Spring 2013

"It's About the Way You Fold Your Underwear": Dutch Interracial Relationships in the Colonial Context

Sarah Iverson
SIT Study Abroad

"It's About the Way You Fold Your Underwear": Dutch Interracial Relationships in the Colonial Context

Sarah Iverson
Smith College
Sociology, Study of Women & Gender

Advisor: D.G. Hondius

Academic Director: Yvette Kopijn

Primary Research Site: Europe, The Netherlands, Amsterdam

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The Netherlands: International Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender
SIT Study Abroad
Spring 2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For these past four months I have been constantly amazed at the willingness of those who I have just met to open up their minds, lives, homes, boats, and schedules to an often bewildered American undergraduate researcher. There are many, many people without whom this work would not have been possible.

Thank you to Dr. Dienke Hondius, the seminal scholar on interracial relationships in the Netherlands, for sharing your staggering knowledge base. Gratitude to Yvette Kopijn, Lisa Reberts, and Jasmijn Rana for your feedback from the beginning.

Thank you to Quinsy, Trevor, Ruud, Merhawi, and Flavia for welcoming me with open arms into your critical but not cynical (and most of all inspirational) world. I want to be all of you when I grow up.

To Vincent, Katie Lee, Vinz, and Mariah, my favorite Dutch people -- living with you has given me all of my favorite Amsterdam stories. I can only hope to one day have a family as "chaotic" and beautiful as yours. To my parents, Shot Shot, and Csf, for your feigned interest as I described every new Dutch baked good I discovered. Thank you to Anna and Rebex, my only friends, and to /r/Amsterdam, for the unintentional hilarity.

And most of all, thank you to my participants, who took the time to sit down with me. I hope this project honors the life experiences and perspectives that you so graciously shared.

ABSTRACT

Interracial relationships cannot be defined purely through the lens of racial difference. Drawing upon loosely structured interviews with three couples, this case study presents lived experiences as a way to better understand interracial relationships in the Netherlands. An intersectional analysis of these interviews uncovers three distinctive themes among couples: 1) their relationship is frequently treated as "common property" to be commented on by family, friends, and strangers alike, 2) the use of "avoidance" discursive strategies when discussing negative reactions, and 3) the enactment of color-blind ideology when talking about race. The personal narratives of individuals in each couples are presented in order to take into account the diverse local realities enacted when embodying these relationships. This research concludes that there is no common value system that indicates the success or failure of a relationship, and that relationships are built at a crossroads of race, ethnicity, class, nationality, gender, religion, and age.

INTRODUCTION

No two romantic relationships are alike. Two individuals may become romantically involved with each other for a variety of reasons: common interests, a shared sense of humor, physical proximity, familial duty, or no specific reason at all. Deciding to build a relationship with someone is a very personal, individual choice that may not be understood by those outside of the relationship. While relationships are built on the individual level, over the course of my semester abroad studying sexuality and gender in the Netherlands I became interested in researching the structural and socio-cultural factors that influence the politics of romantic attraction in the Dutch context, particularly for those in interracial relationships. How do class, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, nationality, sexuality, and other factors influence interpersonal attractions? Are systematic mechanisms of oppression evident in these categorizations reproduced or eradicated at the interpersonal level through interracial relationships? In order to explore these structural and socio-cultural factors, I became engaged in the history of colonialism and post-World War II attitudes that have created the unique context for contemporary race relations in the Netherlands.

I believe it is largely through sharing stories and being open to the stories of others that we can learn not to oppress each other. With this in mind, I embarked on a month long journey to discover the stories of couples in interracial relationships in the Netherlands. I spent one month collecting interviews, analyzing my data, and synthesizing all that I had learned during the semester into this project. Simultaneously, I took an internship with the organization "Roet in Het Eten," a collective of activists and thinkers who seek to provide a platform for cross-cultural contact and critique of Dutch society. Through "Roet in Het Eten" I met those who are on the

front lines of combatting racism in the Netherlands, and I hope that in one small way this project contributes to this fight, building understanding of one aspect of race in contemporary Dutch society.

LANGUAGE & TERMS

While initially explaining my intended topic of study to others, I often met resistance or confusion by my use of the terms "mixed race," "interracial," "bicultural," or "heterogamous" when describing these relationships. I was told that "mixed race" is a term that is only used to described multiracial individuals in the Netherlands, and not relationships. "Interracial" seemed to fit better, although not all couples who come from differing racial backgrounds necessarily identify as being in an interracial relationship. Further, the term could be seen by some as reifying racial categorizations imposed by outsiders to the relationship. "Bicultural" works as a limited description for couples who come from two ethnic cultures; however, it does not encompass the couples that I interviewed who identified more than two cultures when they spoke of their relationship. "Heterogamous" is a term that I found used by scholars writing around ten years ago, and was not a familiar term used by anyone I spoke to in conversation. To my ears, "heterogamy" sounds like both too broad of a categorization -- implying a relationship between individuals with any category of difference (age, religion, class, etc.) -- and a categorization too

precariously associated with biological terminology and race for a consciously post-WWII Dutch society.

From speaking to my interviewees and those who study race in the Netherlands about this dilemma, I posit that the lack of comfortable discourse in Dutch society when talking about relationships with partners who come from different races, ethnicities, or cultural backgrounds stems from the more general lack of discursive vocabulary about race in the Dutch language. This makes it difficult for Dutch speakers to have accessible terms to describe these relationships. Many Dutch terms around race are borrowed from English academic sources, such as "intersectionaliteit" or "pigmentocracy". This lack of vocabulary may reflect a more general Dutch resistance to adopt terms to address race after World War II. Because biological conceptions of race and difference were used as justifications for horrific genocide, race as a common categorization "disappeared from the discursive scene after the Second World War. It became a word deemed 'not important' and rather not to be mentioned." (Essed & Trienkekens, 2008). Instead, Dutch racial discourse is often framed as discussions of ethnic roots -- recognizing that people come from different cultural backgrounds but ignoring the implications of these difference in a society which white Dutchness is the privileged norm (Essed & Trienkekens, 2008). In an attempt to not repeat the mistakes of the past, eliminating racial terms from Dutch discourse in fact served the opposite affect: stripping away language from which to productively discuss race as a continued marker of unequal treatment.

Among these terms, I have chosen "interracial" as the best descriptor for the the couples I interviewed in this project. While imperfect, "interracial" was most frequently used as a self-description by the couples, and seemed to be the most accessible and recognizable term spoken

back to me when I talked about my project with people of color and white people alike. I also found that it is the most frequently occurring term in print. I make use of the terms "mixed race," "bicultural," or "heterogamous" when first spoken by my interviewees or written in my literature review sources, as a way to honor their original terminology and not re-classify their decisions. Finally, using the term "interracial" seems to be broadest way to encompass the range of these couple's stories, and staying true to the diversity of experiences shared with me over the course of this project has always been my primary goal.

Before moving further, it is also important to establish the differing demographics that the white/non-white binary belies in the Dutch context. While embodying whiteness comes with the capital of being the dominant racial group in the Netherlands, those who are non-white do not experience the world uniformly. Reasons for this include differing economic resources, differing dominant narratives of non-white groups in Dutch culture, differing histories of groups of color in the Netherlands, and different policies surrounding immigration to the Netherlands, among others. However, non-whites share the positionality of navigating a Dutch society and state in which whiteness is the norm, where those in power are more likely than not to propagate the hegemonic values of the dominant white ruling class.

This divide can be seen most clearly in the Dutch categorizations of *allochtoon* and *autochtone*, which originated in the 1970s and continue to influence Dutch conceptions of race today (Mepschen, 2013). *Allochtoon* literally translates as "originating from another country," and has been used in Dutch discourse to classify non-white "outsiders" (Mepschen, 2013). In contrast, *autochtoon* translates as "originating from this country," differentiating the white Dutch who were born in the Netherlands (Mepschen, 2013). This terminology divides Dutch society

between those who do not belong, *allochtoon*, and those who do, and have an inherent privilege to enjoy all of Dutch society's resources without question, *autochtoon.* Migrants, whether they be first- or second- or third- generation, must constantly prove their loyalty and integration with Dutch values, and are under constant threat of discrimination and scrutiny (Mepschen, 2013).

