the gay bars where she used to live, in Atlanta, were integrated; another could not recall whether her high school had been desegregated before or after she left it.

The working of memory is complex, political, and idiosyncratic. Luisa Passerini suggests that memory presents different levels during an oral-history interview, one being what she refers to as an " 'all-ready' memory, stereotyped, revealing general views of the world," and another "more directly connected with life experience."[9] This distinction may usefully be applied to apparent "contradictions" in white women's narratives, where, for example, a woman might say that she did not notice race differences when she was growing up and elsewhere describe incidents in which she made decisions on the basis of an awareness of race.

Interviewees were multiply positioned in relation to these life narratives. On the one hand, they were coproducers of the narratives. On the other hand, they were observers, both of their environments and of themselves as they retold and reevaluated what had gone before. This reevaluation was frequently an explicit component of the narratives. And if interviewees' relationships to the text were complex, so is mine. As the interviewer, I too stand as a coproducer of the narratives. At the same time, I am an observer, of the lives described and of the mode of telling them. What makes interview narratives readable, analyzable, open to questioning and critique—in effect, "writerly," in Roland Barthes's terminology[10]—is that they contradict themselves and each other. They are self-reflexive, and they confirm as well as contradict other accounts of the social world outside of the project. In a wider sense, they intersect with other local and global histories. In the chapters that follow, I have tried to analyze the narratives in all of these ways: in terms of their internal coherence and contradiction, in relation to each other, and in the context of a broader social history.

3

Growing Up White: The Social Geography of Race

My family was really very racist. It was just a very assumed kind of thing.

—*Patricia Bowen*[1]

Ever since I was a baby, Black people have been around, the person who taught me to walk was a Black woman, that was a maid for our family . . . pretty much all throughout my childhood, there was a maid around.

—*Beth Ellison*

I was so unaware of cultural difference that I probably wouldn't have noticed they were different from me.

—*Clare Traverso*

The main things I remember . . . are some friends. . . . The Vernons were two sisters and they had a little brother too, just like our family, and they were Black. And the Frenchs . . . they were white.

—*Sandy Alvarez*

I never looked at it like it was two separate cultures. I just kind of looked at it like, our family and our friends, they're Mexicans and Chicanos, and that was just a part of our life.

—*Louise Glebocki*

This book begins with childhood, looking in detail at five white women's descriptions of the places in which they grew up and analyzing them in terms of what I will refer to as the "social geography" of race. *Geography* refers here to the physical landscape—the home, the street, the neighborhood, the school, parts of town visited or driven through rarely or regularly, places visited on vacation. My interest was in how physical space was divided and who inhabited it, and, for my purposes, "who" referred to racially and ethnically identified beings.

The notion of a *social* geography suggests that the physical landscape is peopled and that it is constituted and perceived by

means of social rather than natural processes. I thus asked how the women I interviewed conceptualized and related to the people around them. To what extent, for example, did they have relationships of closeness or distance, equality or inequality, with people of color? What were they encouraged or taught by example to make of the variously "raced" people in their environments? *Racial* social geography, in short, refers to the racial and ethnic mapping of environments in physical and social terms and enables also the beginning of an understanding of the conceptual mappings of self and other operating in white women's lives.

The five women upon whom I focus in this chapter do not represent the full range of experiences of the thirty women I interviewed, and the landscapes of childhood will in fact be a recurrent theme in this book. Rather than taking these particular narratives as representative in their content, I draw on them here to begin the process of "defamiliarizing" that which is taken for granted in white experience and to elaborate a method for making visible and analyzing the racial structuring of white experience. This method, it seems to me, takes the question of white women and racism well beyond that of the individual and her beliefs or attitudes to something much broader and more grounded in the material world. For it becomes possible to begin examining the ways racism as a system shaped these women's daily environments, and to begin thinking about the social, political, and historical forces that brought those environments into being.

All five of the women in this group were between twenty-five and thirty-six years old at the time of the interviews, their childhoods and teenage years spanning the mid-1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. One woman, Beth Ellison, grew up middle class, the other four—Pat Bowen, Clare Traverso, Sandy Alvarez, and Louise Glebocki—in working-class homes. Pat grew up in Maryland, Beth in Alabama and Virginia; Sandy and Louise are from the Los Angeles area, and Clare is from a small town outside San Diego, California.

These women's stories all bear the marks of an era of challenges and transformations in terms of race, racism, and antiracism. Sandy's mother, for example, was a political activist involved in struggles for integration. By contrast, as we will see, Beth's mother was ambivalent in the face of challenges to the racial status quo in her all-white, middle-class neighborhood. All five women spent at least part of their childhoods in racially desegregated

schools, indicative of the effects of the civil rights movement on the patterning of children's daily lives. As will be abundantly clear, however, the women's material and conceptual environments were shaped in complex ways by long histories of racism. Regional histories also differentiated the racial and ethnic landscapes of these women's childhoods. Thus, for southerners Pat Bowen and Beth Ellison, the people of color with whom they had contact were mainly African American (or, in the language of the time, Black). Clare Traverso grew up on the U.S.-Mexican border, in a town with Native Americans and Mexican Americans. And both Sandy Alvarez and Louise Glebocki grew up in racially heterogeneous (Latino, Asian, Black, and white) working-class Los Angeles neighborhoods.

As adults, these five women were also distinctive in the extent to which they had thought about, or acted on, antiracism. Two of them, Sandy Alvarez and Clare Traverso, taught in high schools whose students were predominantly Asian and Latino; for each of them, teaching was to some extent tied to social change. Thus, for example, Sandy had tried (with limited success) to raise faculty consciousness about racism, and Clare had worked to make student literacy a vehicle for empowerment. Louise Glebocki was active in a left party. And while neither Pat Bowen nor Beth Ellison described herself as an activist, both had thought a great deal about the interracial dynamics with which they had grown up. In addition, Louise and Sandy were both in long-term primary relationships with Chicano men. One of the five, Beth, was lesbian, the others heterosexual.

These women were, then, unusual in certain ways, both politically and in their life choices. Their accounts of childhood, however, resonated with those of more conservative interviewees, and, like the others', their experiences ran the gamut from explicitly articulated and de facto segregation to what I will refer to as "quasi integration." There was, then, no predictive relationship between ways of growing up and adult perspectives. (Indeed, even Sandy, whose mother was an active integrationist, described her sister as having become "racist" in her adult attitudes.)

