Triple Jeopardy in the Lives of Biracial Black/White Women

Instructions:
1. Read this article.

2. Type out the answers to the questions below. Your answers should take approximately one to two pages, double-spaced.

Questions:
1. What does the author, Angela Gillem, mean by the term "triple jeopardy?"

2. How might the stereotypes of the Black Matriarchy be detrimental to African American women?

3. According to this article, what are some of the unique obstacles faced by biracial women? What are some of the unique strengths that seem to develop out of being biracial?

4. Were the attitudes toward biracial women described in this article consistent or inconsistent with your own experiences and observations?
Biracial women who are the offspring of one African American parent and one European American parent are the focus of this lecture. Although more has been written about biracial people and about African American women's issues in recent years than in the past (more than 80 percent of articles listed in PsycINFO about Black/White biracial people have been written since 1990), very little has been done to explore the interface of gender and race as it impacts biracial women and girls. In fact, a search of PsycINFO from 1900 through 2005 turned up only 33 articles about biracial women and girls, all of which have been published since 1992. Ten are about Black/White women (Bing, 2004; Buckley & Carter, 2004; Constantine & Gainor, 2004; Gillem, 2000; Henriksen & Trusty, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004; Scales-Trent, 1995; Shorter-Goodeen, 2000; Streeter, 1996; Williams, 1999), and three are about Black/White biracial girls (Fields, 1996; Harrison, 1997; Vagas, 1992). Five of these 13 articles are found in one edited volume (Gillem & Thompson, 2004).

This lecture will consider whether biracial women are in multiple jeopardy, being Black (according to the “one-drop rule” that governs how race is constructed...
in the United States), female, and the product of a union of members of two antagonistic groups. Given the dearth of research specific to biracial women, I will attempt to construct an answer to this question through a discussion of the relevant theory and research on African American women, biracial people, biracial women and girls, and the social construction of race. Drawing on the paradigm of triple jeopardy that has been proposed by Greene (1994b) to describe the multiple oppressions experienced by Lesbians of Color, I will describe a similar paradigm that may apply to the multiple oppressions that biracial women must manage in their lives. I will also incorporate Root’s (1999) ecological construction of racial identity that “explicitly consider[s] the interactive role of geographic history, gender, class, sexual orientation, or generation on the construction of racial or ethnic identity” (p. 67). Recognizing that multiple oppressions have more than an additive effect on people’s lives, I will call my paradigm triple jeopardy.

THE DOUBLE JEOPARDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

In 1904, Mary Church Terrell stated that “not only are colored women... handicapped on account of their sex, but they are almost everywhere baffled and mocked because of their race. Not only because they are women, but because they are colored women” (quoted in King, 1988, p. 42). Greene (1994a) echoed this sentiment when she stated that “gender and race constitute two major dimensions around which most people organize themselves and which influence both their understanding of the world and of their relative place in it” (p. 131). Smith and Stewart (1983) developed a model that suggests that racism and sexism provide contexts for each other that produce not only cumulative or parallel effects on Black women’s lives but also interactive effects. This phenomenon has been referred to as “double jeopardy” by a number of authors (Fleming, 1983; King, 1988; Smith & Stewart, 1983). The interaction of these two oppressions may lead to the development of psychological strengths to cope with adversity in some areas of Black women’s lives, but in other areas there may be negative effects, accounting, for example, for Black women’s low socio-economic status and proneness to depression. Thus, Smith and Stewart (1983) suggested that this complex interaction of oppressions might produce a qualitative difference between the effects of racism on Black men and those on Black women and between the effects of sexism on Black women and those on White women.