As such, non-whites in Dutch society are effectively "othered," their existence marginalized. In order to discuss this process, this project may occasionally lump non-whites together for the sake of clarity of argument, and differentiates within this categorization where necessary. It is my hope that this decision does not essentialize the experiences of non-whites, or define their experiences solely in relation to the dominant group, but recognizes the common structural and institutional constraints that non-whites must navigate.

METHODOLOGY

Over the course of April and May 2013, I interviewed three couples for this project. I found my interviewees by asking as many people as I could if they knew any couples in a relationship with one white Dutch partner and one non-white partner, and from there used snowball sampling. I did not classify my sample population as interracial couples because I did not want to exclude those who did not necessarily identify as being in an interracial relationship. Further, in the interest of practicality on my short timeframe, I did not specify any particular race or ethnic group of interest because I wanted to open my research population to anyone who would be willing to talk to me. I also did not place any limitations on sexuality, age, economic status, nationality, religion, or gender of the couples, because of practical reasons, and because I knew I wanted to take an intersectional approach to my research and could incorporate these factors when conducting my final analysis. The only stipulations that I made when I put out the call for interviewees was that I wanted to speak with couples who had been together for at least two years. This was to ensure that the couples had plenty of lived experiences to discuss, and that

their relationship with someone of a different race has made a lasting impact on their lives and identity as an individual navigating contemporary Dutch society.

I ended up interviewing two couples from Amsterdam, Maartje/Jalal and Tara/Thiago, and one couple from Haarlem, Rosalie/Hassan. All three couples had one male partner and one female partner. Two couples had one self-identified Moroccan male partner and one white Dutch partner (Maartje/Jalal and Rosalie/Hassan), and the third couple had one self-identified mixed Dutch Surinamese/Antillean male partner and one mixed Dutch white /South African partner (Tara/Thiago). All of the couples identified themselves as being interracial. Both Moroccan males had been born and raised in Morocco and had immigrated to the Netherlands after meeting their partners in Morocco in their twenties. Only one of the couples is married (Maartje/Jalal), and the other two are long term partners. All of my interviewees were between the ages of twenty-five and fifty.

I interviewed each partner separately for around an hour to an hour and a half. Initial interviews were scheduled with individuals so that my interviewees would feel free to speak frankly about their relationship. Joint interviews could not be scheduled due to logistics. I had an interview guide that provided an outline of my questions around my interviewee's background, relationship experiences, and reactions to their relationship (see appendix A). However, during the course of the interview I allowed my participants to speak freely, and asked them questions about whatever topics came up in conversation. While I had my interview guide available to remind me of common themes I hoped to explore, I was primarily interested in collecting the oral histories of these individuals while doing my research, and so was entirely open to divergent trains of thought. I made a conscious decision to conduct oral histories because I hoped that on

one level this project provides a platform on which to hear often marginalized stories. On another level, I strive to connect the lived experiences of my interviewees with the social structures and power dynamics at work in the Netherlands, which at its heart is the purpose of sociological analysis. Throughout my data collection and analysis, I made sure to to utilize my sociological imagination: thinking about what systems create order and authority in social groups, and acknowledging that social structures often work through individual actors (Lemert, 115).

I recorded each interview using a voice recording software on my computer, and transcribed the relevant portions of the interview that appear in my analysis to the best of my ability, staying as true to the cadence of our initial conversation as possible. I have inserted bracketed words for clarification in the text, and have noted relevant gestures, pauses, and emphasis where pertinent

In order to ensure the safety and security of my participants, I have used pseudonyms throughout this paper. The names that I chose reflect the character of my participant's true names. I read a short verbal consent form to each participant prior to beginning the interview, which states that an interviewee need not answer any question they feel uncomfortable with, and can stop the interview at any time (see appendix B). In designing my interview guide, I made a conscious choice to let my participants be the actors in bringing up any issues that may be painful, such as facing discrimination or problems in their relationship, and gently asking questions if a sensitive topic was brought up. These issues came up unprompted during every interview I conducted, and I believe that I created a safe space in which my participants could share their full, truthful stories without fear of repercussions or emotional hardship.

I found that it was quite easy to build rapport with my interviewees. Many seemed

eagerly interested to hear about what I had been finding in my research, and wanted to help out in any way possible. Almost every participant I spoke with remarked on my own ethnically ambiguous appearance, and I shared with my interviewees that my mother is Filipino and my father is white. If my interviewee asked, I also often shared that I myself am in an interracial relationship. My positionality as a researcher in relation to my participants was as both an outsider and an insider. I was an outsider because I am an American, do not speak fluent Dutch, Arabic, Berber, or any other language that my participants may speak, because I am a student who may be quite a bit younger than my participants, and because I am not a member of their relationship. On the other hand, I believe that my positionality as a mixed race individual who is also in an interracial relationship made my participants more at ease answering my questions, because I did my best to make it clear that I am trying to gain true understanding of how interracial relationships work in the Netherlands, and not exoticizing or otherizing these relationships.

Early on in my research process, I recognized that my positionality as a product of an interracial relationship and as a current member of one may introduce a potential sense of bias into my analysis. Throughout my research, I made a conscious effort to counteract this bias by constantly recognizing that each relationship is completely unique, with different factors and power dynamics at work, particularly in the cross-national/cultural/racial contexts. I did my best to not compare my participant's stories with my own experiences or what I have observed of my parent's relationship. I also made an effort to view my research participants as not just one half of an interracial relationship, but as individuals with diverse lived experiences outside of the context of their relationship. Further, in order to avoid bias as an American researcher, and

recognize the specific Dutch context of colonialism and post-WWII race relations, throughout this paper I do my best to ground my research in academic literature that is Netherlands specific.

The methodologies I outlined above come inherent with a number of challenges and external potential sources of bias. First, my population sample is limited to couples who were willing to speak about their relationship with an academic researcher. These couples were willing to open up their lives to scrutiny, and so may only represent interracial relationships that are working out, or that felt comfortable talking about race. Second, as an American research new to Dutch culture, I conducted all of my interviews in English. Although I did not face many obvious difficulties with this limitation, perhaps my participants would have been better at expressing themselves or more comfortable speaking in a native language. Third, I did not interview couples with the same racial makeup. Although this would have added a dimension of consistency to my research that perhaps would have made my work more generalizable, I am still able to recognize patterns among these three couples. If anything, having couples of differing demographics has allowed me to compare and contrast their experiences through an intersectional lens, taking the particular ethic makeup of a couple into account. Finally, the couples I interviewed are not representative of the Netherlands as a whole. Amsterdam and Haarlem are unique cities different from the rest of the country, and so my interviewee's experiences can only speak to one dimension of Dutch society.

The analysis of my interviews is organized around common themes. First, I present brief descriptions of each couple, noting relevant information such that the reader can get to know my interviewees and the context in which they speak about their relationship. Then I discuss the reactions of family, friends, and strangers directed at my respondents, who commonly

experienced their interracial relationship as "common property" up for discussion and critique for a variety of intersecting reasons. How my interviewees responded to reactions about their relationship reflects how race operates in each relationship -- as a day to day reality that brought my respondents together in their relationship, as something that was unimportant, or as a factor occasionally acknowledged. I discuss the attitudes toward race of each couple, and posit that these attitudes stem from factors like the educational background, nationality, and positionality of my respondents. Then, I examine the experience of each of my interviewees with their partner's culture. If interracial relationships show that racism does not exist in this relationship, how do partners come to truly understand their partner's background? Then, I discuss the discursive strategies used by my respondents when speaking. It is my belief that the shape of the narrative shared by my interviewees reflects the thoughts and intentions of the speaker. The picture that is painted by how each of my interviewee's points leads to the next, or the specific language used when telling a story is the product of a societal and cultural attitudes toward interracial relationships. Understanding the thought process behind each specific word choice, each narrative arc, is often as, or even more important the the content of the anecdotes themselves. It is my hope that these themes reveal some of the commonalities and differences evident in individual relationships, relating the individual level experiences of these relationships to the common social structures that each relationship must work within in the Dutch context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The temptation to study interracial relationships purely through the lens of racial differences does not take into account the diverse local realities enacted when embodying these relationships. How individuals in interracial relationships build a partnership with one another, interact with social institutions, are perceived by others, are considered by the law and policy, and are portrayed by the media all depend on the intersections of ethnicity, class, gender, age, religion nationality, and sexuality that a particular couple embodies in the context of the wider Dutch society and its history. Two couples may appear demographically identical on paper, but go about their lived realities in completely different ways simply because of how they appear. In contrast, two couples who share no demographic similarities may face similar struggles and triumphs because they are both in interracial relationships. For studying an issue so personal and so intimately tied to conceptions of self, family, and identity, I believe that examining interracial relationships must always be done through an intersectional lens. We do not experience our world or our love through one identity at a time, but through the complex layering of each

identity constantly in interplay with our historical past and societal present.