Race was, in fact, lived in as many different ways as there were women I talked with. Nonetheless, patterns emerged as I analyzed the interviews. I clustered the childhood narratives around four types or modes of experience, not because each narrative fell clearly into one or another mode, but because there were enough

common threads to make the similarities worth exploring, and because the contrasts between modes were significant enough to require analysis. Of the four modes, one seemed at first to be characterized by an absence of people of color from the narrator's life, but turned out, as I will suggest, to be only "*apparently* all white." Second, there was a racially conflictual mode. Third, there were contexts in which race difference was present, but unremarked, in which race difference functioned as a filter for perception while not always being consciously perceived. Finally, some white women described experiences I have interpreted as quasi-integrated, that is, integrated but not fully so, for reasons that should become clear below. One of the five women I focus on in this chapter is drawn from each of the first three modes and two from the quasi-integrated group.

Beth Ellison: An "Apparently All-White" Childhood

Many of the women whose childhoods were apparently all white shared suburban middle-class childhoods. Beth, born in 1956, grew up in a white, middle-class, professional suburb in a town in Virginia. Today, she describes herself as a feminist. She is an artist who makes a living as a retail worker. Beth said of her childhood:

> I was born in Alabama and spent my real early years in New Orleans. I was five when we moved to Virginia. I remember living in a professional subdivision, our neighbors were all doctors and lawyers. . . . It was a white neighborhood. . . . The only specifically racist thing I remember from growing up in Virginia was when a Black doctor and his family moved into the neighborhood . . . at that time I guess maybe I was fourteen and I still didn't think about racism . . . I wasn't interested in politics . . . but I vaguely remember neighbors banding together to see if they could keep this family from moving in and I remember thinking that was disgusting, but I was more concerned with my life and being a young teenager.

In the telling of this incident, racism is categorized as "politics," and as separate from daily life as a teenager. Beth's self-description in this sense highlights a key difference between whites' experience of racism and the experience of people of color: racism is frequently pushed to the forefront of consciousness of people of color, as a construct that organizes hardship and discrimination.[2]

The statement that the only *specifically* racist incident was the attempted exclusion of a Black family from the neighborhood suggests a view of racism as limited to willed, concerted activity. Yet the very existence of a neighborhood whose residents are all white itself bespeaks a history of racist structuring of that community. Elements of that history might include both the "redlining" of neighborhoods by realtors to keep Black people from buying property in them and also the economic dimensions of racism that would place affluent neighborhoods beyond the reach of most Black families. The incident that drew Beth's attention to racism was, in short, only the tip of the iceberg.

There *were* Black people not too far away, for Beth says:

> I saw a lot of Black people around . . . on the street and . . . in class and downtown, but . . . I don't remember there being many Black and white people hanging out together, I just don't remember seeing that. And also I didn't pay real close attention to it, either. . . . Now that we're talking about this, I remember seeing a lot of Black people around, and I remember not really hanging out with them . . . it wasn't any kind of conscious decision but it was just not what I did.

With or without a conscious decision, Beth's experience of friendship and community was racially structured in multiple ways.

Beth said that there were no parts of town that she avoided when she was growing up. In her hometown in Virginia, the poorest—and Black—part of town was on the way to the downtown record and bookstores, and Beth traversed it regularly. So, unlike some other women in the "all-white" group, Beth did not perceive people of color as a threat or a group to avoid; rather, their presence or absence was not a salient issue.

If Beth felt no anxiety, however, her mother seemed to oscillate between what Beth called a "humanist" belief in at least a limited integration and the sense that she needed to keep her children apart (and, in her perception, *safe*) from Black children and adults. This is illustrated in Beth's description of school integration, which for her began in fifth grade:

> I would have been about ten when schools were desegregated [in 1965]. I don't remember anyone in my family being upset about it, or my mother trying to withdraw me from school or anything. . . . I was . . . a little bit excited about it because it was something new. . . . My mother tried really hard to be—she's kind of a humanist, so I don't remember her saying anything like "Don't hang out with Black kids."

But later, in high school, Beth was involved in an incident in which she was pushed up against the wall of the gym changing room by a Black girl. This resulted in her parents moving her to a segregated private school. Beth comments:

> We didn't talk about it at the time, but as I look back on it now . . . it seems evident to me that they did this because it wasn't a school where there would be, uh, what they might consider rowdy Black girls for me to have to contend with.

Beth's mother showed a similar ambivalence on the question of residential integration. On the one hand, Beth did not think her mother had taken part in the effort to keep the Black family out of her neighborhood. Her response was very different, however, when Beth, at twenty, moved to a poor, racially mixed part of the same town:

> I do remember my mother being really concerned and I don't know if that's because there were a lot of Black people living there or because it was an extremely poor part of town where you'd be more inclined to be ripped off . . . [but she] wouldn't let my younger brother come visit me.

So Beth grew up in a context in which Black people were the "significant others" of color, and where race and income were intertwined. Being white and middle class meant living somewhere different from Black people. The social distance between white and Black people—which was considerable—was produced and reproduced through the conscious efforts of white people, including Beth's mother and neighbors, and through the more diffuse effects of the interplay of the class structure with racism. White people like Beth's mother deliberated over the permissibility and safety of living in the same terrain as Black people, seemingly projecting their fear or dislike of Black people when they made such decisions.[3] Less visible here are the forms of white people's personal and structural violence toward African Americans that marked both residential and school desegregation and the period of civil rights struggle in general.

In any event, Beth received mixed messages. Her environment was shaped by at least three factors. First, there was a preexisting arrangement of racial segregation and inequality, reproduced, for example, by the all-white private school. Second, Beth's mother's verbal messages about segregation espoused ideas about equality

or what Beth called "humanism." Third, and contrasting with her humanism, there were Beth's mother's actions in response to Beth's experiences and choices, which, as Beth tells it, frequently leaned in the direction of segregationism and hostility toward Black people. The result was that, without trying, Beth could continue to live a mostly racially segregated life.

For Beth, the structure of racial inequality was at times simply lived in; at other times, it was both lived and seen. If the consequences for *herself* of a racially structured environment were not always obvious to Beth, however, the impact on others of race and class hierarchy was at times very clear. She said of the two communities she knew well as she was growing up:

> BETH: In [the town in Virginia] it seems like it was mostly poor neighborhoods where Black people lived, but there were also a lot of poor white people that lived there too. But in [the town in Alabama], there was a Black part of town and a white part of town. There was the rich part of the white part of town, the middle class, and then the poor white section. And then there was shantytown, and it was literally shacks.
>
> RF: So the shantytown was really the Black part of town?
>
> BETH: Yeah . . . these tiny little shacks that looked like they'd been thrown together out of plywood and two-by-fours. The difference was incredible, because you could drive for one minute in your car and go through rich, beautiful neighborhoods to . . . what looked squalid to me.

