of loss. Whilst I have some misgivings, and am aware this will
at times be hard work, and there is pain and anguish, challenge and tension, there are also gains, bringing together two cultures can be life enhancing, enabling growth, although it can also create conflict. There is sometimes confusion and conflict due to communication difficulties, and different cultural expectations about issues such as gender roles, religious practice and disparities in wealth and education. I have to learn to compromise and find the strength to have an open dialogue about these issues in order to survive. Sometimes humour helps, but being empathic and understanding of our separate experiences and working together is important. This is hard work and draining due to these extra layers of social and personal complexity, particularly, for me, having grown up in a predominantly white privileged world, understanding the impact of racism has been difficult. I know there are times I don’t discuss this or raise it, and my partner doesn’t talk about these experiences. Is that because I don’t feel comfortable with initiating this, or he finds it painful or difficult to speak about this with me because of my lack of experience?

Sometimes I feel caught between two worlds, on the edge not knowing which camp I belong in. I am perceived by white others as having betrayed my white identity, and by black others as taking their males from their community, seen as ‘loose’ by all. I am occasionally on the receiving end of quite angry, belittling and dismissive comments from both communities; this is hurtful and upsetting. This can also cause tensions internally and externally. I sometimes have an overwhelming feeling of isolation.

Having children has brought much joy but also many layers of worry. My awareness of the extent of racism and prejudice has increased as a consequence
of being in this relationship, so my concerns are about how to prepare my children for the future and the likelihood of them being treated differently, inequitably, or being on the receiving end of prejudice and abusive name calling. Will I be able to prepare them for the injustices ahead, and will I be able to provide a positive model and instil a sense of racial identity that will enable them to be proud of their mixed heritage and also deal with negative consequences of being mixed race? As the children grow and face the outside world, it is painful and evokes anger when your child comes home from school crying because another child refused to sit next to them because of the colour of their skin, or your teenage son has been stopped in the street where he lives, and questioned about his presence because it is a predominantly white and affluent area. I hope they have sufficient resilience and feel able to discuss these events with us. As I haven’t had to deal with this myself growing up, I may have tended to be more reactive, more passive, i.e. waiting for the situation to arise, rather than proactive, which my partner is due to his own experiences of injustice. The importance is about being able to discuss this as a couple and as a family. I knew that being a mother of mixed race children would be different, and there would be extra layers of worry, uncertainty and confusion that would not have been present if my children were white. It has taken strength, determination and perseverance to undertake this parenting with much heartache and challenge as well as many happy moments of pride.

How do I cope with all this? Humour helps, having the ability to have fun, but also to be able to laugh at some of the situations that we face. Sometimes I ignore, and sometimes I challenge. It is often about making choices about what I am going to respond to as it can be emotionally exhausting to be constantly raising issues with others. It is always important to remain positive, focus on strengths and seek
development and survival through education. Having an openness to discuss issues and areas of conflict is essential to combat negativity and find resilience to overcome and move forward. Sometimes it involves compromise, which can be difficult.

The impact of being in an interracial relationship can be positive; it has opened my eyes to issues of racism and social injustice and I have a growing awareness of other cultures. It has made me more empathic and understanding on a personal and professional level. It has made me challenge my own views and previous experiences, particularly about issues of white privilege which I have taken for granted, it has also made me consider the intersectionality of gender, class and education and how these interconnect in the context of my relationship, and me as a white woman and my identity. However it has brought with it many tensions, additional layers of worry, fears for my children and, at times, emotional exhaustion.