Thus, the theoretical framework of intersectionality is a useful framework from which to consider my research. Intersectionality is the concept that an individual embodies and experiences a multiplicity of identities at one time simultaneously. Rather than viewing discrimination through a single-axis framework, intersectionality recognizes that those “who are multiply burdened are generally left below unless they can somehow pull themselves into the groups that are permitted to squeeze through the hatch,” that is, privilege and oppression do not work in the same way for everyone who identifies with a particular group, but operate differently depending on how an individual is situated within all her identities (Crenshaw, 1993). One's life experience cannot be only viewed through one lens: "Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice" (Collins, 2000). Often overlooked in forms of first- and second- waves of Western feminism that only work to empower white women, intersectionality is a useful framework that expands feminist thought into a matrix of domination and inspire more collective action strategies.

Keeping the theoretical framework of intersectionality at the forefront of my research, I will not try to analyze the experiences of my interviewees through one particular aspect of their identity. Others who have conducted research on interracial relationships in the Netherlands only consider these relationships from one lens (Kalmijn, et. al 2005, Hooghiemstra, 2003) and I am actively pushing back against this way of thinking and presenting my research as a counterpoint. I will use the intersectional lens "as a way to challenge subjectification based gendered assumptions essentialized difference, racialization, and other post-colonial regimes of power,"

striving to keep the particular Dutch context in mind (Diggins, 2011). While the theory of intersectionality originated in the United States with scholars like Kimberle Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, I will use the unique Dutch attitudes around race, gender, religion, nationality, age, and class when conducting an intersectional analysis on the couples I interviewed.

Inspired by the concept of intersectionality, I will also use Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's interpretive framework of color blind racism while doing my research. Color blind ideology is explained as "the assertion of essential sameness between racial and ethnic groups despite unequal social locations and distinctive histories" (Rodriquez, 645). Color blind discourse exists in the United States as a popular discourse that "gives room for exceptions ('Not all blacks are lazy, but most are') and allows for a variety of ways of holding on to the frames -- from crude and straightforward to gentle and indirect," (Bonilla-Silva, 48). It is a discursive strategy used primarily by whites to perpetuate a form of racism marauding as liberal acceptance. Although work on color blind ideology has largely been done in the American context, I will apply this to the Dutch context by recognizing the distinctive social locations and distinctive histories of the groups that I analyze. This framework works hand-in-hand with intersectionality, because both recognize that the lived experience happens on multiple levels, and cannot be boiled down to one truth based on a particular characteristic.

Because interracial relationships connect two races in a very obvious way, many point toward their existence as evidence for movement toward "post-racial" society. Further, in my attempt to find research participants, I met hostility from certain Dutch people who argued that dating outside one's race is not an issue worth of study because "skin color doesn't matter." This

idea was also propagated in some capacity by my research participants themselves. In my work I do not wish to deny the lived experiences of those I spoke with, but I do wish to consider this color-blind discourse alongside the critique that it is a form of racism used by "whites in ways that justify racial inequality" (Bonilla-Silva, 25). Color blind discourse has been used to naturalize race-related matters, to point to the declining significance of race, and to frame racial arguments as aspects of individual cultures or value systems (Bonilla-Silva, 28). Each of these impacts of color blind racism have insidious affects on a Dutch society in which race continues to play a very large role in structuring inequality, despite a lack of explicit racial discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the unique context in which interracial relationships in the Netherlands exist, it is first necessary to understand the interconnecting history of colonialism, immigration policy, and post-World War II perspectives that formed contemporary Dutch attitudes toward race.

Briefly, the Netherlands existed as a colonial power prior to World War II, after which it was immediately forced to give up its imperialistic holdings in parts of South East Asian and the Caribbean (Boehmer & Gouda, 2009). During this post-WWII period, many immigrants from former Dutch colonies began to move to the Netherlands, beginning the post-colonial divide that continues to exist in Dutch society (Pieterse, 2002). The post-colonial divide refers to the hostility faced by post-colonial immigrants in the Netherlands, who were marginalized in Dutch society and often faced poverty, paternalistic attitudes, and racialized policies (Kopijn, 2013). However, the term "post-colonial immigrants" belies the heterogeneity in experience of those who came to the Netherlands. Hans van Amersfoort and Mies van Niekerk, whose article

"Immigration as a Colonial Inheritance: Post-Colonial Immigrants in the Netherlands, 1945-2002" traces the post-colonial migration flows to the Netherlands from the East Indies, Surinam, and the Antilles, argue that immigrants to the Netherlands during this time period had very different experiences based on the intersections of social class, ethnic origin, timing of the migration, government policies, and general perception by the public (2006).

Today, "the status of the Netherlands as an ex-colonial power remains un-problematised, and consequently the manner in which the history of colonialism might link up with the formation of contemporary national and migrant identities is left insufficiently examined" (Boehmer & Gouda, 2009). The Netherlands continues to exist as a "Kingdom," with colonial holdings in Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten. Ulbe Bosma writes of the Dutch "colonial amnesia," in a country reluctant "to admit that the Netherlands was (and is) a country of immigration" (2013).

The Dutch policy toward immigrants has always been one of assimilation. Immigrants who possessed Dutch citizenship and a familiarity with the Dutch language and culture expedited this integration process for many immigrants, and contributed to their favorable standing in the eyes of white Dutch natives (Amersfoort & Niekerk, 2006). In the 1950s, classes on "becoming Dutch" and keeping a home were implemented for immigrant women, and sex-segregated boarding schools for children from the colonies were created to "civilize" the masses (Kopijn, 2013).

The current immigration discussion and policy echoes these attitudes toward immigrants. The official policy states that foreign citizens must "demonstrate that they can support themselves financially," not have a criminal record, and if they are coming "for the purposes of

family formation or reunification," as is often the case for those in interracial relationships, must "take and pass the Dutch civic integration examination abroad" (Government.nl, 2013). The last provision makes the Netherlands the first country in the world to require immigrants to pass a test prior to immigration (Expatica, 2013). Beyond the language barrier that many immigrants face when taking the test, the citizenship test notoriously asks questions about Dutch values that prove difficult to answer. For example, Rodaan Al Galidi, a refugee from Iraq who had been in the Netherlands for thirteen years and won the European Union's literature prize, failed to pass the test (Dutchnews, 2011). In addition, there are thousands of dollars of fees and a six month waiting time required in the application process.

Once in the Netherlands, immigrants are often funneled into low-skill, low-paying jobs: for example, the Dutch government implemented a formalized recruitment agreement with the Moroccan government in 1969 to fill semi or unskilled labor positions (Bouras, 2013). This history has resulted in the stereotyping of Moroccan and other immigrants as at fault for their low socioeconomic position, and has caused much criticism of immigrant groups by white natives for taking resources (Bouras, 2013). This type of criticism inherently defines the boundaries of Dutch citizenship as only for those with white skin, and marks immigrants or any person of color as a problematic "other" who must actively show their loyalty and integration with Dutch values (Mepschen, 2013).