Comparing Beth's words here with her memories of her own neighborhood, it is striking that Beth was much more sharply aware of racial *oppression* shaping Black experience than of race *privilege* in her own life. Thus, Beth could be alert to the realities of economic discrimination against Black communities while still conceptualizing her own life as racially neutral—nonracialized, nonpolitical.

For Beth and the other women who grew up in apparently all-white situations, there were in fact at least one or two people of color not too far away. It is in fact conceptually rather than physically that people of color were distant. In this regard, one startling feature of several descriptions of apparently all-white childhoods was the sudden appearance in the narratives of people of color as employees, mainly Black, mainly female, and mainly domestic workers. What is striking here is not the presence of domestic workers as such[4] but the way in which they were talked

about. For, oddly, these Black women were *not* summoned into white women's accounts of their lives by means of questions like "Were there any people of color in your neighborhood?" or "Who lived in your household when you were growing up?" Rather, they arrived previously unheralded, in the context of some other topic.

Black women domestic workers appeared in Beth's narrative when I asked her if she remembered the first time she became conscious of race difference, or conscious that there were Black and white people in the world. Beth responded that her first consciousness of race as a difference was when she was about four years old, when her mother chastised her for referring to a Black woman as a "lady." Here, of course, we are seeing race not just as difference but as hierarchy. Beth said:

> Ever since I was a baby, Black people have been around, the person who taught me to walk was a Black woman, that was a maid for our family . . . pretty much all throughout my childhood, there was a maid around.

She added that, although she had not really noticed at the time, she realized now that when her mother remarried, the family stopped employing anyone to do housework. Thus Black domestic workers, despite involvement in Beth's life on the very intimate level of teaching her to walk, seemed on another level to have been so insignificant as not to have merited mention earlier in our conversation. Nor had she noted their departure from the household after a certain point in her life.

The forgotten and suddenly remembered domestic worker recurred in several of these white, middle-class childhoods. Tamara Green, raised "solidly middle class" in suburban Los Angeles, said:

> I totally forgot until I just started thinking about it—we had housekeepers who, all but one from the time we lived in California, were Latin American, Mexican, Colombian, Honduran, Salvadoran. There was one British Honduran who was Black. And I had a close relationship with one of them.

Why is the story told in this particular way? It may be the status of domestic workers from the standpoint of white middle-class women, or the status of people of color from the purview of a white and middle-class childhood, that made these women invisible and stripped them of subjectivity in the landscapes of childhood.[5] But whether or not it is race per se that determined how the domestic worker of color appeared in the interviews, it is primarily through employer-employee, class-imbalanced relationships that women from apparently all-white homes encountered women of color. If not themselves in positions of clear authority, these white middle-class women must have seen their parents in such positions, able to summon and dismiss the racially different Other at will. It is perhaps in this sense of control and authority that the home was indeed all white, and the neighborhood similarly so.

Patricia Bowen: Race Conflict and "Segregation"

> I grew up in a town that was semi-southern . . . a fairly small town, and pretty much in a working-class family. The town was very racist, it was very segregated. Everyone was aware of race all the time and the races involved were pretty much white and Black people.

Patricia Bowen grew up in Maryland in the 1960s, in a town where race conflict and racism were in the forefront of daily life. Pat described her town as "segregated," yet, as we will see, she and her family had more interaction with people of color (specifically, Black people) than either Beth or Clare (whose narrative follows). Segregation, in Pat's experience, was a complex system of interactions and demarcations of boundary rather than complete separation. In fact, Black and white people lived close together:

> [We] lived on a street that was all white, and there were no Black people on that street. But the back of our house—our front door faced an all-white street, the back door faced an all-Black street. . . . It was completely separate.

The boundary between white and Black was thus very clear. And differences between the streets were also evident to Pat: the houses on the Black people's street were poorer, more "shacky" (her term), and there were more children playing outside.

In this setting, both the presence and the absence of Black people were sharply indicated. They were very noticeably absent from the street in front, yet in some sense almost more visible than whites, given the children playing in the street beyond the back door. Added to this sharp distinction was a feeling of fear:

We were kind of told that it wasn't safe to walk down the Black street. . . . [Black children would] yell at you . . . I never got hurt but [they] threatened you a little bit. . . . So I grew up learning that Black people were dangerous.

Pat never came to any harm on the "Black street," and in fact often used it as a shortcut: the idea of danger was introduced by adults and by the threats (apparently never carried out) of the Black children, but in fact Pat went in fear rather than in danger. As an explanation for the threats, Pat suggested that the Black children "weren't used to whites walking through"—yet it sounded as though Pat and her friends routinely cut through the street. One is tempted to interpret the situation as another aspect of boundary demarcation, or as a gesture of turf maintenance on the part of Black children frustrated at their treatment by their white neighbors. In any event, in Pat's experience, difference, opposition, and threat lived right on the back doorstep.

As Pat describes others in her family, however, it seems that for them the issue was not fear so much as maintaining a complex balance of association with and differentiation from Black people. Black and white people used the same stores. As the person in charge of the household, Pat's grandmother took care of shopping. As a result, Pat explained, her grandmother knew many of the Black women in the other street. She would chat and even visit their homes but always maintained a separateness:

PAT: She'd tell me proudly or just very self-righteous, "Well, you know, I would never sit down when I go in their house. I would go over and talk to them, but I wouldn't sit down." You know, because to sit down would imply some equal relationship and she wouldn't do that. They would come up to the back door.

RF: Instead of the front door?

PAT: Yes.

This elaborate and contradictory boundary maintenance was undertaken by other relatives, too:

My uncle was pretty young . . . , a teenager when I lived there. He and his friends would kind of play with boys who were Black, but again they didn't really consider them friends in the same way . . . Black culture was really cool, they would imitate them all the time, and the funny thing was they spoke exactly like them . . . it was pretty much the accent something like they had anyway. The way they danced was really cool and everyone listened to Black music all the time . . . , but at the same time there was this "niggers, niggers, niggers," it was this weird contradiction.

The direct teaching Pat received from family members about racism was equally mixed. On the one hand, she said:

My mother was more liberal . . . so she would always tell me not to say 'nigger,' that Black people weren't any worse than white people.

On the other hand:

I remember this one incident. . . . When I was about eight or nine and walking with my uncle down the street and kind of mutually bumping into a Black woman. I just said "Excuse me," and he said, "Don't ever say excuse me to a nigger. If you bump into them or they bump into you, it's always their fault." And I said, "How is it their fault if I bumped into them?"