So whilst celebrating our relationships, our families and getting on with everyday life, I am surrounded by images and words that often portray different messages of cynicism and antagonism. The realisation that my relationship as a white woman in an interracial relationship is very much a public relationship about which 'everybody' appears to have a view, be they family, colleagues, strangers in the street or professionals. I have to console myself and my children, from those hurtful slights from the public, from teachers, and health professionals. These views can be stereotypical about me, about my partner or about my children and they all have an emotional impact on myself.
Appendix 9

Women’s emotional words

**Joanne**
- Conflict
- Excitement
- Curious
- Fun
- Uncertainty
- Stress
- Torn
- Fearful
- Caught between
- Strength
- Increased confidence
- Isolation
- Uncomfortable
- Discomfort
- Making choices
- Sadness
- Suppressing
- Painful
- Celebration
- Different
- Not fitting
- Freedom
- Sacrifice
- Surprise
- Shock
- Overwhelmed
- Compromise
- Challenges
- Pressure
- Alone
- On the edge
- Conflicting feelings
- Difficulty
- Hard
- Hurt
- Challenging
- Tiring
- Separate identifies
- Tensions
- Rejection

**Helen**
- Questioning
- Divided
- Hyper-vigilant
- Watchful
- Growth
- Moving on
- Anguish
- Perseverance
- Disbelief
- Draining
- Resistant
- Intense
- Intellectualising
- Awareness
- Anger
- Horror
- Fears
- Discomfort
- Negativity
- Balancing
- Guilt
- Moving on
- Rebellious
- Strength
- Memories
- Beliefs
- Complex
- Surprise
- Hard
- Unexpected
- Disappointment
- Weird
- Horrific
- Stressful
- Incongruence
- Shock
- Surprise
- Disbelief
- Different
Cross
Fun
Developing awareness
Opening views
Compelling
Amazing
Respect
Shock
Terrible
Great
Dignity
Concerned
Awful
Reflexive
Struggles as a woman
Hostility
Special
Making choices
Being open
Snubbed
No choice
Repeated negativity
Ignored
Sexual fear
Growth in awareness
Vexed
Dealing with others’ expectations
Choices about how much one says
Balancing
Trapped
Choice
Close
Challenging
Choosing moments
Being different
Worries for daughter
Thoughts about others’ views
Naïve
Reflexive
Threat
Scares me

Immediate rapport
Physical
Lovely human being
Sex
Altruistic
Sucked in
Pressure
I knew there were concerns
No choice
Big risk
Disparities
Eyes open
Difficulties
Lot of reservations
Going to be hard
Angry
Choices
No choice
Risks
Social approbation
Affect my reputation
Follow my heart
Misgivings
Risks
Emotional needs
A lot of problems
Lying to self
Differences
Exchange
Conflicts
Stressful
Financial pressure
Frustration
Lacking energy
Not up to dealing with this
Sensitive
Dealing with racism
Commonality
Immersed in African culture
Positive
Underestimated difficulties
Too many difficulties
Outrageous thing to do
Isolation
Political

Liz
Uncomfortable existence
Messy
Magnetic
Attractiveness
Ecstatic
Entrenched
Pining
Isolated
Felt right for me
Emotionally dependent
Part of my identity
Disillusionment
Burden
Education
It did matter
Concern about neighbours’ perceptions
Furious
Cracks
Clash
Conflict
Curiosity
Challenge to own standpoint
Resentful
Exhausted
Resentful for being responsible
Disappointment
Felt manipulated
Guarded
Mistrust
Misgivings
Uncomfortable
Resentful
Annoyed
Wearing me down
Changes
Less positive
Reassessing my values
Loss of hope
Control
Subsumed
Complicated
Guilt of white privilege
Rejection
Reasserting my identity
Loss
Changes
Disengaged
Sadness
Divide
Prejudice
Discrimination
Feeling threatened
Worn down
Constant battle
Struggle
Run out of energy
Curiosity
Overt
Covert
Poisonous
Left me to mercy of village gossips
Idealistic
Concerned about people’s perceptions
Dilemmas
Objectification
Anger
Suspicious
Joking
A topic of conversation

Susan
Attracted to brown men
Hard to say black
I’m more comfortable with brown
Man’s world
Bright
Sporty
Physical
Nightmare
I was never sure if I wanted children
Wondering
Anxious
Preparing
Seeking approval
Never sure if they were racist
Frowning upon
Uncertain
Not what they wanted
Cultural difference
Curiosity
People looking
Class
Different
Wondering
Denial
Differences
Tensions
Anger
Protective
Desire to be vocal
Shallow
Avoidance
Good boys
Great looking kids
I really want them to mix
I don’t need to go there I don’t want to go there