Most recently, Dutch anti-migrant attitudes have been directed toward the Muslim community. The popularity of politician Geert Wilders, who advocates that "the fight against Islam is a mission for life," and that Islam is "the biggest sickness" in Europe, speaks to the growing attitude of Islamophobia in the Netherlands (Dutchnews, 2012). Homonationalism,

which argues for the supposed sexual freedom and emancipation of Western countries in contrast to the sexual repression is Islamic countries, has also been used in anti-migrant rhetoric in the Netherlands (Aydemir, 2013). The overarching popular argument against immigrants in the Netherlands is their failure to assimilate -- that immigrant communities often keep to themselves, do not learn the language, are too religious, too conservative, and have a stronger national identity with their home country (Bouras, 2013). In reality, immigrant communities are often shunted to certain neighborhoods because they can only afford to live in certain areas due to job discrimination or wish to live close to family members; second-generation immigrants learn Dutch and the Dutch culture quite quickly; there is no such thing as homogenous Dutch values'; and as such, immigrant values are made homogenous and do not reflect the reality of their home country (Bouras, 2013).

Because assimilation of immigrants is so often the goal of Dutch immigration policy, the existence of interracial relationships occupies a precarious position that reflects he connecting of two social groups. One one hand, an interracial relationship between a non-white immigrant and a native is often viewed as a positive means of assimilation, and there is a long history of sociologists using "measures of intermarriage as the most basic measuring stick for the social distance between groups, and with good reason" (Rosenfeld, 152). On the other hand, interracial couples are often a point of "fear and concern" for example, interracial marriage was officially discouraged by the Dutch state commission for Marriage and Family in the 1960s (Hondius, 410). The reasons for these concerns are varied, including racist beliefs about racial purity, men "stealing" a woman from her home culture or "taking advantage" of a white woman, and the belief that these relationships can never work out because of a mismatch in partner "values"

(Kalmijn, et. al, 2005).

Recently, reports show that around 6% of couples married or living together in the Netherlands are of mixed nationality, with Dutch-Indonesian and Dutch-Surinamese as the most popular partner makeups (Dutchnews, 2012). Interracial relationships have been studied extensively in classic immigration countries like the United States (Rosenfeld, 2002; Baptiste, 1984 among others), Britain (Twine, 2010; Jones, 1982), and Australia (Meng & Gregory, 2005), and only a few studies on interracial couples exist in the Dutch context (Hondius, 1999; Kalmijn et. al, 2005).

Matthijs Kalmijn, Paul M. de Graaf, and Jacques P.G. Janssen presents twenty years of data on heterogamous marriages and divorces in the Netherlands in their article "Intermarriage and the risk of divorce in the Netherlands: The effects of differences in religion and in nationality, 1974-94" to argue that ethnic intermarriages have a higher risk of divorce because of differing cultural, religious, and social characteristics between partners. Kalmijn et.al. test the hypothesis that these differences "are correlated with differences in tastes, values, and communication styles," and from their data conclude that intermarriage between Dutch natives and foreigners have twice the divorce risk as homogamous couples, while marriages between members of different religious groups have only a slightly higher risk of divorce than those who share a religion (71). Because this study only looks at two variables -- the ethnicity and religion of each partner in heterogamous marriages -- Kalmjin et.al. miss many confounding variables in both the methodology and theory of their study. Variables such as the gender of each partner, their class status, nationality, sexuality, and the interconnections between each identity that form the lived reality of an individual and his or her relationship are left unaccounted for. Kalmijn

et.al. fall into the trap of "setting up more or less implicit hierarchies between categories of inequality, and furthering the debate on reductionism" (Bilge, 225). When approached from an intersectional lens, this study on intermarriage clearly leaves much to be desired, and I argue that the conclusions of this study cannot be supported based on its analysis.

Primarily, ethnicity is not the only factor that mediates interracial relationships. Since ethnicity in the Netherlands so deeply intersects with economic status because of job discrimination, language barriers, immigrant status, and other reasons, it is impossible to disentangle ethnicity as the only factor interracial relationships (Mepschen, 2013). Differences in class background surely create power imbalances in relationships, especially as embodied in an individual's decision-making ability or ability to economically sustain one's self autonomously outside of the relationship. Realities such as housing segregation and having the disposable income to go out mean that it may often be difficult for people of different class backgrounds to even meet each other in the first place. Economic inequality surely places a strain on many relationships, particularly when coupled with ethnicity and gender. In contrast, economic parity may strengthen a relationship that may otherwise face difficulties because of ethnic differences, particularly if because of their class status partners have similar levels of education, dispositions toward particular lifestyles, or child rearing strategies. Interracial relationships face a distinctive set of challenges within the social context of the Netherlands, and class is too often a variable ignored by those like Kalmijn, et. al who point toward a higher rate of divorce as reasons why interracial relationships are bad. There is not a uniformity of experience in these relationships; however, as with all relationships, the social structure and historical context of the relationship's societal backdrop play a large role in mediating how these relationships play out.

The gender of each partner as it intersects with his or her class background and ethnicity also plays a crucial role in the dynamics of these relationships and is ignored by Kalmijn et.al. A woman of color in a relationship with a white Dutch man faces a different set of societal restraints from a man of color in a relationship with a white Dutch woman because of Dutch and immigrant notions of gender roles as well as the Dutch history of colonialism -- again, the dimensions of gender, ethnicity, nationality and class are not interdependent.

Dienke Hondius' work, "Gemengde huwelijken, gemengde gevoelens: Aanvaarding en ontwijking van etnisch en religieus verschil sinds 1945" is arguably the seminal work on interracial relationships in the Netherlands. Hondius traces the history of attitudes toward interracial relationships both in the colonial and post-colonial periods, using as her starting point "the idea that a mixed marriage forms a testcase for tolerance, in the private circles of families and friends, as well as in wider public social circles" (2001). Hondius finds that couples are often met with "active versus passive forms of acceptance and (in)tolerance," (2001). Further, based on over eighty interviews she conducted with interracial couples, Hondius describes the changing "orientation toward and identification with their own as well as their partner's group of origin" (2001). Hondius finds that in the Netherlands, "avoidance is the dominant public as well as private attitude," which corroborates with my own research, albeit perhaps following a different logic.

A number of useful frameworks surrounding interracial relationships have been identified by numerous scholars, particularly stereotypes that involve relationships involving one non-white partner and one white partner. There is the idea of a pigmentocracy, which is a social hierarchy of race according to skin color, in which those with darker skin tones are considered

inferior and subject to discrimination and prejudice (Smedley, 1993). Those who exist within the more ambiguous zones of skin color, for example, those of multiethnic heritage, can be allowed to achieve a high social status within the pigmentocracy, like in the postcolonial Latin countries, showing that these boundaries could be fluid; however, the system of color preferences became more rigid as a justification for prejudice as colonialism continued (Smedley, 1993).

The "exoticization" of non-white bodies by those in power casts people of color as the "other," an object that is valued only for what it presumably represents in terms of cultural stereotypes (Spickard, 1989). Interracial relationships have been viewed through this lens because of the history of men exoticizing women in the land they colonize (Spickard, 1989). Building from this stereotype, another trope, is of the hypersexuality of people of color, who are a corrupting, thrilling force in the white partner's life (Spickard, 1989).

These stereotypics can be seen in the Dutch film "Allen maar nette mensen, " directed by Lodewijk Crijns. This film is a notable media representation of interracial relationships in the Netherlands, and was brought up several times over the course of my research.. Media representations are consequential because they have the power to perpetuate certain narratives about interracial relationships and normalize social inequality. "Alleen maar nette mensen" tells the story of a young Jewish man who goes to the Bijlmer, a neighborhood in Amsterdam stigmatized as being dangerous because of its multiculturalism, in order to find Black women to date (2012). The Black women in the film are portrayed as exotic objects who corrupt the protagonist. This plot of this film is problematic for a number of inherent reasons, including the exotification of the non-white body, sexism, class based discrimination, and perpetuating racist stereotypes, particularly because it is one of the only depictions of interracial relationships in the

Netherlands that I could find in my research. That such a film could be produced and accepted in Dutch society in 2012 speaks to the current state of race relations in the Netherlands.

INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

The Couples

Maartje and Jalal live in Amsterdam with their ten year old daughter. They have been married for fifteen years. Maartje works organizing immigration visas, and Jalal works as a sales associate. Maartje was born in a working class neighborhood in the Netherlands, Jalal in a small town in the South of Morocco. They met each other while Maartje was on holiday in Morocco. Jalal was her waiter at a restaurant, and they spent one day together before she had to go back to the Netherlands. Their courtship continued over phone, fax, and letters, until Maartje made another three week trip back to Morocco, during which she met Jalal's family. After returning to the Netherlands, Jalal joined Maartje the next year, and they married a month after his arrival. Maartje is almost fifty, and Jalal is around forty.

Tara and Thiago live in Amsterdam, and have been together for two and a half years. Although they both were born and grew up in Amsterdam, they met through mutual friends in South Africa, where they were both doing Master's programs in African Studies. Tara's mom is

white Dutch, and her dad is a first generation South African immigrant. Both of Thiago's parents are immigrants to the Netherlands: his mom from the Antilles, and his dad from Surinam. Both currently have jobs in the media, in which they deal daily with critical discussions around race. Both are in their mid-twenties.

Rosalie and Hassan live in a large city in Holland with Rosalie's fourteen year old son from a previous relationship. They have been together for four years. They met in Western Morocco, through Hassan's sister, who lived down the block from Rosalie. Hassan is from Western Morocco, and Rosalie is from the same city they both live in now Rosalie is quite a bit older than Hassan, and they make a life in a lower middle class socioeconomic neighborhood.

These basic facts about each couple only tell one story. Over the course of my research, it became clear that each individual experiences the lived reality of being in a relationship with someone outside of their race in a unique way, dependent not only on factors like their race, nationality, gender, religion, age, or class status, but also on factors like personality, attitudes toward being in a relationship, work schedules, and interests. What may make one couple similar on paper may only highlight their differences in reality. What I culled from my interviews are themes and experiences common for those in interracial relationships, experienced in unique ways. From my research I do not wish to make generalizable statements about the experiences of all interracial couples in the Netherlands, because I only have the experiences of six individuals in three couples, but I do hope that this case study reflects what it is like to be marked as an other in a society that privileges one way of being in a relationship over others.

Relationships as Common Property

Before I even began asking my formal interview questions, almost all of my interviewees brought up reactions of their family members to their relationship. It seemed as if this was the question they anticipated being asked when talking about their relationship, perhaps because of the common assumption that interracial relationships are more likely to cause familial tension (Kalmijn et. al, 2005).

Both Rosalie and Hassan were quick to tell me that their families completely accepted their relationship from the beginning. Similarly, Tara and Thiago's relationship was a non-issue for both of their families in the Netherlands. Both couples cited their family's familiarity with other cultures as the reasoning behind their acceptance: for Tara and Thiago because both sets of their parents had been in interracial relationships themselves, and for Rosalie and Hassan that their parents lived in diverse neighborhoods and interacted with different kinds of people.

In contrast, after telling her parents that she was marrying Jalal, Maartje's parents made their disapproval clear. Maartje said that they told her that she was being "cheated," that "he's just coming here for the money, just wants an opportunity to get into a rich country." Because her parents did not approve of their marriage, Maartje was estranged from her family for five years, until their daughter was born. When speaking about the period of her estrangement, Maartje framed her anger at her parents as being "insulted." Rather than criticizing her parents for their attitudes towards Moroccan men, Maartje emphasizes that the problem was with her parents not respecting her autonomy as an adult woman: "I was 32 years old, I thought I could make my own decisions by then." From Maartje's perspective, her relationship with Jalal became a point of conflict for her parents to criticize other aspects of her life -- the fact that she was getting married so quickly, the age difference between her and her partner, his nationality, and her religious

choices.

Further, those in interracial relationships face the unique positionality of never really being a member of the majority, whether surrounded primarily by people of color, whites, or even a diverse mix. Because no two relationships operate in the same way due to the variety of intersecting identities in each individual relationship, my interviewees frequently discussed having to defend or justify themselves or their relationship beyond just racial lines. For example, Tara spoke about receiving numerous questions about her romantic attractions in South Africa, where she was pursuing a Master's degree. She noted that people were "shocked" when told that she has her Master's, and always seemed more interested in asking her about her romantic life. These questions clearly run along gendered lines, and Thiago, who is also mixed race and studied in South Africa, but is a man, did not face such reactions. Rosalie, who comes from a lower socioeconomic background and lives in a diverse neighborhood, said that she did rarely faced negative reactions to her relationship with Hassan. In contrast, Maartje, who grew up with a middle class background, faced comments by others that she was being taken advantage of. Perhaps others perceived Maartje had more to lose than Rosalie by being in a relationship with a Moroccan because of their differing socioeconomic status.

Maartje's experience reflects a reoccurring theme throughout each interview -- that others outside of the relationship felt empowered to comment on interracial couple's relationships. While some level of familial feedback on a serious relationship seems appropriate in any context, Maartje compares her parents lack of acceptance of her relationship with Jalal with her previous relationship with a white American man: "People were a bit like that -- 'what, *you* with an American?' It's the moment you sort of jump over boundaries. But it wasn't that strong. This

reaction was much stronger." Maartje recognized that she was crossing boundaries with her previous relationship, but with Jalal it was different. It is more problematic for Maartje to be in a relationship with a Moroccan man than a white American man because of the differing amounts of privilege that each partner brought to the relationship. Situated in the context of growing Islamophobia in the Netherlands, as evidenced from the popularity of anti-Islam politician Geert Wilders, dating a Muslim, Moroccan man was viewed as an "irresponsible" decision for Maartje (Dutchnews.nl, 2010). Even for those who do not necessarily support Mr. Wilders, the history of Moroccan immigration in the Netherlands, which funneled immigrants into low-paying jobs, as well as popular discourse that paints Moroccans as antithetical to "liberal, Dutch values" has bred a climate of hostility toward Moroccans in the Netherlands (Bouras, 2013). In contrast, because the Netherlands has generally positive relations with the United States, a similarly Western, developed country, it was less of a boundary for Maartje to date an American man. These attitudes were not shared by the members of my Dutch interviewee's families who lived in more diverse areas, which indicates that being exposed to different types of people firsthand makes one more open to accepting others.

From the perspective of the non-Dutch families, Jalal said that his family immediately accepted Maartje as his partner. In his opinion, this stemmed from the fact that he's "not someone who hides things" from his family and that Maartje "accepted the [Moroccan] culture." Maartje framed her relationship with his family differently: she said that as a Western woman she was able to "throw money around" and was treated "sort of like a man." Maartje recognized the privileges that her nationality, race, and skin color provided her in Morocco, such that she was easily able to be accepted by Jalal's family. On one hand, Maartje was able to navigate Jalal's

Moroccan family easily because of her acknowledged privilege and willingness to learn about Moroccan culture. In contrast, Jalal's willingness to move to the Netherlands and learn Dutch were seen as threats by Maartje's family, indications that he was trying to take advantage of her.

White privilege as equated with higher socioeconomic status is evidenced further, through Maartje's account that when she began dating Jalal, her family assumed "that he was only doing it for the money -- that was a very deep rooted assumption that people had." Although Morocco is a diverse country with people from many socioeconomic backgrounds, her family immediately assumed that because Jalal was Moroccan he was taking advantage of Maartje for her money. In reality, Maartje and Jalal occupied similar economic positions in their home countries. Further, Maartje explained, "in the beginning people thought -- oh that's just for sex. But that is part of every relationship. I never had any other boyfriend where people said that." With these comments, her family reduces Maartje and Jalal's relationship to a sexual relationship, ignoring any other factors that could have brought the couple together. These comments may speak to the exoticization of the "other" that many equate with interracial relationships. While the traditional narrative is of colonialistic, paternalistic white men exoticizing women of color as fantasy sex objects, because Maartje is ten years older than Jalal the narrative could be flipped. Jalal's age and gender were associated with sexual virility, and Maartje's with the narrative of older women taking advantage of younger men. Maartje's experiences reflect how her family's comments about her relationship with Jalal were very much negatively based on assumptions about his race, nationality, class, age, and gender. Her experience also shows how common narratives can be modified to fit a situation, and that the way age intersects with gender operates on the same axis as beliefs about ethnicity and class.