Notice here Pat's resistance or at least her puzzlement in the face of explicitly racist socialization. Like Beth, Pat was not always an unquestioning recipient of her environment.

The potential for complexity in responses to racially structured environments was dramatized in Pat's descriptions of two relationships she had with young Black teenagers in her junior high school years:

There are some things about friendships that I developed with Blacks at that time that are kind of interesting. There were two in particular that I really remember. One was a guy in my junior high . . . who was kind of a leader, very charismatic person, and he started hassling me a lot, he wanted to pick on me and he would tease me and kind of threaten me, pull my hair or whatever and I was terrified of him. This went on for a while and then one Halloween my friends and I were out trick-or-treating—we were teenagers and were tagging along with the little kids. . . . We saw him with a friend also trick-or-treating and we laughed. It was a kind of bonding because we were both these obnoxious teenagers out trick-or-treating, trying to get candy with the kids. So I had a feeling he kind of really liked me after that. . . . The relationship kind of switched from him threatening me to being a real friendly relationship. I wasn't afraid of him any more.

But the way that got played out is a lot of jokes about racism acted out, like he would pretend to threaten me or tease me in front of people, like Black and white people who were there, and I would play with him back, and everyone would be nervous and thought a fight was going to break out. . . . It was something where we would never really talk or become friends, but it was a neat little thing.

And Pat had a similar experience with a Black girl:

> She was a very, very large woman and she would pretend to threaten me sometimes and I remember some Black girls going "ooh" because I was much smaller than she was. We'd play around with that.

In playing with the segregation system like this, Pat and her friends were taking at least a small step toward subverting it. By acting out their roles as enemies but not really fighting, they signaled that they knew what they were caught in; the dramatization was a kind of stepping aside from their assigned roles, although this did not, of course, change them. For Pat, one could say that this kind of play involved *acting* being white simultaneously with *being* white.

However, white people's fear of people of color—which played a part in many narratives—involved another, much less self-conscious inversion of social reality. For if Pat's African American friends were playing with the racial order by pretending to threaten her, that threat itself inverts the institutionalized relations of racism wherein African Americans actually have much more to fear from white people than vice versa. Commonplace as is white people's fear of people of color, and especially of Black people, it is important to step back from it and realize that it is socially constructed and in need of analysis. I will return to this issue later.

Most of the time Pat and others around her lived out the rules of segregation without subverting them. The same girlfriend with whom Pat "played" racial tension also experienced it directly in an incident that Pat described:

> There were three of us that hung around together, . . . Janet, who was Black, and my friend Sandra and me. Sandra—again, like I had this whole liberal interpretation I got from my mother about Black people and race. Sandra was just more—"nigger"—she would whisper that word and things like that—yet we were both friends with Janet. . . . I remember one night—this is really an awful, painful thing—we were at Janet's house just hanging around, she was drinking Coke out of a can and she passed it to my friend Sandra, and Sandra . . . said no, and we all knew it was because she wouldn't drink out of a can after a Black person, but yet this was our friend that we hung around with. I remember Janet just looking really sad, but also accepting, like it hurt her. . . . I guess it never occurred to me not to drink the Coke.

Pat, Sandra, and Janet were all around twelve years old at the time of their friendship. It is worth noting that Pat did not state the race of her white friend, Sandra; as is often the case, white stands for the position of racial "neutrality," or the racially unmarked category (see chapter 7). Pat further commented on this incident that "we never really talked about race, it was just too taboo a subject."

Taboo or not, race difference and racism seemed never to be far from the forefront of Pat's experience. Her life was structured very visibly by race hierarchy. Curiously, however, segregation bespoke the presence rather than the absence of people of color. This might partly have been a result of the fact that Pat was working class: Pat pointed out that middle-class whites in the town would probably have had less contact with African Americans than she did, and in fact one can speculate that, had Pat been middle class, the racial social geography of her childhood might have resembled Beth's.

Boundary demarcation of physical space—being in the same street or house, sitting or standing, making physical contact, sharing a drink—seemed to be of major concern for the white people Pat described, probably precisely because of the proximity of white and Black people in the context of an ideology and practice of white superiority. However, boundary maintenance was an issue in other women's stories too, evidenced, for example, in Beth's all-white neighborhood. In addition, as I will discuss in the context of other narratives, the taboo on interracial sexual relationships, possibly the most intimate form of refusal of racial boundaries, came up in conversations with many of the women I interviewed (see chapters 4 and 5).

Clare Traverso: Race Difference as a Filter for Perception

In contrast to this very clear and immediate awareness of race difference, the situation described by Clare Traverso was a complex mix of noticing and not noticing people of color. Whether Clare saw people of color as different from or the same as herself was at times also unclear. Clare was born in 1954 and grew up in a small, rural town not far from San Diego. The town, said Clare, was

> kind of like a redneck town, actually. . . . Very conservative politically. People off to themselves, don't want to be bothered with government or politics or other people, love to drink beer and drive around and stuff like that.

Clare's parents were "fundamentalist Christian, but not moral majority" people who had moved to California from South Dakota with their children. Clare, the fifth child of six, was born in California. Describing how her time was spent as a child, Clare explained:

> We lived sort of off into the hills. We didn't really go into town much. . . . The amount of times I went out to eat before I went to college was maybe five times. . . . See, my parents had more traditional values from the Midwest—always saving money and . . . we never went on vacations. I went on two, but they were back to South Dakota to visit my relatives.

Consequently, aside from school and, later, church-related activities, Clare spent a lot of time during her early years playing on the land around her family's house. Nonetheless, she was able to describe the racial composition of the town:

> The town itself is located right next to an Indian reservation. . . . There was also a small Mexican American population that went to our high school, but I would say probably no Blacks. Maybe one or two.

One may note that Clare's standpoint here is clearly different from that of the African American townspeople themselves, for whom it would be impossible to confuse existence with nonexistence. What Clare's cloudy memory on this point perhaps indicates is the lack of importance accorded to Black people in the community by whites.

Clare's first contact with people of color was when she began traveling on the school bus. At that point, her response, like Pat's, was fear:

> The bus I rode, there were these . . . Mexican American families, lived on the hill across from us, so they rode our bus, and they always had the reputation for being really tough. And I was really scared of this one girl, I remember, because she used to get in fights with this other girl.[6]

Clare speculated that her fear was probably bolstered by her brother, who was in class with one of the "tougher" Mexican American boys. Again like Pat's, Clare's fear did not come from experience of personal attack so much as from a sense of different behavior perceived as louder or rowdier than her own:

> They used to yell, flip people off—I came from a more sheltered environment. My parents never did things like that.