Jane
Reminded of sacrifices
Reminiscing
Excitement
Adrenalin
I didn’t want to go there
Whirlwind romance
Romantic
Physical
Volatile
Attractive
Challenging
Edgy
Not good for me
Taking risks
A very exciting relationship
Hooked
Horrible
Deteriorated
Fear
Uncomfortable
Misunderstandings

Emotional and cultural difficulties
I made a lot of mistakes
Tensions
On off pattern
Conflict
Difficult
He was a draw
I loved him as well
Couldn’t do it without feelings
Knew I shouldn’t
Easier to give up and stay than leave
Lack of understanding
Lack of tolerance
Family horrified
Difficult
Ups and downs
Tensions
Cultural tensions
Gender roles
Strong gender views
Big rows
Family tensions
Different experiences of family lives
I have to mitigate to others
I have to explain so others understand
Caught between
Feelings of difference
They can’t work us out
With second daughter I felt we were legitimate so it’s a real relationship. With the third child change of perception again
Different children
Exotic unusual combination
Uncomfortable
Discomfort
Cross the boundary
They don’t look like my children
People looking
Have you adopted
Outrageous
Matching set
Looks
Disbelief
Objects of curiosity
Standing test of time
Class an issue
Hard
Somebody is giving up their heritage
Real tensions
Double edged sword
Needed support to survive
Rift
No speaking
Struggle
You live with compromise all of your life
Compromised
You don’t tell anybody
I wouldn’t recommend interracial marriage
Sadness
Isolation
Embarrassment
Concerns
Worries for the children
Sadness
Bullying

Ann
Scary
Passionate
Non-illusions how I am perceived
Choose where we socialise and who with
Hard work
Rebel
Challenge
Be provocative
Strong attraction
Fragile
Careful about what I say
because of other people’s perceptions

This wasn’t going to be easy
Open to difference
I feel privileged
I choose who I share information with
I keep work and home separate
I’m careful
De-energising
Tiring
Sometimes provoke
Challenge
Good experience
Balance the negative ones
Conserve energy
Many, many, many, many negative experiences
Surprise
Negative reactions from white men and black women
Naïve but still surprised
Difficult
Treated differently
Invisible
Racism
Exhausting
Understanding
 Unsure
Shocking
Compromise
Schizophrenic personality
Different identities
Cannot be oneself
Appalling
Anger
Invisible
Relief
Different treatment
Seen as slut
Overt
Negative
Extra effort
Hyper-vigilance
Pensive
Strength
Protection
Awful lot of work
Worry about child
Aware
Sensitive
Isolation
Outrage
Unfair
Empathy
Responsibility
Hurt
Painful
Fear for child
Dealing with layers
Hard
Tough decisions
Massive
Huge
Huge
Commitment
Times of frustration
Tears
Proactive
Prepare
Having a voice
Big decision to have a child
Question strength
Not just partner of a black man
but mother of a black boy
Challenges

Knew experience would be different
Extra layers of worry
Constantly surprised

**Charlotte**
Brought up in white culture
Very close family
Opening my eyes
I didn’t socialise with black people
I didn’t want to get involved
Wondering what family would think
Absolutely brilliant

Just works
We work
I didn’t see him as colour
It was big surprise
Regret
Massive issue
Big life changes
How to explain mixedness to children
People looking
Proud
Different
Why are people looking
I do the talking
Conflict
Two beautiful children that’s a plus
You’ve got a skin to die for
Challenge
We are normal
We are really happy
Connection with other interracial couples
Am I perceived in a particular way
Watched
Reflexive