Beyond familial reactions, each couple experienced reactions from strangers to their relationship. How my respondents felt about these reactions were primarily context dependent. When they moved in more diverse neighborhoods, none of my respondents felt like they were treated any differently than other couples. However, Tara notes that "if we are in places where we are the only people of color, you'll see people staring at you, or just reading you differently. Especially older people. The other day we were in the movie theater, and there were a lot of Dutch white older people, and they were kind of looking all at us." Negative reactions to my respondents from strangers most often came in the form of lingering looks. Maartje experienced "people star[ing], sometimes people think my husband is a refugee and I'm his sort of buddy or something." All of my respondents agreed that these looks came primarily from white people, but occasionally people of color. However, they primarily discussed instances in which they received comments from white people, and only rarely from people of color. This pattern may reflect what Tara noted when asked if she had received similar backlash from people of color, that these reactions "feel less invasive."

None of my respondents described a time in which they received an explicitly racist comment. Instead, couples often received comments veiled as compliments. Thiago recounted that many strangers would tell him and Tara that "you're going to have such beautiful children because you are mixed." Thiago was also told that "I did a good job" dating Tara "because she's mixed." Similarly, Rosalie notes that people often tell her that she found a "catch" in Hassan, and that if they were to have children they "will look so pretty, because they will be so mixed and you'll have these little exotic children with an afro." These "compliments" by virtual strangers clearly mark interracial relationships and their products, mixed race children, as exoticized others

that stand outside of the standard relationship model. This is damaging because it reifies the *allochtoon/autochtoon* divide of who can pass unnoticed in Dutch society (*autochtoons* with white privilege) and who constantly stand out, up for discussion (non-white *allochtoons*). These compliments reflect the fact that a pigmentocracy exists in Dutch society, in which the lighter one's skin color is, the better. Thiago posits that "Black is not good enough, so as soon as you mix it with white it becomes better." This line of thinking reflects the persisting racial hierarchy in the Netherlands. Beauty does not stem from the non-white part of a mixed race individual, but comes from the association with whiteness. Relationships where both partners appear to be of the same race are clearly marked as the standard, while interracial relationships deviate from this norm and so are worthy of commentary.

Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

How my respondents talked about race, ethnicity, and culture in the context of their own lives versus in the context of other's experiences is telling of how these categories operate in their relationships. If, as Hondius posits, "a mixed marriage forms a testcase for tolerance," then attitudes of tolerance and racial consciousness should be evident in the discourse of those in interracial relationships themselves. While tolerance of other races is true across the board for my respondents, the way that ideas about other ethnicity or cultures (even the ethnicity or culture of their partner) operates in their relationships varies, from viewing it as a day to day reality that brought my respondents together in their relationship, as something that was unimportant, or as a factor occasionally acknowledged.

Rosalie and Hassan both use a color blind ideology when discussing their relationship,

and what attracted them to one another. Hassan explained that in his experience there are "not too many Dutch and Moroccan couples, more in America or French or Spain, but that's okay." When asked if she ever thinks about or talks about race with Hassan, she replies

> "Nay. That's not why I fell in love. I fell in love with him. So that's not an issue. That would make a really difficult relationship. You argue, of course. But if you don't, how are and there are differences between Dutch and being Moroccan, but also between being female and being a man. But different cultures and different religions, that's not why I fell in love with him. So it's not going to help me to emphasize that. "

Bonilla-Silva argues that color blind ideology allows white individuals to "tiptoe around the most dangerous racial minefields because the stylistic elements of color blindness provide them the necessary tools to get in and out of almost any discussion" (2006). However, both Rosalie, a white woman, and her partner Hassan, a Moroccan man, utilize color blindness when explaining their relationship. Perhaps this is because Hassan and Rosalie are so often painted as coming from different races or ethnicities by others who do not see any other depth to their relationship, that when talking about how they feel about each other they have gotten used to trying to explain that attraction on other levels. That the couple utilized similar discourse when describing their relationship may indicate that they have explained this before, and want to appear as a united front on issues of race, ethnicity, and culture.

Or perhaps Rosalie and Hassan's colorblindness stems from beliefs they still have about each others cultures, despite being in a long term partnership with a member of that race. When

asked about her experiences in Morocco, Rosalie says that Moroccans "Don't mix, they stay to themselves. You take them to school and you go to pick them up again, and there's Moroccan kids and you can talk and have a conversation, but that's it. That's as far as it goes. " In lumping Moroccans together under the term "they," Rosalie is generalizing about an entire group of people and repeating arguments against Moroccan immigrants often repeated in Dutch popular discourse. She justifies her relationship with Hassan by saying that "He is different from the Moroccans that are here," casting her partner as the exception to the rule. Here, Rosalie does not think in stereotypes at the individual level, when describing her attraction to her husband; yet this level of tolerance or consciousness of the different levels of opportunity available to those of different races/nationalities does not extend to others on a more structural level.

Maartje's experience of race, ethnicity, culture in her relationship with Jalal is somewhat different than how Rosalie and Hassan described their relationship. On explaining her attraction to Jalal, she describes "A relationship is not a statistical fact. So that's why I think it goes well. That we found things in each other that aren't there in our own cultures. It works because we are from two different cultures, not despite it." Jalal's explanation is similar: "For me, it is normal. So it doesn't really feel like I am married with someone that strange, just different." Maartje and Jalal do not let race define their relationship, and yet they acknowledge its existence as a fact of reality that they must deal with by virtue of being in an interracial relationship in a society that still privileges certain races over others. For Maartje and Jalal, race does not play out consciously on a day-to-day level, but because of the context in which they live, they acknowledge that it does have an impact on their lives and their attraction for each other. Maartje puts it this way: "I remember when my husband moved in with me, people think our adjustments are like these big

things: the position of women, Islam, and blah blah. It's not about that. It's about the way you fold your underwear." From Maartje and Halal's experience, the day to day realities of interracial relationships are more mundane than deep discussions of different value systems, just like any other relationship.

This perspective is also evident in how Maartje and Jalal talk about each other's cultures. Maartje says that she approaches learning about Moroccan culture as "a bit more like an anthropological fieldwork experience. Because they were so different. But on the other hand, people are people." She clearly marks Moroccan culture as different from what she is used to, acknowledging difference, and yet does not lump all Moroccans together as diametrically opposed to her own culture. Jalal described a similar experience when navigating Dutch culture as an immigrant, saying that his "beginning was a little difficult. You come here, you don't speak the language, you don't know anybody. You have to adapt to another system, another culture, another people. How they are thinking." Jalal's transition to the Netherlands is made difficult by the reality of difference in Dutch life and in life in Morocco caused by different political, economic, and religious systems in the two countries, among other factors. Jalal acknowledges these differences, but does not make generalizations about Dutch people as a homogenous whole.

Of the three couples, Tara and Thiago emphasized race as an important dimension of their relationship. Thiago describes, "we both experience the same discrimination when it comes to racism in this country. That's one of the things why we are together, yeah. Even though a relationship should be based on more than the issue of race, the fact that you can talk about it with someone, and someone who can understand it, it is always better." Although they come from different ethnic backgrounds, Tara and Thiago are both mixed race in a country where any

other skin color besides white is labeled as the other. They both dealt with issues around race growing up and in their professional lives, and so it seems natural that this large part of both of their identities brings them together. Rather than the denial of difference, like Rosalie and Hassan, or the acknowledgement of it like Jalal and Maartje, Tara and Thiago emphasize race as a factor in their relationship. Tara describes,

> "When you're in an interracial relationship, it's really easy when somebody understands what you mean if somebody looks at you a certain way, you don't have to explain because people just know how that feels like. I wouldn't want to be with somebody who doesn't understand that there's racism in the Netherlands. It's something that's around you and it's important, so you should be able to share it. "

Tara frames race as a commonality that brings her together with Thiago as another person of color. However, Jalal and Hassan, both also considered people of color in the Netherlands, emphasize race in their relationships far less than Tara and Thiago. Thus, discussion of race does not just fall on racial lines.

