

*Navigating Interracial Borders* is a sociological study of interracial sexuality and marriage. Unlike most research in this area that explores individual-level factors influencing why individuals enter interracial unions, or how they cope with racism, Erica Childs presents a sophisticated analysis of the broader social, cultural, and political meanings of interracial union. This is not a book about the experiences of Black-White couples per se but rather the meanings attached to images and discourse about such relationships. Using in-depth interviewing, focus groups, and content analysis of interracial images in the media, Childs makes visible the invisible ways that racial segregation is reproduced through everyday discourse. In each of the three data sources, she reveals the tension between colorblind ideology and persistent messages that interracial marriage is fundamentally deviant.

Among the 15 interracial couples interviewed, Childs finds some who understand the world through colorblind frames, whereas others are racially cognizant. These ideological frames serve as the primary lens through which couples understand their social experiences. All the couples face racism, but they explain it in very different ways. Her analysis is most compelling when she explores the contradictions between the colorblind worldview held by some of her respondents and their life experiences that are replete with overtly racist acts. These contradictions, and the discursive gymnastics her respondents go through to resolve them, serve as a powerful example of how ideological frames can both filter and distort experiential reality.

In addition to the couple interviews, Childs cleverly analyzes data from six focus groups. Each group is racially homogeneous, allowing a window into the different ways that her Black and White respondents perceived interracial sexuality and marriage. Her White respondents repeatedly said interracial coupling was acceptable generally but then proceeded to explain why they would not make such a choice individually. That their individual-level opposition followed patterned scripts (e.g., "it's too difficult," "what about the children?") illustrates how opposition to interracial coupling is often coded in colorblind discourse so that her White respondents can claim to be nonracist while simultaneously reproducing racialized attitudes and behavior. Colorblindness forbids them from saying they would not live by, work with, or

*Navigating Interracial Borders: Black-White Couples and Their Social Worlds.* Erica Chito Childs. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 2005. 248 pp. ISBN 0-813-53586-7. \$23.95.

befriend African Americans, yet deems their personal refusal to engage in an interracial relationship perfectly acceptable. Childs finds the opposite pattern among her Black respondents who openly opposed interracial marriage generally (because of the scarcity of marriageable Black men) but made numerous exceptions for individual people in their lives.

Childs demonstrates how the media consistently sends the message that interracial coupling is deviant. This occurs via representations of interracial sexuality that reify beliefs that Blacks and Whites are essentially different and that their coupling only leads to familial, financial, and social problems. Her chapter on interracial images on the Internet is particularly savvy. She first documents how interracial Web sites fall into three categories: support groups, pornography, or hate groups. Then, she powerfully argues that each type sends the message (positively or negatively) that interracial coupling is not "normal." Again, the patterned nature of such messages cannot be explained as individual attitudes but represent widely held societal norms that are reproduced daily in multiple mediated formats.

Ultimately, Childs demonstrates that both overt and subtle opposition to interracial sexuality and marriage rests on the racist belief that Blacks and Whites are fundamentally different and unequal. Her White respondents oppose interracial marriage because it challenges Whiteness and thereby lowers a family's status, whereas her Black respondents' resistance to interracial marriage is based on a painful history

of race relations that devalues their existence, as well as their present experiences of discrimination, isolation, and rejection.

Childs's book is original and insightful but overly concise on methodology. I wanted to know far more than the brief discussion offered in the introductory chapter. The book also could have benefited from more contextualizing of the data presented. When reading the findings, I often felt Childs made broad generalizations about "Black communities" and "White communities" based on clearly nonrepresentative data. The combination of limited methodological information and semantic slippage might lead less careful readers to believe that the findings are empirically, as opposed to theoretically, generalizable. This is unfortunate given that the great contribution of Childs's work is its theoretical richness.

*Navigating Interracial Borders* is written in an engaging style, and Childs masterfully weaves the respondents' own words into her analysis. The accessible writing style makes the book as appropriate for undergraduate courses on family as it would be for a graduate seminar with clinicians and social service providers who work with interracial families. Most importantly, the book provides a much-needed sociological corrective to an area that has been dominated by individual-level analyses that too often fail to consider the unique structural pressures that interracial families experience.

KERRY A. ROCKQUEMORE  
*University of Illinois at Chicago*

Copyright of *Journal of Marriage & Family* is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.