**Maria**
Realisation
Different
Curious
Connections
Realise being different as a couple will never go away
Tensions
Joking
Laughter
Shock
Undercurrents
I don’t know which camp I’m in
Consequences
Discomfort
Racism
Justifying relationship
I don’t understand
Compared
Being different
Critical eye
Accepting
Laughing
I’ve joked
Middle of the road
Everybody looking
Uncomfortable

On show
Ignoring it
Invisible
Conscious being looked at and being white woman
Worrying did I measure up
Not up to standard
Humour to deflect
I don’t know why
**Appendix 10**

Key recommendations for multiculturally skilled counsellors’ characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Counsellor awareness of own assumptions, values and biases</th>
<th>Understanding the world view of the culturally different client</th>
<th>Developing appropriate intervention strategies and techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Beliefs and attitudes | Culturally skilled counsellors:  
• are aware and sensitive to own cultural heritage and to valuing and respecting differences  
• are aware of how their own cultural background influences psychological processes  
• are able to recognise their limits  
• are comfortable with differences between them and clients | Culturally skilled counsellors:  
• are aware of their emotional reactions towards other racial and ethnic groups  
• are aware of their stereotypes and preconceived notions | Culturally skilled counsellors:  
• respect clients’ spiritual beliefs and values  
• respect indigenous helping practices  
• value bilingualism |
| Knowledge | Culturally skilled counsellors:  
• have knowledge about their racial/cultural heritage and how it affects definitions of normality and process of counselling  
• possess knowledge and understanding about the workings of oppression/ racism/ | Culturally skilled counsellors:  
• possess specific knowledge and information about the particular group they are working with (refers to the minority identity development model)  
• understands how race/ culture/ ethnicity may | Culturally skilled counsellors:  
• have clear knowledge of limits of counselling and how they may clash with minority values  
• are aware of institutional barriers preventing minorities’ access to mental health service. |
| Skills |
|---|---|---|
| discrimination (refers to white identity development model) | affect personality formation/vocational choice/psychological disorder/help-seeking behaviour | • understand limits of assessment procedures  
• have knowledge of minority family structures and community hierarchy |
| • possess knowledge about their social impact upon others | • understand and have knowledge of socio-political influences that impinge upon racial/ethnic minorities | Culturally skilled counsellors:  
• should familiarise themselves with relevant research regarding various groups and seek out educational opportunities that enrich their knowledge, understanding and skills  
• become involved with minority individuals outside the counselling setting so that their perspective is wider-informed |
| Culturally skilled counsellors:  
• seek out educational consultative and training experiences to enrich their understanding  
• constantly seek to understand themselves as racial/cultural beings and actively seek a non-racist identity | Culturally skilled counsellors:  
• become involved with minority individuals outside the counselling setting so that their perspective is wider-informed | 

Source: Based on Sue et al, 1992.
Appendix 11

School of Education
Ethical Approval Application Form

The ethical approval application form must contain answers to all the questions indicated in the boxes below, if they do not apply please state why.

SECTION 1 Student Details /Identification of the person responsible for the research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Student:</th>
<th>Patricia Ward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student ID (quoted on library/ swipe card):</td>
<td>75828030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Address:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pat-ward@hotmail.co.uk">pat-ward@hotmail.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Supervisor:</td>
<td>William West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme (PhD, Prof Doc, MEd, PGCE, MSc, BA etc):</td>
<td>Prof Doc in Counselling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 2 PROJECT DETAILS (Please expand boxes to fit answers)

2. **Aims and Objectives of the Project**

A. Provide a statement of your research aims and objectives including research questions.

The aim of the research is to explore personal growth experiences and racial awareness development of white women in interracial relationships. How they have dealt with racial tensions as a result of being in an interracial relationship and come to understand their own sense of self in the context of their relationship and what enables any changes or transformations.