Instead, perhaps Tara and Thiago's positionality of being people of color who have the privilege to be exposed to critical discussions of race in their education and upbringing explain this discourse. Both grew up in diverse neighborhoods, and have parents who are in an interracial relationship. They are both younger, and so perhaps represent a subsequent generation of interracial couples than Jalal/Maartje and Rosalie/Hassan, that they are more likely to talk about race. Or perhaps because they are so young they are more inclined to take what Tara describes as

a more "radical stance." Perhaps it is because other individuals I interviewed grew up confronting racial difference in their everyday lives, because Jalal and Hassan lived in largely ethnically homogenous areas of Morocco, Maartje describes not having to "think much about race" growing up, and Rosalie maintains a colorblind ideology. Here, the intersections of socioeconomic privilege, age, and nationality intersect to influence the various dispositions of my respondents when describing their racial difference.

Discursive Strategies

Over the course of my six interviews, I noticed a number of reoccurring discursive strategies utilized by my respondents. First, that many of my respondents described blatant acts of racism directed toward them as with words that denote confusion, instead of using more powerful words like "hateful" or "racist." For example, Tara described a time when an acquaintance asked if she had returned from South Africa because "she was done with the lazy negers," which Tara deemed a "weird question." In another instance, Tara was asked by an acquaintance if she "only dated Black guys," which she described as an "awkward question." Similarly, Thiago found probing questions about his relationship with Tara "ridiculous" and Maartje proclaimed questions about Jalal's immigration status "weird." Hassan describes his experience with Islamophobia in the Netherlands as "strange." These discriminatory acts directed toward my interviewees are all reflective of dominant narratives and social structures at work that other the non-white, non-Western body, and are the cause of tangible harm toward my responds. For example, Hassan and Jalal both talked about struggling to find work because of

negative perceptions against people from Morocco. It is evident throughout the rest of my conversations with my respondents that the majority of them have been affected by these acts of racism.

Thus, I posit that the softer words used to describe these acts are a way for my respondents to deal with them without engaging in the constant emotional toll of discrimination. This corroborates Dienke Hondius' assertion that this language is a type of "avoidance [that] has important functions such as conflict management, self-protection, and self-defense" (2005). Those in interracial relationships must face relentless messages in their everyday lives that tell them that their relationship deviates from the norm. From the lack of media representation of interracial relationships (the only representation any of my respondents could think of was a harmful, racist movie [see literature review]) to the othering of non-white bodies all together in Dutch society (as evidenced from the continued *allochtoon/autochtoon* discourse), it would be a lot for anyone to engage with in their everyday. Further, Tara described feeling like a few of her friends thinks she is "obsessed with certain issues", and not wanting to be the "token person of color" who always presents a critique against common racist discourse. Perhaps these feelings were translated into the specific word choices that my respondents used when describing difficult interactions in their lives. These discriminatory attitudes directed toward many of my responds have tangible effects not only in perpetuating hegemonic discourse in the mainstream, but also through my respondents themselves, who must tame their descriptions of discrimination in order to avoid an emotional toll and not be tokenized.

Often, those in interracial relationships have to defend themselves not only to strangers, whose opinions they are less likely to care about, but also to family members and friends, who

must be convinced of a relationship's validity. This means that those in interracial relationships must be more deft at defending their relationships than those who only face discrimination from people they do not care about. For example, I noticed that in the way Maartje described her courtship with Jalal she seemed somewhat defensive, like she had been telling this story for the past fifteen years and had practiced telling it in a way that would not lead to negative comments. She was reticent to share what exactly attracted her to Jalal, besides saying that with him she always felt "at home." Perhaps this narrative has emerged because Maartje has always felt the need to justify her relationship with Jalal to doubters, including those she cared about. Perhaps these reasons can account for the language my participant used when describing negative reactions to their relationship -- it is harder to call a family member racist than a stranger,

Similarly, Rosalie was adamant that she does not care what other people think about her relationship: "I really don't care. It's not interesting what they think. No one has said anything to me. No one. Ever." Here, Rosalie's emphatic tone seemed almost practice, like she really wanted to be sure that I as an interviewer did not think she let other's opinion of her relationship affect her. While this may be true for Rosalie, the fact that she emphasized it so much during our interview may indicate that she is used to telling others that racist comments or other forms of discrimination do not affect her, whatever the truth is. Hassan, Rosalie's partner, took a similar tone when describing his experience with the Dutch immigration test: "I can speak French, English, and Dutch, but still the test was hard. They asked questions about being nice to neighbors, or personal questions about women. It was very fast. Very strange." Perhaps those in interracial relationships do not want others to think that forms of discrimination and othering, whether they come in the form of pointed looks or impossible tests on Dutch values, are difficult

for them because it would add another reason for doubters to criticize their relationship.

CONCLUSION

Interracial relationships as a social phenomena is a unique vantage point from which to consider race relations in the Netherlands.These relationships speak to the immense amount of intersectionality that must be accounted for when analyzing any type of relationship, and speak to the constant interplay between social structure and day to day realities that make up the lived experience. This research strives to present real narratives of individuals in interracial relationships in order to combat generalizations their dynamics of difference that are too often made by the media, academics, and common perception alike.

My research finds three common themes in its analysis of three interracial couples, all of whom enact each theme in a unique way depending on the diverse local realities that intersect to make up the social structures at play in each relationship. First, that interracial relationships are often treated as common property by others, who feel free to comment on them because they stand out. This theme shows that race is still alive and well as a mediating factor in the Netherlands, and clearly others members of interracial relationships as outside of the mainstream

definitions of Dutch citizenship. Second, race, ethnicity, and culture are all discussed by each couple, but in very different ways. Couples range from discourses that echo the color blind ideology, the denial of these differences all together, to actively celebrating racial difference as one of the factors that brought partners together. This theme complicates the assertion that those in interracial relationships are always tolerant and cognizant of their partner's race, ethnicity, or culture, and the common thought that interracial relationships are one step toward the creation of a post-racial society. Finally, I analyze the discursive strategies of each couple when describing discriminatory acts against them and when describing the narrative arc of their relationships. In analyzing oral histories, it is important to keep in mind that the specific word choices or narrative strategies that each individual utilizes are often just as important of the content of the words themselves. I posit that my interviewee's discourse of using less charged words when describing discrimination, as well as preemptively telling their relationship narrative in particular ways, are defensive strategies that come as a response to societal and cultural attitudes toward interracial relationships.

Ultimately, what the diverse experiences of the three couples I interview shows are that there is no common value system that indicates the success or failure of a relationship, and that relationships are built at a crossroads of race, ethnicity, class, nationality, gender, religion, and age. Relationships exist within social structures, but first and foremost must exist at the individual level between partners. Perhaps it takes a certain kind of person to begin an interracial relationship -- those with the interest and ability to travel to Morocco, like Maartje and Rosalie, those with the freedom to immigrate for the partners, like Jalal and Hassan, or those who share similar dispositions to the world because of their different races, like Tara and Thiago -- but this

case study indicates that the day to day work of interracial relationships is similar to any other kind of relationship on the interpersonal level. There are no unique value systems that stem purely from a racial lens, and the intersectional realities of individuals must always be taken into account making assertions about interracial relationships.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study of interracial relationships in the Netherlands would benefit from a longitudinal study of how these relationships grow overtime. Integrating the narratives of couples that have split up for a variety of reasons would contribute to understanding relationship dynamics within the context of social inequality. Similarly, hearing the voices of couples as their relationship develops, and having research on how racial attitudes, discursive strategies, and everyday realities change over time would be useful in analyzing how race and culture function in a changing Dutch society. Research into same-sex interracial relationships could also prove interesting as a means to parse the role that gender plays in both homo and heterosexual interracial relationships. Finally, any kind of large scale study that controls for specific variables like racial makeup of couples, age difference between couples, nationality, or socioeconomic status between couples would provide insight into the specific narratives that couples with similar demographics experience.