Fleming (1983) and Allen (1992) observed the double-jeopardy phenomenon in Black college women. Fleming found that the racially adverse conditions of predominantly White colleges were related to self-reliance and enhanced coping and survival skills, articulateness, Black ideological consciousness, and assertiveness in African American women, but they
were also related to lower academic performance and greater negative feelings and dissatisfaction with their college experience. On the other hand, she found that the academically supportive atmosphere of Black colleges was related to academic motivation, confidence, and performance, but apparently the presence of large numbers of African American men may have encouraged passivity, reduced social assertiveness, and increased shyness, submissiveness, and fear of confrontation—all stereotypical, and often problematic, “feminine” characteristics. These findings have been fairly consistent across a number of studies that involve Black college women (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1983; Smith, 1982). In comparison, Allen (1992) found that it has been consistently advantageous, both academically and psychologically, for Black men to attend Black colleges.

Further, despite higher scholastic achievement than Black men in high school and overall lower fear of success than White women (Smith, 1982), Black women had lower career aspirations in college than did Black men. Most aspired to stereotypical female jobs with less prestige and power and lower pay (Allen, 1992; Smith, 1982) than their Black male counterparts were seeking. These lower aspirations lead Black women to the bottom of the occupational pyramid in low-status service jobs (Fleming, 1983), where they earn a median income of $3,120 less than Black men and $5,044 less than White women for full-time work (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Over 60 percent of African American women hold jobs in the service and sales economy (e.g., waitresses, store clerks) with little chance of advancement (Matlin, 1996; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). It’s no wonder, then, that Black women report lower psychological well-being than Black men and White men and women and are two to three times more likely than Black men to experience depression in their lives (Matlin, 1996). In contrast, Smith (1982) has found that Black women have a positive sense of themselves despite the double jeopardy of racism and sexism. It would appear then, that Black women develop strength in the face of racial adversity but pay a high price for it academically and professionally. On the other hand, they gain academically in a racially supportive atmosphere but lose strength in their relationships with Black men, as White women do with White men.

The strengths that Black women display in some contexts often lead to stereotypes of them as domineering matriarchs. Because of this stereotype, African American women have been blamed for everything from the deterioration of the Black family (the “normal” role of dominance being reserved, of course, for men) to the “castration” of Black boys and men, which ultimately leads to their imprisonment and endangerment. Black women have also been stereotyped as not being in need of the kind of emotional support and physical help that White women supposedly deserve. This was eloquently addressed in Sojourner Truth’s famous “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech. Fleming (1983) concluded that the concept of the Black matriarchy is a myth despite the strength that many African American women evidence in some contexts. Instead, Fleming interpreted
this strength not in terms of Black women being more domineering than Black men, but in terms of Black women being less passive and dependent than White women because of a long history of self-reliance and an orientation toward serving the family. One ought not confuse strength with dominance (Ladner, 1971, cited in Smith, 1982).

Thus, theory and research point to the existence of double jeopardy for African American women with regard to the interaction of the dual oppressions of racism and sexism, as well as in their adaptive and maladaptive responses to those oppressions. I suspect that many biracial women are subject to similar jeopardy, particularly if they self-identify as Black or are perceived as Black because of physical appearance. Research on biracial people in general may provide a clue to yet a third level of oppression that may interact with race and gender oppression to enhance the social and psychological jeopardy of biracial women.

BIRACIAL RESEARCH AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE

I became interested in issues concerning biracial people as a result of my interaction with a group of biracial college students during a prefreshman orientation program for Students of Color. During an extended discussion with students of mixed heritage, I learned of both the joys and the sorrows of growing up biracial in the United States. I heard them speak of feeling "torn," "split," guilty, and without a community. But I also heard them speak of feeling more sensitive, unique, and happy in their inherent diversity; challenged and lucky at having two cultural heritages; and pleased to represent a "coming together of differences," "a point of connection, a link." Thus, in spite of the challenges associated with making their way in a racialized society, these young people have been able to harness the richness of their dual heritages as a resource in their lives. This was explored more fully by Edwards and Pedrotti (2004), who suggested a strengths-based approach to biracial people's experiences based on positive psychology.