What is the justification for the research? (why is it an area of importance/ has any similar research been done)

Studies show that white women in interracial relationships in Britain still face disapproval (Oktikpi, 2009; Harman, 2010) ranging from overt racism to social distancing. White women are in an ambiguous position often being scrutinised and their relationship questioned. Some studies indicate that women undergo changes as a consequence of being in an interracial relationship (O’Donoghue, 2004; Luke, 1994; Sweeney, 2008). The participants will be adult white women who have been in interracial relationships for a minimum of twelve months. They may or may not have children. One research study from
the USA suggests that intimate interaction with Black people is an important predecessor to transformations in racial awareness development in white women (Sweeney, 2008). This is a British study that seeks to find out from white women in interracial relationships how they perceive their experiences of growth in the context of their relationship.

C. What are the main ethical issues and what steps will be taken to address them?

Commitment to ethical issues is paramount, addressing confidentiality, informed consent, right to withdraw and data protection. Participants will receive information sheets and consent forms to sign and be seen individually to discuss these issues at depth so that any questions or concerns can be addressed.

2. Methodology

A. Please outline the design and methodology of the project, including the methods of data collection and the methods of data analysis and the theoretical framework that informs it.

This is a qualitative heuristic inquiry. According to McLeod (2011) qualitative research aims to develop an understanding of the social world and how it is constructed. The methods are flexible aiming to understand meanings and subjective experiences. The conceptual framework for this research stems from feminism and social constructionism. Issues of ‘race’ and gender are socially constructed. The choice of methodology is influenced by the importance of giving voice to a group of women who are often marginalised and their experiences overlooked. The research will also include my own experience as well as the participants which is acknowledged by feminist and heuristics research inquiry approaches. The approach involves self discovery and dialogue, acknowledging the life experiences of the researcher and the participants. It is not about a text to be interpreted but seen as a whole experience. A reflexive approach is becoming more acceptable and its validity and contribution to understanding ‘real’ experiences is increasingly being acknowledged.

A semi-structured interview will be used as this allows for flexibility as well as giving some structure to the process. The questions do reflect my interest, involvement and personal commitment. According to Kvale (2009) a semi-structured life world interview attempts to understand themes of lived experiences from the participant’s perspective. The use of this approach feels appropriate to this research.

The heuristic approach to analysis involves the researcher’s perspective but also focuses on first person individual accounts and the data will organise each individuals experiences into themes. Consideration was given to a phenomenological approach but dismissed because of lack of depth and the need for the researcher to ‘bracket’ their own experiences. According to McLeod (2011) phenomenology also loses the person in the process of descriptive analysis whereas in heuristics participants remain visible as whole persons.

B. A description of the research procedures/activities as they affect the study participant and any other parties involved.
Participants will be invited to take part in an interview. Part of this will involve building rapport, explanations about the research and some connection with myself and my experiences. The interview will last approximately an hour and a half. Some demographic questions will be part of the interview.

C. Please state your experience in conducting the research procedures/ activities and provide supporting evidence.

Over the past three years assignments relating to different aspects of methodology and approaches have been undertaken eg a focus group in second year, an autoethnographic account this year.

Prior to the course research for a Masters involved using a qualitative approach using a semi-structured interview.

As a Person Centred Counsellor I have experience of building relationships using interpersonal skills to develop rapport, set professional boundaries and being empathic, non judgemental and congruent.

*Attach copies of any draft instrument / interview guide / screen prints, and so on.*

### 3. Participants

A. 6-8 adult white women in interracial relationships living in west midlands

B. Will your project include participants from any of the following groups? (Tick as appropriate)

- [ ] Children under 16
- [ ] Adults with learning difficulties
- [ ] Adults with mental illness
- [ ] Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the researcher
- [ ] Prisoners
- [ ] Young Offenders
- [ ] Other vulnerable groups (please detail)

C. If your project includes vulnerable populations please explain why it is necessary to include them in your study, including measures you will take to avoid coercion.

### 4. Recruitment *(please append any advertisement you will use)*

A. How will potential participants be:

   i) Identified- Volunteers from a support organisation for interracial families via email
   ii) Approached and Recruited- An opportunistic sample from professional and personal contacts

B. How will your recruitment policy avoid putting any overt or covert pressure on the individual to consent?
Through full discussion and information about the proposed research. A commitment to adhere to ethical guidelines of the University and BACP

C. How long will the participant have to decide whether to take part in the study? Information will be given to participants and left with them to read and formulate any further questions. Contact will be two weeks later. No pressure will be made on the person to participate.

