



White Women Mothering Mixed-Race Children in a Black-White Interracial Relationship

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Abstract: It is over five decades since ‘River of Blood,’ the speech about race in Britain, has been acknowledged as the symbol of discrimination towards immigration and minorities like Black British. Meanwhile, America, as another traditional western cultural center, has faced more serious issues during the process of human equality. Loving. V. Virginia, as a legal milestone of Civil Rights in the US, has influenced the public attitude of the majority towards interracial union; however, the discrimination and prejudice have become more invisible via the changing of societal environment. Although the anti-miscegenation movement has been treated as the big step of human rights, the union between black and white faces misunderstanding, even stigmas in their daily lives. Hence, taking black-white interracial relationships as examples, from white women’s perspective, this essay will examine the dilemma between their own cognition of cultural identities and being partially embedded into a different culture when ‘marrying-out’ and raising mixed-race children.

Keywords: Interracial marriage; Mixed-race Children; Mothering; White women

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1. Introduction

The interracial relationship has grabbed the attention of the public by the American ex-actress Meghan and Prince Harry holding the Royal Wedding in 2018. It is worth noting that Meghan delivered her son Archie in 2019, which has triggered controversial discussion about the skin color of the baby. BBC Radio 5 live host Danny Baker has been fired because of posting the racist content about the Royal baby on Twitter ^[1]. It shows not only a contradictory phenomenon that a positive attitude cannot hide the social-historical negative impact on the interracial relationship, but also race and identity has been highlighted in the mixed-race mothering practice.

2. Background and concepts

To understand the white women’s dilemmas in mothering practice, the concept of race and ethnicity have been analyzed under the context of social identity. Otherwise, the discussion will step into the superficial biological phase. The definition of race can be divided as three levels ^[2]: the first is the differences of human’s biology, it depends on the natural genetic. The second considers the emotion belonging of the specific ethnic group; The third shows the more comprehensive explanation including breed, family, people, tribe and nation. The three levels have to be considered as a whole to define the concept of race. By the advancing of society, the connotation of race has been highly focusing on its socioeconomic and societal meanings. For instance, in the middle of last century, racial segregation has led the hatred and barriers between Black and White groups in North Africa. In this case, the race has been impacted by politics and

traditional white privilege. It also can be seen as a part of the massive discrimination that the colored skin people have received from White in America. In this series of racialization movement, instead of strengthening the national identity, by highlighting the biological and genetical differences between black and White, it has declined the in-depth understandings in the level of linguist, geography and nationality. Furthermore, according to the racial formation theory the race is a social construction interpreted through the broad lens of culture.^[3] At this point, although the physical appearance is the inevitable factor of race, sociality has become the initial frame when 'race' is being argued about in the contemporary context.

Another crucial concept appearing in the essay which needs to be clarified is the ethnic group. The ethnic group means the group of people distinguishes from customs, characters and linguists. The human population shares the common cultural experiences, which by the time the 'same' community has formed. In other words. Ethnicity is a social construction whereas race is more of a biological concept, and the relevance in these two fundamental conceptions cannot be ignored. Moreover, it was mention that intermarriage provides a method for different races people getting involved in the ethnic groups which differ from the group they come from ^[3]. Thus, these two key concepts will help the essay narrates the mothering issue in black-white interracial union under the impacts of racial and ethnical identity, The societal prospective will be considered as a macro background, which provides the structure to explore the black-white interracial relationship.

To conclude, because of globalization, people have various ethnicities background who live in the same society has brought a multicultural environment into daily life. On the surface, it presents the opportunities and bright side of cosmopolis which provides a chance for a peaceful world, but beneath the positive attitude, it reveals the historical contradiction which has changed its appearance in contemporary: people who identify themselves as Black respect the culture from the ancient land, as they live in the White-dominant continent. Meanwhile, although western central culture holds a powerful influence in the world, the recognition of whiteness is facing the racial blindness which indicates the essential of dilemma of white women in White-Black union mothering mixed-race children.

3. The dilemmas of white women

This section will be divided into four parts to show the further factors which exist in the white women mothering mixed-race children's experience. Considering the race and gender impact, the combination of those two concepts has formed the discourse of white mothering dilemmas. It has shown the inferior position of white women due to the difference in appearance and cultural heritage in mothering mixed-race children in Black-White interracial relationship. Under the sociological context, the discussion will contain the following terms: socioeconomic and class, gender, the competence of accessing extended family, and the absence of whiteness. From above, the section tries to understand the source of the interracial mothering pressure. Except for the general parenting problems, the challenges come from the mixed union, the essay will mainly focus on white women's dilemmas.

4. Socioeconomic and social class

In the previous research, when the analysis of interracial relationship has been mentioned, the economy and class, as the essential facts, are highlighted because they reveal the reality of societal ties. Some researchers suggest that white working-class women in an interracial union have more concerns about realizing self-value in education and economy ^[4-5]. However, according to Caballero et al., the problems and pressures of mothering mixed race children in working class are similar as the couples of middle or upper-middle class ^[6]. Also, samples from another literature shows that more than half of the female interviewees come from a middle-class background ^[7]. However, this does not mean that both side in the relationship initially have the middle-class status. Schaefer points out that racial discrimination is measurable through the lower

income and fewer opportunities which non-white people will receive from work place ^[8]. The exchange theory also supports the high rate of interracial relationship in between the middle class, which means the marriage has become the socioeconomic union which indicates the upward mobility has existed in both sides, in this case, black men get the higher social status and give the economic advance to the counterpart ^[9].