Much of what has been written about biracial people has been related to racial identity and self-concept. These have been of interest to many researchers primarily because of the way that race is constructed in our society. Root (1990) suggested that racial identity development and self-concept can be especially difficult for biracial people because of the tension between the two racial components of the self, and she asserted that rejecting part of their heritage most likely reflects racial discrimination within the nuclear and/or extended families. This also represents internalized oppression for biracial people. Sebring (1985) said that adopting a monoracial identity can lead to "massive guilt" and "feelings of disloyalty" (pp. 6-7), and many biracial people themselves have indicated that being forced to adopt a monoracial identity is emotionally damaging and
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feels like a betrayal of the self (Watts, 1991; Williams, 1999). To understand this potential for damage, we need to consider the racial history of the United States. The practice of monoracial assignment of biracial people in the census is rooted in a history of discrimination against people of African descent. According to the one-drop rule, anyone with "one drop" of African blood is considered Black (Davis, 1991; Spickard, 1992). This hierarchical typology of race, which was developed by Europeans, places White people, Asians, Native Americans, and Africans, respectively, in descending order of evolutionary development (Curchack, 1991; Spickard, 1992). The majority of scientists now agree, however, that the concept of race is itself a myth and that all human populations are racially mixed and have been mixing for thousands of years (Curchack, 1991; Davis, 1991). Thus, this typology has been used to create and justify boundaries between races that are based on phenotype (physical appearance), not genotype (genetic inheritance) (Davis, 1991). For biracial people, this has meant being assigned exclusively to the racial group with the lowest social status. Spickard (1992) suggested that this has been done so that Whites could maintain absolute and undiluted economic, social, and political power in the United States. Thus, the one-drop rule is simply a social fiction with no biological legitimacy. Its use continues to benefit Whites at the expense of Blacks by maintaining a social, political, and economic hierarchy. As the Reverend Joseph Lowery has stated, "What's implied in labeling everybody black [sic] who has any black blood...is that you are contaminated" (quoted in Watts, 1991, p. A10).

This social fiction and the historical antagonism of Whites toward Blacks in the United States have given rise, in many African American communities, to a range of strict rules for determining who is Black and who is not. One of these rules is reflected in a "you're either with us or against us" attitude. Negative experiences with Black people, including criticism for identity choices, challenges regarding racial loyalties, and distrust because of Anglicized physical appearance, have been well documented in the biracial literature (e.g., Gillem, Cohn, & Throne, 2001; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Thompson, 1999; Williams, 1999). Pressure is placed on those who are biracial to identify as Black in order to expand numbers, to increase political strength, and to avoid dilution of what little political power Blacks have managed to gain. In this context, claiming an exclusively Black identity is presumed to establish racial loyalty; and claiming a biracial identity is deemed suspect. However, imposing a Black monoracial identity on biracial persons carries the danger of perpetuating the one-drop rule and not respecting the dual heritage of biracial people.

I am not saying that Black and biracial people should not join forces politically. However, to be unified, they need not be the same. In fact, making sameness a requirement of unity only denies the reality of the diversity of Black people and pressures biracial persons to denounce half of their heritage. This may be psychologically damaging as it imposes an additional layer of racial discrimination from members of a group that
should be their allies. Thus, I agree with Root (1994), who has concluded that “multiraciality poses no inherent type of stress [or threat] that would result in psychological maladjustment [or political division]; any distress [or threat] related to being multiracial is likely to be a response to an environment that has internalized racist beliefs” (p. 456).

The difference between the social context of miscegenation in the late 1800s and the context of interracial relationships today is important in further understanding this potential for psychological jeopardy. In the 1800s, most of those who were biracial were mixed race as the result of sexual exploitation of Black women by White slave owners (Davis, 1991; Williamson, 1984). Thus, rejection of their White heritage was consistent with rejection of the illicit, immoral, exploitative means by which it usually occurred and, thus, was adaptive. Today, however, biracial offspring are most often the result of a consensual union between a Black person and a White person based on mutual attraction. (A discussion of whether or not social or economic exploitation exists in these relationships is beyond the scope of this lecture.) Thus, for children of a consensual interracial union, compulsory rejection of a part of their racial heritage may, to them, represent rejection or betrayal of the parent of that race; conversely, a child’s racial rejection of either parent may be a reflection of the child’s rejection of that racial part of herself. Thus, taking on a monoracial identity may be maladaptive for biracial people.