D. State any payment or any other incentive that is being made to any study participant. Specify and state the level of payment to be made and/or the source of the funds/gift/free service to be used and the justification for it.

No payment will be offered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Risk and Safeguards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please outline any adverse effects or risks for participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. What is the potential for adverse effects of a physical nature; risks or hazards, pain, discomfort, distress, or inconvenience, to participants?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Will any topics discussed (questionnaire, group discussion or individual interview) be sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting, or is it possible that criminal or other disclosures requiring action could take place during the project?

There is a minimal chance that issues discussed may mean participants talk about emotional reactions to their experiences. A support package will be offered in this event which could be access to therapeutic services.

C. What is the potential for adverse effects, risks or hazards, pain, discomfort, distress, or inconvenience, of a physical or psychological nature to you as the researcher?

None

D. What precautions have been taken to minimise or mitigate the risks identified above in A, B, C?

Constant evaluation of the process will be undertaken so that participants may withdraw at any point. Awareness of any signs of discomfort nonverbally as well as verbal. This would lead to further discussion and in the unlikely event that someone feels uncomfortable to discuss options such as taking a break, suspending the interview or seeking external support. Discuss with supervisor.
6. **Consent**

A. Detail how informed consent/assent will be obtained.

A written information sheet and consent form will be given to the participants. Taking care as to whether people may have disabilities hidden or visible that information is appropriate. Discussion will take place about the purpose of the research and an opportunity given to discuss any queries or concerns the participant may have.

Part of the discussion will be to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, what will happen to the data, ensure well being of both participant and researcher, whether participants have access to the data, permission for publication.

B. If the participants are to be recruited from a vulnerable groups (3B) give details of the extra steps taken to assure their protection.

**Attach draft Information Sheets & Consent Forms for each participant group.**

7. **Data Protection and confidentiality**

A. Will the pilot study use any of the following activities at any stage?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Electronic transfer by email or computer networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, e-mails or telephone numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Publication of direct quotations from respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Use of audio/visual recording devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Storage of personal data on any of the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Manual files</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Home or other personal computers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ University computers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Private company computers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Laptop computers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Please provide details on the measures you will employ to comply with the Data Protection Act and the University Data Protection Policy?

Data will be locked securely with access only by the researcher

Digital recordings will be kept in a locked filing cabinet until no longer needed and then destroyed

C. What measures have been put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data? Give details of whether any encryption or other anonymisation procedures have been used and at what stage?

All data will be anonymised using pseudonyms for participants
D. Where will the analysis of the data from the study take place and by whom will it be undertaken? The analysis will be undertaken by the researcher in a private study used solely by the researcher.

E. Who will have control of and act as the custodian for the data generated by the study? The researcher

F. Who will have access to the data generated by the study? The researcher and her supervisor

G. For how long will data from the study be stored? The data will be destroyed one year after confirmation of the degree. All data will remain locked away.

8) Reporting Arrangements

A. Please confirm that any adverse event will be reported to the Committee

Discussion will take place with my supervisor should any changes or concerns occur.

B. How is it intended the results of the study will be reported and disseminated?

(Tick as appropriate)

X Peer reviewed scientific journals
☐ Internal report
X Conference presentation
X Thesis/dissertation
☐ Written feedback to research participants
☐ Presentation to participants or relevant community groups
☐ Other/none e.g. University Library

D. How will the results of research be made available to research participants and communities from which they are drawn? Discussion about feedback to participants will take place in the initial stages of contact eg feedback about initial interviews and transcriptions, this is likely to be face to face. Participants will be offered the opportunity to meet again after completion.

D. What arrangements are in place for monitoring and auditing the conduct of the research? The supervisor will monitor the research.