5. Gender

In a patriarchal society, women's identity has become a focus topic in the field of feminism. Through the lens of gender, it zooms in the distance between the anxiety of identity and societal autogenesis. As gender is a significant perspective of white women mothering mixed-race children, the section will categorize the feminism concept to construct the identity of women in an interracial union. Ruth Frankenberg introduced the race structure of white women involving in an interracial relationship ^[10]. Her book is an essential theoretical work to provide a new method of white women's identity in the race dimension. It highlights that white women are not the 'outsider' in a black-white interracial marriage and parenting because the privilege and advantage that the in-law families may receive from society. At this point, she has borrowed 'outsider within' from the black feminist theory ^[10]. It was pointed out that black women cannot fully be the feminist due to the conflict presenting on identifying themselves in maleness and whiteness dominate society ^[11]. However, the 'outsider within' has positioned black women into a unique angle to examine the social, political and economic realities. In other words, outsider within, a marginalized status of black women, provides a micro point of view for feminists ^[12].

Similarly, white women are in a dilemma between gender and politics, which the former emphasizes the male-dominant world and the latter portrays the white-privilege society ^[13]. Every woman has a dual identity in an interracial family, as a man's wife, 'she' carries the female subordinate in the family hierarchy; as a mother of her children, her whiteness has reduced the material connection between them. However, the role of a mother requires women taking more responsibility to deliver the patriarchal race identity. Another book also describes the anxieties of women being a mother of biracial children. Kilson and Ladd focus on white women involved in interracial parenting who come middle-class or upper-middle-class families ^[7]. The authors have the mixed-race mothering experience as well, which zooms in the distance between theory and practice. From the biological difference to the concerns of racial identity, although as the essay mentions above that it is superficial to categories race in the genetic discrepancy, the skin color is the most significant issue in the mothering experience. Both two books examine that dealing with mixed-race identity and racism has challenged women's autogenesis: the experience has not just blurred the boundary of racial identity, white women live in a double life to deal with the unfamiliar experience of being others as an insider ^[7, 10, 14].

6. The competence of accessing extended family

The barriers between both families and the 'marrying-out' women have not been reduced due to the birth of a child. In some cases, the interviewees report that having a grandchild has declined the conflicts between parents and daughters ^[7], in contrast, as the mother of a biracial child and the daughter of white parents, she has to face the racism which comes inside of the family and protecting her child from it. From this point of view, it will examine the women's role in the extended family dimension in both family-of-origin and in-law. Twine ^[15, 16] highlights the controversial dilemmas which white mothers face in their mothering practice. On one hand, the skin color of the mixed-race grandchildren will not help the white grandparents to understand the interracial relationship. Moreover, it associates with the white heritage ^[13]. Some participants report that they did not receive the care help from their original family side compared to the sisters who married to white men. On the other hand, conditionally, women get more acceptance in the

in-law families when they become the mother of a biracial child than in white families. It can be discussed in two identity dimensions, which is the biological and racially ethnic mother. In this case, the latter is more important than the former due to the expectations of being a heritage marker ^[17]. Thus, as a mother of the mixed-race children, the recognition of race is beyond itself, it requires these women to develop their racial identity to become the ethnic mother due to the status of primary carer ^[6]. The notable competences which relate to the acceptance of extended families are the ability to deal with the daily physical care like curly hair and moisture the skin, and to cook the decent traditional food ^[15]. It can be seen as the symbol of whether the white women integrate into the black culture; more importantly, this is also a process of shifting her racial identity ^[13]. Furthermore, for approaching the black heritage, white mothers also seek help from other black women who are either friends or relatives of in-law extended family to form a co-mothering alliance dealing with racism. Clearly, compared with white mothers, black mothers have advantages to solve the realistic racial problems than their counterpart due to their experiences and family heritage. However, although the co-mothering alliance provides supports to white mothers, it has blurred the racial recognition boundary of white women by embedding the other culture in her daily life.

7. Conclusion

As the ‘white’, ‘black’ appearing in terms of interracial union, the conception of race and ethnic have been automatically categorized into historical, cultural and sociological contexts, which is the essential background of white marital dilemmas. The anxiety of white women’s identity inspires sociologists and feminists exploring the dynamic which supports the fluidity of white identity. From the perspective of race, on one hand, most of the black-white interracial relationship is base on the cultural liability and societal privilege of white, the upward mobility has played a crucial role in the acceptance of white women in in-law families. On the other hand, beyond the white privilege, white blindness has become the new form of racism, which has not only influenced on the women’s statue in the interracial union, but also in the daily mothering practice of mixed-race children. White women have blurred their racial identity by transforming dominant whiteness like ‘us’ into marginal otherness like ‘them.’ Also, another fundamental role impacting white women identifying their status in interracial relationship reality is gender. The discourse of women in the patriarchy society reveals the subordinate position under the cultural gender regimes. White women stuck in the middle of race and gender identity. ‘Outsider within’ explains the controversial situation that women negotiate with the white heritage from the original family and the role of women playing in society. ‘She’ is not only an individual from her ethnic group, moreover, but also a mother and a wife of ‘other’ counterpart. For this reason, the mother’s recognition experience has impacted the mixed-race children to construct their racial conception. Several studies report that mixed-race children have negotiated with the conflict between the racism caused by the physical appearance and the marginalization caused by the social reconstruction of the racial identity. Hence, the identity of white women in an interracial union has been reshaped by the historical and cultural empiric; moreover, based on the anxiety of identity, it also has negative impacts on the mothering practice of mixed-race children. Although the recent research has shown more approaches to help parents negotiating with the children’s racial identity, the confusion of race will continually influence the interracial families. In addition, there are few studies focusing on the white fathers’ status in raising black-white mixed-race children, further studies can explore the impact of race, gender and white heritage from the perspective of masculinity.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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