In a sense, the explanation—my *parents* never behaved that way—suggests that, unconsciously, a cultural explanation is being advanced for the difference in behavior: it is placed in the realm of things taught. Although the fact that this group was Mexican American is clearly a part of the anecdote, once the children were off the bus and in school, Mexicanness became less important as a feature of conscious differentiation:

> RF: So your [kindergarten] class was all white?
>
> CLARE: I'm pretty sure it was—probably—oh, wait, I had one little friend, Ralph Vasquez. Their whole family was Mexican American, my sister went through school with one girl in that family. . . . But I never really thought of them as, like, different from me. I don't think I was aware of them being culturally different

A similar pattern appeared in Clare's description of her Native American schoolmates later on in school. On the one hand, she said:

> I was so unaware of cultural difference that I probably wouldn't have noticed they were different from me.

On the other hand, she remembered Native Americans in school as a distinct group, noting that they were in the remedial classes. Differences were thus both seen and not seen, or perhaps seen but only partially. Race difference entered into Clare's conscious perception of her environment only on those rare occasions when it carried a real or imagined threat to herself (as when she was afraid on the school bus). The ways in which racism did seem to cause hardship for students of color, by contrast, were perceived only dimly, accessible to memory but not remembered as having made a strong impact on Clare at the time. For, presumably, racism accounted for the location of the Native American students in remedial classes and, more indirectly, perhaps for their intragroup fights too.

The composition of Clare's friendship group in high school further supports this picture of a daily life that was in effect patterned by race: structured around the student council and a church youth group, it was all white. What shaped Clare's descriptions of all three groups—whites, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans—was on the one hand the absence of a conscious conceptualization of cultural and racial difference per se, but on the other hand, the *experience* of a racially structured environment, not

understood as such at the time. In sum, Clare saw individuals in her immediate community through a racial lens, but did not consciously see race, cultural difference, or racism.

Clare came to awareness of all three concepts as she grew older but, interestingly, in relation to communities other than her own:

CLARE: In sixth grade I started learning Spanish and learning a bit about Latin culture, Latin America. My awareness of race came through that rather than Mexican American people.

RF: So what did you learn about Latin America?

CLARE: Pyramids, music, sometimes we'd listen to the radio. I was fascinated by the Aztecs and the Incas.

Latin America thus appeared to Clare as a site of more real or authentic cultural difference, and as the proper adjunct to learning Spanish. Cultural difference was at a distance and in the past rather than nearer to home. At the same time, in a contradictory vein, Clare commented that Spanish seemed like the appropriate language to study in school, rather than German or French, "because we were living around and across the border from people who spoke it."

If Latin culture was conceived as being far away, it was clear that the Spanish language was closer at hand. In this nearer context, though, difference referred to social inequality more directly than to cultural difference. The Mexican border was less than a two-hour drive from Clare's home, and for some, although not for Clare's family, border towns like Tijuana were places to visit on day trips. Clare *did* visit across the border in rather different circumstances, as described in the following story. Note the implication that Mexican Americans or Chicanos somehow do not really count as members of a Latino, Spanish-speaking culture. Again the issue is one of the perceived inauthenticity of Latinos on the U.S. side of the border:

CLARE: Even though I had Spanish in high school, I didn't really speak it—once when we went down to Tecate at Christmastime to give away clothes and we spoke a little bit of Spanish to real people who spoke it. . . . This Spanish teacher I had . . . every year they used to collect all these clothes and bring it down and give it away to people in Tecate. I think we did that twice. And you'd give away the clothes to people, the poor people there.

RF: So how do you do that?

CLARE: You just walk up to people and say, "Hey, do you need something?"

RF: Just like that?

CLARE: Yeah, it was kind of weird, really. . . . We would walk around—and, yeah, we had trucks or cars or something. . . . Our teacher knew someone there. I think he knew the mayor. . . . I felt really odd about giving things away like that, even though they didn't have anything and I know they needed things. They needed food and clothes. You could tell by the way their houses were, just like little shacks, really—dirt floors . . . I remember feeling a real contrast between myself and them. . . .

RF: Do you remember any comments, from your parents, or from school?

CLARE: I'm sure they thought it was good. . . . We all felt happy that we'd helped poor people out.

In this incident Clare was unwittingly inscribed into the power relations involved in any act of charity. While the sharing of wealth in almost any form is of course useful, here the process was controlled entirely by the givers. The receivers were dependent on the mercy of the schoolchildren who, at their teacher's behest, walked the streets asking, "Do you need anything?" This power imbalance may in part have accounted for Clare's feeling that something was not quite right about the situation. In going to Tecate, Clare became starkly aware of the imbalance of resources on opposite sides of the border. But it was not clear from our conversation how, if at all, this imbalance was explained to her. It is likely that in this context the United States would be identified as generous and "good" rather than as partially responsible for Mexico's poverty.

Remember that this expedition took place in the context of learning a language. As adjuncts to the language, Clare was taught about ancient and distant *cultures* (exemplified by her fascination with the Aztecs and Incas), along with present-day, physically nearer *poverty*. This pattern replicates the classic colonialist view of the conquered society: a view of past glories and present degradations (from which, within a colonialist ideology, it is the conqueror's duty to save the poor native).

Further, authentic difference of any kind was placed firmly outside Clare's home community. Asked about the possibility of practicing Spanish with Mexican American fellow students, Clare

was unsure whether any of them spoke Spanish. She summed up this contradictory situation thus:

> I think I was so—like I say, we never went to Mexico, we never had contact with other races, really, and if they were there I wasn't aware that they were from another race, I mean vaguely, only looking back on it.

Toward the end of high school, social studies classes analyzing global inequality and her sister's involvement in the movement against the Vietnam War gave Clare a political outlook and a set of values that she felt were more "liberal" than those of most people in her family and hometown. Again the focus was largely outside her immediate community, however. The same was true of the process whereby Clare began to see *herself* as a culturally specific being:

> I went away to college [in Minnesota] and I met . . . all these people who had a real sense of "I am Swedish," "I am Norwegian." And then when I went to [stay in] Mexico. That was the two strongest things, I think.

The social geography of race for Clare differed from Beth's in the greater number of people of color she encountered and the absence of the racially divided employer-employee relationships in the family. Her story also differed from Pat's in that racial difference was not in the forefront of consciousness, nor was there visible ongoing conflict.

One feature common to all three stories is white women's fear of people of color. As I have suggested, this fear needs careful analysis, both because of its prevalence and because it is an inversion of reality. In general, people of color have far more to fear from white people than vice versa, given, for example, the ongoing incidence of white supremacist terrorism around the United States, which targets African and Asian Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Jewish Americans (in addition to gay men and lesbians); and the problematic relationship with the police that leaves many communities of color with, at the very least, a sense that they lack legal and physical protection.