Root (1990) asserted that, because of racial inequality in our society, biracial people “begin life as marginal people” (p. 185) and experience severe stress in identity development. If parents don’t openly talk with each other and their children about racial issues, identity problems could result and contribute to that sense of marginalization. Buckley and Carter (2004) reported that their participants, who were poorly socialized by their families about race, tended to minimize, intellectualize, or deny the salience of race, which could negatively affect their ability to deal with challenges to their racial identity. Their data are consistent with Root’s (2001) Biracial Sibling Project findings of problematic family approaches to racial dialogue that leave biracial people without skills to deal effectively with racial issues. One of these is the colorblind approach, in which the parents naively assume that “race is not important” (p. 146). Another is minimization of race by parents who are ill equipped to deal with race themselves.

Sommers (1964) found that identity problems in biracial people tend to result from lack of a secure parental relationship, from society’s messages about their parents’ social status (for example, that the Black parent has lower status), and from conflicting social and cultural loyalties. These conflicting loyalties can arise out of societal pressures to identify with the “race” of only one parent. When that one parent is Black, and there is little affirming dialogue about race in the family, developing a positive self-concept is even more complex because of the negative information and stereotypes about Black people that are both expressed and implied by our society’s treatment of race (Brandell, 1988; Gibbs, 1989; Lyles, Yancey,
Grace, & Carter, 1985). Some of that negative information may even come from the White parent who raises the biracial child (Rockquemore, 2002). Thus, Arnold's (1985) research indicated that biracial children with a Black identity had lower self-concept scores than those with White or biracial identities. Also, Field (1996) found that her White-identified biracial participants who expressed negative feelings about their Black heritage had lower self-concept scores than her Black or biracially identified participants. Thus, for some biracial people, a monoracial identity, whether Black or White, can be a reflection of internalized racism, which involves the acceptance and incorporation of idealized constructions of European Americans and devalued constructions of African Americans.

Conversely, for Storrs's (1999) mixed race participants, a monoracial non-White identity was "psychologically fulfilling" and gave them meaning and a sense of belonging. These women constructed Whiteness as stigmatized and spoiled: "normative, empty, and bland but also as oppressive, prejudicial, and discriminatory" (p. 194) and, thus, something with which they avoided identifying. At the same time, they idealized their non-Whiteness as culturally positive and as providing a home; they established their non-White identities by emphasizing the biological markers of their difference from Whites and by behaving in ways culturally consistent with their non-White heritage. Although Storrs (1999) characterized these essentialist notions as challenging racial boundaries, it seems more like these women were caving in to the status quo essentialist notions of race that have been characterized as problematic in the psychological literature. These women have developed monoracial "oppositional identities," much as did Gillem, Cohn, and Throne's (2001) participant who denigrated Whiteness and idealized Blackness.