WORKS CITED

Alleen Maar Nette Mensen. Dir. Lodewijk Krijns. Perf. Geza Weisz and Imanuelle Grives. 2012. DVD.

"Almost 6% of Dutch Couples Are Mixed Nationality." DutchNews.nl - Almost 6% of Dutch Couples Are Mixed Nationality. Dutchnews, 25 Apr. 2012. Web. <http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2012/04/almost_6_of_dutch_couples_are.php>.

Amersfoort, Hans, and Mies Van Niekerk. "Immigration as a Colonial Inheritance: Post-Colonial Immigrants in the Netherlands, 1945-2002." Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 32.3 (2006): 323-46. Print.

Aydemir, Murat. "Queer Theory, Globalization and Migration." SIT Netherlands, Amsterdam. 19 Feb. 2013. Lecture.

Baptiste, David A., Jr. "Marita Land FamilyTherapy with Racially/CulturallyIntermarried Stepfamilies: Issues and Guidelines." Family Relations 33 (1984): 373-80. Print.

Biermann, Katelin. "Love in a Melting Pot: Understanding Bicultural Relationships Through the

Couple." Thesis. SIT Netherlands: International Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender, 2012. Print.

Boehmer, Elleke, Frances Gouda, David Murphy, and James Proctor. "Postcolonial Studies in the Context of the 'Diasporic' Netherlands." Comparing Postcolonial Diasporas. Ed. Michelle Keown. N.p.: n.p., 2009. 37-55. Print.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. "The Central Frames of Color Blind Racism." Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States. 1st ed. Vol. 1. N.p.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. 25-51. Print.

Bosma, Ulbe. "Why Is There No Post-colonial Debate in the Netherlands?" Post-colonial Immigrants and Identity Formations in the Netherlands. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2012. 193-212. Print.

Bouras, Nadia. "Historical Overview of Waves of Migration in the Netherlands." SIT Netherlands, Amsterdam. 26 Feb. 2013. Lecture.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." Feminist Legal Theory: Foundations. By D. Kelly. Weisberg. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993. 383-95. Print.

Diggins, Chloe. "Examining Intersectionality: The Conflation of Race, Gender, and CLass in Individual and Collective Identities." Student Pulse 3.3 (2011): 1-3. Print.

Essed, Philomena, and Sandra Trienekens. "'Who Wants to Feel White?': Race, Dutch Culture, and Contested Identities." Ethnic and Racial Studies 31.1 (2008): 52-72. Web.

Hill, Collins Patricia. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of

Empowerment. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

Hondius, Dienke. Gemengde Huwelijken, Gemengde Gevoelens: Hoe Nederland Omgaat Met Etnisch En Religieus Verschil. Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 2001. Print.

"Immigration." Government.nl. Government of the Netherlands, n.d. Web. <http://www.government.nl/issues/asylum-policy-and-immigration/immigration>.

Jones, Peter R. "Ethnic Intermarriage in Britain: A Further Assessment." Ethnic and Racial Studies 7.3 (1984): 398-405. Print.

Kalmijn, Matthijs, Paul M. De Graaf, and Jacques P. G. Janssen. "Intermarriage and the Risk of Divorce in the Netherlands: The Effects of Differences in Religion and in Nationality, 1974–94." Population Studies 59.1 (2005): 71-85. Print.

Kopijn, Yvette. "Historical Overview of Waves of Migration in the Netherlands." SIT Netherlands, Amsterdam. 26 Feb. 2013. Lecture.

Lemert, Charles C. "The Mysterious Power of Social Structures." Social Things: An Introduction to the Sociological Life. 4th ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. 111-30. Print.

Meng, Xin, and Robert G. Gregory. "Intermarriage and the Economic Assimilation of Immigrants." Journal of Labor Economics 23.1 (2005): 135-74. Print.

Mepschen, Paul. "Against Tolerance: Islam, Sexuality, and the Politics of Belonging in the Netherlands." SIT Netherlands, Amsterdam. 19 Mar. 2013. Lecture.

Pieterse, J.N. "Europe and Its Others." A Companion to Racial and Ethnic Studies. By David Theo. Goldberg and John Solomos. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002. 17-24. Print.

"Prize-winning Author Fails Dutch Integration Test." DutchNews.nl - Prize-winning Author Fails Dutch Integration Test. Dutchnews, 18 Nov. 2011. Web.

<http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2011/11/prizewinning_author_fails_dutc.php>.

Rodriquez, J. "Color-Blind Ideology and the Cultural Appropriation of Hip-Hop." Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 35.6 (2006): 645-68. Print.

Rosenfeld, Michael J. "Measures of Assimilation in the Marriage Market: Mexican Americans 1970-1990." Journal of Marriage and Family 64.1 (2002): 152-62. Print.

Smedley, Audrey. Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview. Boulder: Westview, 1993. Print.

Spickard, Paul R. Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-century America. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1989. Print.

"Tracking the Dutch Immigration Policy." Expatica. Expatica, 19 May 2004. Web. <http://www.expatica.com/nl/news/local_news/tracking-the-dutch-immigration-policy-7692.html>.

"Wilders to Step up International Anti-Islam Campaign." DutchNews.nl - Wilders to Step up International Anti-Islam Campaign. Dutchnews, 27 Dec. 2012. Web. <http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2012/12/wilders_to_step_up_internation.php>.

"Wilders Wins Tv Show's Politician of the Year Award." DutchNews.nl - Wilders Wins Tv Show's Politician of the Year Award. Dutchnews, 14 Dec. 2010. Web. <http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2010/12/wilders_wins_tv_shows_politici.php>.

Winddance Twine, F. "White like Who? The Value of Whiteness in British Interracial Families." Ethnicities 10.3 (2010): 292-312. Print.

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Describe the neighborhood that you grew up in.
What was your family like growing up?

How has your family reacted to your relationship? Your friends? Neighbors? Strangers?
Has being in a relationship with someone outside of your ethnicity or culture impacted the way you interact with those you know? How?

Can you tell me about your educational background?
Can you tell me about the type of work you do now?
How did you end up in Amsterdam? Do you like it here?
Describe the neighborhood you live in now.

What do you look for in a partner?
How did you meet your partner?
What attracted you to your partner?
What kind of things do you and your partner do to spend time together?
Have there been any topics that have caused friction in your relationship?

Do you feel like you are in an interracial relationship?Why or why not?
Do you talk about race or ethnicity with your partner? If so, how? If not, why not?
Do you and your partner discuss religion?
Have you ever been in a relationship with someone who was the same ethnicity as you?
    What was that like?
    How was that different from your current relationship?

Have there been any changes in the way you live your life because of who you choose to be in a relationship with?

Have you and your partner discussed raising children?

Would you like to share anything else with me?

APPENDIX B

Verbal Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me, and for being willing to help me with my research.

I am studying intercultural relationships, specifically with respect to the ways that ethnicity, class, and gender play out in these relationships. I will be asking you questions about your background, your family, your relationship, and race/ethnicity in general. I do not foresee any major risk of stress or harm for participants by participating in this research. If at any time you feel like you don't want to answer a question for any reason, you do not have to. You can also stop the interview at any time. Feel free to also ask me questions if you want!

The interview will take around an hour and a half. I will be interviewing you and your partner separately. If you prefer, you can choose to do the interview under a pseudonym. Your personal information will not be associated with this interview in any way. I will record this interview, and keep the recording of our interview only on my computer, which is password protected. I will only use this interview as part of my Independent Study Project, which will be completed in May 2013. Once I finish my project, I will delete all data.

I will be happy to provide you with a copy of my final Independent Study Project. In addition, I will be presenting my research in May, and you are more than welcome to attend if you wish.

If you feel like you want to add something after this interview, or to speak with me again, please feel free to contact me. My advisor's contact information is also listed below, in case you have any additional questions.

Sarah Iverson
SIT Study Abroad Amsterdam
siverson@smith.edu
31 64 525 9318

Advisor: Dr. Dienke Hondius
Associate Professor of Contemporary History
dghondius@vu.nl
31 20 598 6384