White people's fear of people of color is an inversion that can be contextualized in a number of ways. Most importantly, it must be understood as an element of racist discourse crucially linked to

essentialist racism, or the idea that people of color are fundamentally Other than white people: different, inferior, less civilized, less human, more animal, than whites. Further, U.S. history is marked by many moments when the power of racist imagery constructing men of color as violent, dangerous, or sexually threatening has been renewed, as rationale or pretext for white hostility, in the context of political and economic conflicts between particular communities of color and white Americans. Thus, for example, a key aspect of white women's fear of Black men has to do with the persistent, racist image of the Black man as rapist. As Angela Davis has clarified, the production of this myth took place alongside the abolition of slavery and efforts by Black and white people toward reconstruction of the southern economy and polity along more racially egalitarian lines. The lynching of Black people was a means of social and political repression; accusations of rape were used as alibis for what were in effect politically motivated death squads. A discourse ostensibly about threat or danger was in fact a rationale for repression or control.[7]

Similarly, it was in tandem with white, "nativist" movements for immigration control and economic protectionism that, from the late nineteenth century into the first decades of the twentieth, first Chinese, then Japanese, then Filipino male immigrants were represented in the white-owned press as sexually lascivious and physically violent.[8] Most recently in the United States, in the context of the Los Angeles rebellion of May 1992, newspaper and television reports once again described African American protesters as "savage," "roving bands," engaged in a "feeding frenzy" of looting. More generally in the present, I would further speculate, white people's fear of men and women of color may have to do with the projection or awareness of the anger of individual people of color at white racism.

Beyond these few examples of contextualization, white people's fear of people of color and the distinctively gendered dimensions of it require far more extensive discussion than is possible here.[9] It is also crucial to ask what "interrupts" or changes white people's fear of people of color: for those who are not afraid, what made, or makes, the difference? I do not know how to answer this question, but I register it here as an important one for us as white women to address.

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Quasi Integration: Sandy Alvarez and Louise Glebocki

Sandy Alvarez and Louise Glebocki both grew up in contexts that I choose to call quasi-integrated, which is to say, seemingly or apparently integrated. I qualify "integration" in this way because it seems to me that true integration would require a broader antiracist social context than existed in the United States while Sandy and Louise were growing up. It might involve, for example, that no area of physical space be marked by racial hierarchy and that racist ideas be entirely absent—a situation that is impossible in the United States as it is presently constituted. As Sandy's and Louise's narratives show, neither woman's life circumstances in any sense placed her outside the system of racism. Their experience of close peer relationships with men and women of color nonetheless marks them off from the women I have discussed so far.

Both grew up in working-class families in Los Angeles. Sandy was born in 1948. She teaches English as a second language, in a high school. Her husband is Chicano and she has two small children. Louise was born in 1958. She cleans houses, not a job she enjoys but one that she feels is "OK for now." She described herself as always learning, growing, and active. She and her partner of seven years were about to get married at the time of the interview. Like Sandy's husband, he is Chicano.

Sandy Alvarez

Sandy said of the neighborhood where she lived before she was five years old:

> The main things I remember . . . are some friends. . . . the Vernons were two sisters and they had a little brother too, just like our family, and they were Black. And the Frenches . . . they were white. . . . I'm only mentioning race because of this interview . . . as a kid it wasn't until I went to elementary school that I really became aware that these people were different races. Before that you just played with everybody.

From the beginning, Sandy had friends from various ethnic and racial groups. At five, she moved to a community, still in Los Angeles, that was, in her words, "equal thirds Japanese, Mexican, and white, with two Black families," and her friends reflected this mix. Sandy says that she played with Japanese boys and with the only girl in the neighborhood, who was in Sandy's terminology "Anglo." Her school friends were Mexican and white. Her "crushes" (again to use her word) and boyfriends were Anglo, Mexican, Guamanian. A Black woman who was Sandy's neighbor is to this day "like a second mother":

> [She] is one of my dearest friends. She always thought of me as her daughter. She never had a daughter, and couldn't have any more kids. She really loves me and I really love her, and it's a real close relationship.

Looking at the differences between Sandy's experience and Beth's, the first and obvious precondition for Sandy's more racially mixed childhood is that people of color and whites were living nearer to each other. In addition, people responded to physical proximity in a particular way; it need not have led to the mixed friendship groups Sandy describes. The complex relationships between Pat and the Black children in her neighborhood contrast with the visiting back and forth between the Vernons and Sandy's household. The Vernon children would often stay overnight at her house.

The other major difference between Sandy as a child who grew up "integrated" and the other women I interviewed is her parents' standpoint. I asked Sandy what her mother thought of her having friends who were Black. She responded:

> Well, my mother is really—she's a radical, politically. . . . The church we went to . . . the community had turned primarily Black and it was an all-white church and [my parents] were really into helping to integrate the church.

Clearly, Sandy's mother was a woman unlikely to object to her children having Black friends—and for preschoolers, parental cooperation is key to social interaction. Less obvious but also extremely interesting was Sandy's awareness that her childhood was in this respect unusual, so that she cited her mother's activism to account for it. Given that it took work to integrate the church, Sandy's parents may well have been different from other whites in the neighborhood. Later in the interview, Sandy made explicit her sense of being different:

> I don't know that a lot of people have had the integrated experience that we've had growing up, where it wasn't just our acquaintances but our real good friends and all our peers were of different races.

How are race and cultural difference conceptualized in this context? As she suggested earlier, Sandy felt that it was not until she was about six that she became aware of racial differences between herself and her peers. She explained:

> In second grade . . . there are just two pictures in my mind, and I just remember a Black boy, about my age. I don't remember if he was just one of the things that made me aware . . . I just remember becoming aware different kids were different races. And this one girl that I'll never forget. I was really aware she was culturally different, because—she may not have been Mexican, she could have been Filipina, I don't know which culture—somehow I think she was Mexican because the neighborhood was about a third Mexican. But she'd wear her hair up in a bun, and, um, she must have been Asian, because she had those big chopsticks in her hair and in the playground she fell down and one went right inside her skull and they had to take her to emergency hospital. And, uh, I was just aware that was a big cultural difference, that I would never wear those in my hair.