As an alternative to forcing a choice between Black and White heritage, current research and theory suggest that we might do better to support the identification of biracial people with both sides of their heritage in order to have a positive biracial identity and healthy psychological adjustment. Those who identify as biracial have been found to have fewer emotional and psychological problems; to have a stronger, more positive sense of identity; and to have greater self-confidence than those who adopt a monoracial label (Arnold, 1985; Watts, 1991). Research has also shown that being raised in interracial families that provide minority status consciousness (Lyles et al., 1985; Miller & Miller, 1990; Wardle, 1987), parental support with regard to encounters with racism (Brandell, 1988; Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Thompson, 1999), and interracial self-labeling (Jacobs, 1978; McRoy & Freeman, 1986; Thompson, 1999) is associated with positive self-concept and identity in biracial people. In addition, Thompson's (1999) participants indicated that their connection to both Black and White sides of their families strongly influenced their decision to identify as biracial and helped them to feel positive about it: "Asserting a biracial identity is one way to recognize and honor the people who were responsible for making them who they are" (p. 144).
However, Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002, 2004) warned against the shortsightedness of privileging biracial identity as an ideal for biracial people. They encouraged an expansion of the discourse on biracial identity by focusing on the multidimensionality and complexity of identity development. They proposed a dynamic model based on interactional validation of identity. Based on their data from 177 survey participants and 25 interviews, they suggested four variations on identity resolution for Black/White biracial people: singular identity, which involves choosing only one racial background; border identity, which blends Black and White and is referred to by most as biracial identity (may be validated or unvalidated in social interaction); protean identity, which changes with life circumstances, much like Root’s (1996, 2001) situational identity; and transcendent identity, which involves refusing to have a racial identity similar in some ways to Root’s (2001) symbolic race/ethnicity, in which race or ethnicity is acknowledged without any cultural competence or attachment to the group(s). Like Shorter-Gooden (2000), who contended that the meaning of a biracial identity develops through the interaction between internal experience and the external world of family, community, and society, Rockquemore and Brunsma concluded that interactional validation and invalidation, the push and pull of social relations with Blacks and Whites, are critical in understanding identity resolution in biracial Black/White people.

Root (1990) suggested that, however biracial people identify, they must always accept both sides of their heritage, make their own uncoerced choices, and develop ways to deal with others’ perceptions and reactions to them. They need to learn to adjust and function within mainstream society without sacrificing the integrity of their cultural identities (Brown, 1990). Many have suggested that, by doing so, biracial people become more tolerant and less biased individuals (Brandell, 1988; Thompson, 1999) and develop the ability to function within diverse, and even antagonistic, cultural environments (Sebring, 1985; Thompson, 1999; Wardle, 1987). We must remember, however, that our society has not yet gotten beyond racial hierarchy and the one-drop rule. Those who are biracial must often struggle to attain the level of personal integrity that these authors prescribe. Williams (1999) coined the term “simultaneity” to refer to the biracial experience of being in several stages of racial identity at one time, both White identified and Black identified. She was referring to “a combined consciousness that is very difficult to reconcile with existing social constructions of race and racial identity development theory” (p. 34). For example, one biracial woman reported that, despite the fact that her upbringing fits the described ideal, she still always feels that, in both Black and White settings, she is “adopting experiences that are not her own.” She reported that, “if I try to be rooted in either culture, my perceptions are never totally genuine” (personal communication, August 17, 1994). She believes that she is both but neither.
Sandoval (quoted in Root, 1992) placed the racial hierarchy into a gendered context, in which “the final and fourth category [after White men, White women, and Men of Color in descending order] belongs to Women of Color who become survivors in a dynamic which places them as the final ‘other’ in a complex of power moves” (p. 5). Root (1992) suggested that biracial men and women would be fifth and sixth, respectively, in this power hierarchy. However, as suggested by Smith and Stewart’s (1983) model discussed earlier, multiple oppressions have more than just an additive effect; they have very complex interactive effects on people’s lives. For example, Johnson (1992) explained that “the biracial child has a dual minority status both within the larger society as a member or partial member of a devalued racial group and often within the African American community due to perceived lack of ‘full’ affiliation” (p. 45). The experience of being caught between two antagonistic cultural worlds—not being either, but being both—would seem to compound for biracial women the double jeopardy found in Black women’s lives in which the oppressions of racism and sexism have a multiplicative and interactive, not merely additive, relationship (King, 1988).

Jeopardy is multiplied by the stereotypic characterizations of biracial women as exotic, passionate, sexually promiscuous, “Anglicized” versions of Black women (Nakashima, 1992). Root (1990) suggested that biracial women may be less of a threat to Whites than monoracial (Black) women, perhaps because of assumptions of Anglicization. Thus, we see Madison Avenue and Hollywood “diversifying” their ads by using lightskinned or biracial models and actresses to represent Black women, virtually ignoring the other end of the skin color spectrum among Black women. For example, the first Black woman to receive the Best Actress award in the history of the Academy of Motion Pictures is Halle Berry, a biracial woman who played a Black woman in relationship with the White man who executed her Black husband. This often makes biracial women the target of resentment from darker-skinned Black women. “[C]ombined with gender biases such as the unequal distribution of power to women, women being viewed as sex objects, and a woman’s worth assessed through her physical appearance, [this has]… put the multiracial woman at a particular disadvantage” (Root, 1994, p. 457).