E. What are the criteria for electively stopping the research prematurely? Any unforeseen harm that cannot be resolved.
9. Sponsorship
Provide information on whether the study is in receipt of any external funding. Confirm who will act as sponsor of the research. None

10. Conflict of Interest
Have any conflicts of interest been identified in relation to this project?
No conflict of interest has been identified at the point of application. Should a conflict of interest become apparent as the study progresses then UREC will be informed

SECTION 3 - MINOR AMENDMENT TO RESEARCH PROJECT

Application for Approval of Minor Amendment’ to a Research Study

Details of proposed amendment (please give as much detail as possible)

Supervisor Declaration
I agree that the amendment proposed does not change the character of this research or the participant groups.

I confirm that the research risk assessment for the study as MEDIUM remains.

| Supervisor’s signature* | Date |

Please send applications for amendment to ethical approval for MEDIUM risk research to the School Quality Assurance Administrator at ethics.education@manchester.ac.uk who will pass on the request to the RIC member who authorised the original application wherever possible.

1 Minor amendments are those that do not alter the character of the research or the participant groups
APPENDIX 1

Title of study- Making the ‘invisible’ visible: the personal experiences of white women in interracial relationships.

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a study as part of my Professional Doctorate in Counselling. I am interested in your experience of being in an interracial relationship. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the study?

Patricia Ward

School of Education, Ellen Wilkinson Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester. M13 9PL

 Telephone number 0161 306 6000

Title of the study

White women’s reflections on being in an interracial relationship.

What is the aim of the study?

I have recognised as a white woman in an interracial relationship that I have undergone significant personal transitions as a consequence of being in this relationship. I am interested in hearing about other women’s experiences because women in interracial relationships are often not heard or their experiences acknowledged.

Why have I been chosen?

I understand that you are in an interracial relationship and are willing to consider taking part in my study. I am hoping to interview between six and eight white women who are in interracial relationships.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

You will be asked to take part in an interview to talk about your experiences. You may be asked to talk about your feelings about some of your experiences and the impact on you. Some of these may be positive and contributed to significant personal growth. Some of these may be related to negative experiences such as ‘racism’ directed at you or your partner, this may be upsetting but we will be in a supportive environment and be able to talk through this.
What happens to the data collected?

The interview will be digitally recorded and I will transcribe your narrative so that I can look at your experiences and with your permission write this up with other women’s narratives to look at similarities and differences.

How is confidentiality maintained?

All information will be anonymous and nobody will have access to this except my supervisor. Written work and recordings will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home office. All information and recordings will be destroyed after I receive my degree.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Will I be paid for participating in the study?

You will not receive any money for participating in this study.

What is the duration of the study?

We will meet for an initial interview for approximately one and a half hours. I will offer to meet with you approximately a month later to discuss whether you have had further thoughts and to share the progress of my study and your contribution. If you wish we can meet again at the end so that you can receive feedback about the whole project.

Where will the study be conducted?

This will be negotiated so that a mutually convenient location and time can be arranged. For your safety the meeting will take place in an office.

Will the outcomes of the study be published?

The information collected will be written up as a thesis. I am hoping at a future date I may be able to write this up as a journal article or be used at conferences. There will be no personal identification if this happens.

Criminal Records Check (if applicable)

I hold an enhanced CRB.

Contact for further information

If you need further information you can contact me on 07886084047

Or you can contact my supervisor- William West at school of Education, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester. M13 9PL. Telephone 0161 306 6000

What if something goes wrong?
If you feel that you would like extra support I can put you in touch with counselling services that have some understanding of the issues you have experienced. You may also like to have access to specific support organisations for interracial families eg Harmony.

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093
APPENDIX 2

Study Title- Making the invisible visible: the personal experiences of white women in interracial relationships.

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

3. I understand that the interviews will be audio/video-recorded

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes

5. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant ___________________________ Date ___________ Signature ____________________________

Name of person taking consent ___________________________ Date ___________ Signature ____________________________