Here, the specifics of cultural difference are perhaps more imaginary than real in any substantive sense. Sandy, drawing on her early memories and perceptions, did not know to which ethnic group the little girl belonged. The key here is not whether Sandy could answer this question correctly but her struggle as a child to make some sense of cultural difference. The two points to note here are, first, that Sandy was registering how cultural and race differences shape appearance and experience; and, second, that Sandy's awareness that her schoolmates and friends were culturally and racially different did *not* evoke fear, as it did for Clare and Pat.

It was not until many years later, Sandy said, that she was conscious of others seeing her as white and therefore belonging to a privileged group. When I asked her whether her awareness of race changed as she grew older, she said:

> SANDY: As you grow older you see how others perceive you, look at yourself. Before that you just act, you are who you are. In that sense [here she mentions a recent adult experience of feeling judged for being white] that's the only change.
>
> RF: So in junior college and at university you were still "acting," rather than thinking about how you were acting?
>
> SANDY: Yes.
>
> RF: At any point in your life did you think of yourself as white?
>
> SANDY: From elementary school on up I guess I was aware of that.

Here, strikingly, whiteness is described as having been noted without any negative or positive charge—in contrast with most contexts, where white either stands for superiority or is neutralized and assumed. Elsewhere—and this may be the most common experience for young white feminists of the 1980s—"white" is a concept learned simultaneously with a negative connotation of privilege (see chapter 6). For Sandy in this early period, however, "white" or "Anglo" merely described another ethnic group. One cannot help but see this as connected to the multiracial peer context within which she experienced her ethnicity: one in which, at least within the confines of home, elementary school, and the neighborhood, racial and ethnic identities were not hierarchically ordered.

However, it is important not to present a falsely utopian picture of Sandy's experience. Although her friendship groups were racially mixed, from preschool to college, she pointed out that there was racial tension and division elsewhere in the schools she attended. Nor was she immune to racist ideology. For example, she told me that a Black male school friend had asked her out on a date. She explained that she did not accept because she could not bring herself to face the stares she knew they would receive as an interracial, especially as a Black and white, couple. Sandy was not convinced by the myth that says only "bad" white women date Black men, but she was afraid to challenge it in public.

In other words, growing up in a racially mixed context did not mean that racism was absent, nor that the environment was not racially structured. Rather, Sandy was placed in a specific relationship to race difference and racism.

Louise Glebocki

Louise Glebocki, who was born in 1958, did not come from a family that used the languages of integration or antiracism, but she grew up with a more thoroughgoing connection with a community of color than the rest of the women I interviewed. Like Sandy, Louise described growing up in Los Angeles. Having spent her first six years on the East Coast of the United States, Louise, with her mother and two older sisters, came west, moving

> into a barrio, basically around all Spanish-speaking people. . . . Besides Mexicanos, the others that lived there were poor whites. . . . It was just a poor, small community.

Right from the start, Louise and her sisters began having boyfriends. And more of Louise's boyfriends and female friends were Mexicano, or in other terms Chicano, than white:

> LOUISE: I remember I had a white boyfriend and then a Chicano one. But more I started hanging around more with the Chicanos. But both—always.
>
> RF: How come you hung out more with the Chicanos?
>
> LOUISE: To me they were more—at that point I did have white friends too. I don't know, there was just something real honest about them, and real friendly, and real close relationships formed, I remember, around a couple of girlfriends I had. Just visiting their families was a really nice atmosphere—kind of like ours. Because for a white family, while we were poor, we grew up [around] a lot of people. We had a lot of relatives in the L.A. area. It was always a lot of activity, and hustle and bustle. And a lot of times I guess, among the whites, even if they were poor, it was kind of like more snobby, more uppity.

In short, Louise viewed Chicano families as similar to her own, rather than different from it. Louise was also commenting here on class and people's perceptions of themselves. She suggested, in effect, that there was a link between class position and cultural style, linking her own working-class position with a liveliness shared with Chicano families. The suggestion is that other poor whites acted differently, aspiring to a style of life associated with a higher class position. Louise preferred the Chicanos' way of life, viewing it as more down to earth, more honest, and more like her own. Of course, Louise's words are adult ones: it is hard to know exactly what form these thoughts would have taken in the consciousness of a younger person.

In fact, Louise's extended family was not only similar to the Chicanos, part of it actually *was* Chicano. For as Louise explained, a number of her mother's sisters and brothers had Mexican American partners:

> RF: Did it feel to you like you were in a bicultural family, or a family with two cultures? . . .
>
> LOUISE: I never looked at it like it was two separate cultures. I just kind of looked at it like, our family and our friends, they're Mexicans and Chicanos, and that was just a part of our life.

More than any of the other women described here, Louise had a childhood in which a community of color played a central role.

The following description from Louise's narrative underlines three things: first, the closeness of Louise's connection to Chicano or Mexican American culture; second, the fact that at the same time, Louise and her relatives were clear that she was white; and third, the extent to which white culture remained, at least linguistically, Louise's point of reference:

> RF: If you would go to your aunt's house or your uncle's house, would there be things about how their house was and how they raised their kids, things that they would have on the walls or would do, that came from the fact that it was a partly Mexican and partly white household?
>
> LOUISE: Yeah. Like I remember my aunt, she was married to this Mexican dude. And his background was really, *strongly* into the whole Mexican scene. . . . He was real strong in terms of what he was. I mean, he would never want to be anything else but Mexican. And he had a real strong "machismo." He had something like thirteen kids in his previous marriage. . . . And she really took all that in. In fact she's still constantly like that . . . her attitude is, well, a woman should be a woman, and in her place—the whole mentality was, I don't know, really a trip.
>
> But I remember like, with these relatives, the Chicanos, they would always joke around, you know, around us being Polish, and white. There would be a lot of joking about it and stuff, oh you know, "You honkies gotta learn more" and stuff.
>
> And in terms of their house? They'd play a lot of Mexican music, and a lot of regular music, and have stuff on the Indians up on the walls, and from Mexico.

There are interesting contradictions and complexities here. On the one hand, Louise said that she did not conceptualize the two cultures as separate, yet it is clearly possible for her to do so descriptively. The sense of Chicano culture as more sexist (assuming that "machismo" connotes sexism in Louise's usage of it) is jarring, given Louise's statement that Chicano culture was better, more "in tune with reality." The distinction between Mexican and "regular" music suggests that the dominant culture remained the reference point in her description. However, Louise was also conscious of her whiteness in this description, as, it seems, were her Chicano relatives. The use of the usually negative "honkies" to describe Louise and her white family members suggests that no one lost sight of the wider context of race conflict, either. "Taming" the word *honkie* by joking about it suggests a context in which it has been possible to situationally subvert and play with external hierarchies.