Gibbs’s (1989) clinical discussion of biracial adolescent girls indicated that they were especially likely to feel ashamed of their Black physical traits and were more likely than boys to feel anxiety about social acceptance. She also found that biracial adolescent girls felt culturally different and rejected by Boys of Color whom they saw as constituting their dating pool (Gibbs & Moskowitz-Sweet, 1991). Similarly, Phillips (2004), in a study that compared biracial Black/White, Asian/White, and Hispanic/White adolescent girls with their monoracial female peers, found that Black/White girls who identified as White appeared to suffer some of
the lowest levels of overall well-being among their biracial and monoracial peers, and they had the lowest levels of global self-esteem and perceived physical attractiveness. However, their biracial Black/White counterparts who identified as Black had among the highest self-esteem, social acceptance, and perceived physical attractiveness. Phillips suggested that the disparity between White identifiers and Black identifiers may have to do with the White standard of beauty in our society and “[t]he degree to which a biracial adolescent girl resembles a typical member of the ethnic group with which she identifies, [which] could easily influence both her level of acceptance by that group and her feelings of self-regard.” I suspect that the pressure in our society on all Girls and Women of Color to live up to a White standard of beauty, which, as we all know, is often unrealistic even for White women, may cause some biracial women and girls to be more prone to reject the Black part of their heritage. One biracial college woman, who had resisted rejecting her Black heritage and who reported having achieved a good level of self-esteem, wondered why other Blacks didn’t value their hair and skin color as much as they did hers. She eventually “realized that people valued my hair and skin because it is ‘good’ or closer to White. Of course it was easy for me to accept myself when everybody always told me how beautiful I was and when everybody wanted to play in my hair” (personal communication). She was learning through socialization that her “White features” were especially valuable, whereas “Black features” were not as valuable. It was on this socialization that her good level of self-esteem was based. Thus,

the outcomes associated with biracial status are not a function of race or ethnicity, per se, but rather of the relationship between individuals and social groups and, in particular, of the cognitions and emotions that individuals have regarding that relationship. That is to say, biracial girls who don’t fit in fail to do so not because they are, say, Black and White, but, rather, because the relationship between Blacks and Whites in their society is tension-ridden, and this tension produces a host of other negative sequelae. (Phillips, 2004)

Root (1994) suggested that biracial adolescent girls in some groups have “double lower status” (p. 460) related to being female and racially ambiguous-looking. In recent research (Rockquemore, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsona, 2004; Thompson, 1999) that supports this idea, both male and female participants had negative interactional experiences with Black people in their lives. However, these experiences were significantly more likely and especially powerful in the lives of biracial Black/White women. Their negative encounters were with Black women and usually centered on their ambiguous physical appearance and the advantage it gave them on the dating scene with Black men, who were seen as an increasingly scarce commodity. They were often accused of thinking they were better than other Blacks. This led many to develop strong anti-Black sentiments,
which complicated their racial identity development. Funderburg (1994) suggested that the overvaluing of skin color and physical features in our society makes biracial people especially prized by some as romantic partners; however, the exoticized and Anglicized perception of biracial women can have a negative impact on dating experiences. Many have reported feeling used or mistreated by Black men, as did Jeana Woolley, "to reinforce their legitimacy in terms of the majority population" (quoted in Funderburg, 1994, p. 193) and to get revenge against White men who, many Black men think, have deprived them of power and self-respect. In this sense, as Sandy Shupe suggested, biracial women become a trophy in the struggle between Black and White men (Funderburg, 1994). It is interesting that Rockquemore and Brunsma's (2004; Rockquemore, 2002) male participants received positive attention from women and no negative interactions with men regarding their ambiguous physical features.