Curiously, despite this mix of relatives on her mother's side of the family, Louise's father had very different ideas, including, as Louise put it, "racist tendencies." For example:

> My parents had been saving money, and they wanted to buy a house. . . . I'm pretty sure one of the things my dad really emphasized was . . . a nice, white community.

Although the family moved to a white section of a small town in the Los Angeles area, their situation did not change much

> because our school just ended up being pretty poor, and the majority was Chicanos, and a lot of them were people who had just come over from Mexico, so there was a lot of Spanish-speaking people. And there was a whole section of whites, too, but it wasn't this pure, middle-class, white area, it was once again a real mixture.

Through school and into adulthood, Louise continued to be close friends with Chicanos, as much as or more than with whites (see chapter 5). But like Sandy, she may well have been unusual in this, for she described increasing racial and cultural conflict among students throughout her school career:

> When we were in elementary school, everybody was together, playing. By junior high, things started really dividing up, into groups of people. Hey! By high school—to me, the school system really helped set it down. You had your sections. By that time, you had a whole section of these white racists that were into surfing—very outspoken on being racist. I just started seeing a whole lot of divisions—a whole lot of different lifestyles coming together and just crashing. . . . Low riders, . . . gangs. Things started becoming more segregated, more separate.

Louise described the "surfers'" attempts to recruit her to their side, and her refusal to move over: "I saw myself with pride as an antiracist white."

She also saw herself as Polish, identified as such by her surname:

> We had to put up with . . . a lot of racist, Polish jokes, but I looked at it—I just laughed, you know, I just looked at it like, "It doesn't bother me! I feel great!"

In Louise's life, then, despite her own connections to Chicano culture, explicit racial conflict was as visible in her environment as in Pat Bowen's in Maryland. Louise responded to it, though, by means of a much more explicit antiracism.

Despite the extent to which Sandy and Louise grew up with close ties with Chicano (and in Sandy's case, also Black and Asian) people as well as whites or "Anglos," there are reasons to argue that experiences like Sandy's and Louise's represent only a partial or qualified integration. Nor can they be anything else in a racist society, if racial integration is taken to mean the absence of race hierarchy and racist ideas. In fact, Sandy's was an integrating family rather than a family living in an integrated environment. This was also true for two of the other women whose childhoods were marked by what I call a quasi integration. Their parents were also radicals, and both of them felt it necessary to offer this fact to explain a state of affairs they know to be abnormal (although desirable) in a racist society. All of these women encountered racial hierarchy and racist mythology once they were outside a limited, protected space.

Conclusion

In all of these narratives, landscape and the experience of it were racially structured—whether those narratives seemed to be marked predominantly by the presence or the absence of people of color. This is of course not to say that race was the only organizing principle of the social context. Class intersected with race in differentiating Pat's and Beth's relationships with Black communities and as part of the context for the quasi-integrated experiences of Louise and Sandy. Controls on sexuality link up with racism to create hostility toward relationships between African American men and white women.

Once a person is in a landscape structured by racism, a conceptual mapping of race, of self and others, takes shape, following from and feeding the physical context. Thus, for example, Sandy experienced the term "Anglo" initially without any negative or positive connotation; Clare both saw through the lens of racial stratification in her own environment *and* did not perceive racial stratification as such. Even the presence or absence of people of color seemed to be as much a social-mental construct as a social-physical one: recall the invisible African American and Latina domestic workers in some apparently all-white homes.

This analysis has some implications for a definition of racism. First of all, it clarifies and makes concrete some of the forms—some subtle, some obvious—that race privilege and racism may

take in the lives of white women: educational and economic inequality, verbal assertions of white superiority, the maintenance of all-white neighborhoods, the "invisibility" of Black and Latina domestic workers, white people's fear of people of color, and the "colonial" notion that the cultures of peoples of color were great only in the past. In this context, it would be hard to maintain the belief that race only affects the lives of people of color. Moreover, racism emerges not only as an ideology or political orientation chosen or rejected at will but also as a system of material relationships with a set of ideas linked to and embedded in those material relations.

The racial structuring of white experience as it emerged in each of these narratives is complex. It is contradictory: the two women most explicitly raised to espouse racist ideas, Beth Ellison and Pat Bowen, found moments and situations, however fleeting, in which to question the racist status quo. Conversely, Sandy Alvarez and Louise Glebocki, raised to find ways in which to challenge racism, were nonetheless not outside its reach: racism as well as antiracism shaped their environments, and both women drew at times on white-centered logics in describing and living their lives.

These women's accounts of their environments were also mobile. All five indicated in various ways that, with hindsight, they had become more cognizant of the patterning of their earlier experiences: phrases like "now that we're talking about this I remember" and "I was so unaware of cultural difference that" signal both lack of awareness of racism *and* moments of recognition or realization of it. "Experience" emerged here as a complicated concept. As the narratives showed, there are multiple ways in which experiences can be named, forgotten, or remembered through changing conceptual schemata.

Later chapters will return to the landscapes of childhood in the context of other discussions; this chapter has by no means exhausted the range of ways in which white women conceptualized their environments, nor, in particular, the ways generation shaped both material and discursive relations. Race shaped the lives of all the women I interviewed in complex ways, at times explicitly articulated and at other times unspoken but nonetheless real.

4

Race, Sex, and Intimacy I: Mapping a Discourse

[In Detroit in the 1940s] it would have been a horrible thing to marry someone of a different race, or someone Catholic, even. . . . [In Oregon in the 1980s] Henry still thinks his son married a slant-eye!

—*Irene Esterley*

[In Maryland in the 1970s] . . . in high school you're taught really strictly what to do and not do around sex. I mean, it's bad to be a slut, anyway. But [for a white woman] . . . to have sex with a Black man is like being the worst slut in the world.

—*Patricia Bowen*

Interracial sexual relationships have been and remain a controversial terrain in the United States. This chapter and the next focus on interracial primary relationships as idea and as material reality. Examining the discourse on interracial relationships or, as one might more accurately state it, *against* interracial relationships (since it seems to me that there is at this time no popular discourse specifically *for* them) brings into sharp relief a range of issues key to comprehending the impact of racism both on white women's experience and worldview and on social organization more broadly. The *racialness* of constructions of masculinity and femininity are apparent in this discourse, as are the construction of race difference as "real," "essential," and based on "biology" and the construction of racial and cultural groups as entirely and appropriately separate from one another.

Examining these issues provides an opportunity to examine the relationships between individual subjects and discourse. In the same way that, as I argued in chapter 3, there is no way for white women to step outside the reach of racism's impact on the material environment, here I show that, while white women can and do challenge racist discourses, engagement with them is inevitable, in the literal sense of that term. In this chapter I will analyze