Root (1992, 1994) suggested that dating for biracial women may be difficult both because of the sexual stereotypes and Anglicized perceptions and because all dating for biracial women is interracial dating. For example, Thompson's (1999) female participants, more than the male participants, found that their dating pool was limited despite their willingness to date people from a variety of backgrounds. In Roberts-Clarke, Roberts, and Morokoff's (2004) study of how racial identity impacts the dating practices of biracial women, many participants, despite feeling more attractive and interesting to potential partners because they were biracial, felt as if they were in an interracial relationship and somewhat of a cultural outsider, no matter whom they dated. An incident in the early 1990s at a high school in Alabama exemplifies this dilemma. When the principal of the high school attempted to ban interracial couples from the prom, a biracial student, Revonda Bowen, asked him, "Who am I supposed to go with?" He responded that she was a "‘mistake’ he wanted to prevent others from making." (Smotherson, 1994, p. A16).

Other biracial women have reported being perceived as White and resented by Blacks when they date Blacks (Funderburg, 1994), or they are perceived as trying to pass when dating Whites. Whites often reject biracial women's involvement with White men, particularly if they "appear Black," because they are violating the taboo against interracial dating. Sonia Trowers, who was raised to identify as mixed, attended a predominantly White school and started having problems only when dating became an issue among her all-White set of friends; "I just knew that these White guys in this group I associated with wouldn't have any interest in me" (quoted in Funderburg, 1994, p. 37). When her friends actually started dating, she decided to transfer to a more racially mixed public school to escape the uncomfortable feeling of being left out.

Finally, Thompson (1999) found a difference in the way that her male and female participants responded to negative social interactions about being biracial. The women were more likely to internalize the negativity
as indicating that something was wrong with them, and their self-doubts lasted longer after the confrontation. The men tended to let it roll off their backs, externalizing the negative interaction and attributing it to the other person’s jealousy or ignorance. She concluded that the women’s more relational style seemed to be a significant factor in how they dealt with negative interactions.

CONCLUSION

Research has shown that the multiple oppressions that biracial women face may have a negative effect on their self-esteem, psychological adjustment, social relations, and identity formation. They are routinely confronted with racism and sexism from White-supremacist society. They encounter sexism and internalized racism within the Black community. They may experience guilt about rejecting their White heritage, and their White parent, if they submit to the one-drop rule. On the other hand, they may experience lowered self-esteem and conflicts about rejecting Black heritage, and their Black parent, if they identify as White. They may elicit invalidation in the form of confused, distrustful, or even hostile reactions from the Black community if they adopt a biracial, mixed, or multicultural identity. Thus, there is strong support for the conclusion that biracial women may be in triple jeopardy with regard to both the types of discrimination that they experience and their responses to that discrimination (see also Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004).

In conclusion, we must consider the possibility that many women who identify themselves as Black in clinical and research settings (often because of a forced choice that does not allow other than a monoracial identity) are, in fact, biracial. When we fail to consider this phenomenon, we lose a sense of the richness of their diverse experiences, we ignore their experiences of invalidation, and we lose accuracy in our data. Furthermore, we need to understand the clinical implications of different life experiences, special stressors and vulnerabilities in biracial women, and their effects on their functioning. This is exemplified in Shorter-Gooden’s (2000) case study in which her client’s biracial identity issues were not immediately apparent because she identified as African American and socialized almost exclusively with African Americans. However, the impact of racial issues on her life as a biracial Black/White woman was significant in her ability to experience genuine intimacy.

Finally, we need to develop models of healthy racial identity development for biracial women that take their unique statuses into account. As race and gender interact in complex ways in Black women, we need to know more about how they interact in equally complex, and perhaps different, ways in biracial women who may be caught between the rock of gender and the hard place of race.


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SUGGESTED READINGS


