

Margaret Southwell. "I Don't Care What Color You Are": The Depiction of Adolescent Interracial Romances in Young Adult Novels. A Master's paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. April, 2015. 65 pages. Advisor: Brian Sturm.

This study used qualitative content analysis to examine the way in which adolescent interracial romances are portrayed in Young Adult novels. The purpose of the study was not only to identify the consistent, overarching themes in the novels but also to compare their depiction of adolescent interracial romances to the research on the reality of the experience of these relationships. Seven realistic fiction, YA novels in which the protagonists date interracially were selected for the study, and analyzed in depth using several guiding questions based on the literature, emergent coding, and the constant comparative method. Overall, the study found that the portrayal of adolescent interracial romances in these novels was positive, encouraging the hope for a more tolerant, integrated society in the future. Surprisingly, race was not the focus of most of the novels, and the difference in race was often only a secondary obstacle to the relationships.

Headings:

Young Adult Fiction

Content Analysis

Love Stories--Interracial

“I DON’T CARE WHAT COLOR YOU ARE”: THE DEPICTION OF ADOLESCENT
INTERRACIAL ROMANCES IN YOUNG ADULT NOVELS

by
Margaret Southwell

A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April, 2015

Approved by

Brian Sturm

Introduction

Since interracial marriage was made legal in the United States in 1967, it has increased significantly. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, only 0.4% of marriages in the U.S. were interracial in 1960; that number jumped to 2.8% in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999), and, in 2010, nearly 7% of marriages in the U.S. were interracial (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Historically, interracial relationships have been stigmatized in the U.S., meeting with suspicion, disgust, hatred, and violence. Steinbuglar (2012) notes that marriage was the last social institution to be desegregated, which encourages the belief that interracial marriage symbolizes the progressive, “colorblind” society that exists in the U.S. today (p. 10). This inclination to believe that the U.S. is colorblind, however, ignores the subtle, informal racism that continues to survive, placing unofficial sanctions on intimacy between races. In other words, interracial marriages continue to be stigmatized despite their increase in number. Research demonstrates that adult interracial couples today are faced constantly with obstacles to their relationship that stem not only from the barriers that society intentionally as well as unintentionally constructs, but also from the toll it takes emotionally to navigate these barriers and to maintain a relationship in a society that remains unused to, thus uncomfortable with, romances between races.

In addition, research indicates that people date interracially more than they marry interracially. One explanation is that adolescents are faced with those veiled, unofficial sanctions against their romance when they attempt to date interracially, and the experience makes them unwilling to engage in more serious, long-term relationships.

Studies have found that adolescent interracial couples are hesitant to share their relationships with their family, or to display their relationship in public. Their parents as well as their peers are likely to discourage their romance, thus their relationships are likely to be unstable, and to end prematurely. The likelihood that their families and/or their peers are going to frown upon their relationship depends frequently on their race as well as their partner's race. In cases where their families *are* supportive, adolescent interracial relationships are more likely to be stable, to flourish, and to encourage healthy, long-term romance between races. Similarly, interracial friendship groups tend to provide adolescent interracial couples with the support for their romance that they need from their peers to maintain their relationship. In general, adolescent interracial relationships succeed only when they have support, but this support is rare when contact between races continues to be limited in the U.S., and adolescent interracial romances (as well as friendships, for that matter) are looked on with disapproval. This reality is unfortunate, especially because the research shows that adolescents benefit from participation in stable, healthy interracial contact, friendships, and romance (Edmonds and Killen, 2009, p. 6).

One possible way to combat the stigma that remains on interracial relationships is via increased, positive depiction in the media. Research shows that media is able to impact the way in which society perceives a group via constant, positive exposure to that group that is not always possible in person (Lienemann and Stopp, 2013; Cameron et al., 2007). For this reason, film, television, and literature that depict adolescent interracial relationships positively have the ability to influence their consumers to perceive adolescent interracial relationships positively. Media plays an important role especially because the U.S. remains to a degree unofficially segregated; thus for many the easiest,

most accessible exposure to adolescent interracial relationships is via media. One major way for adolescents to be exposed to these relationships is in novels that are written specifically for them, or novels in which they are able to relate to the characters, and to be exposed to interracial intimacy in a way that speaks to them personally. For this reason, this study attempts to examine adolescent interracial relationships in YA novels. Are the portrayals positive, or negative? Are the obstacles to the relationships those that are seen in the research? What role do families, friends, and peers have? In short, how are adolescent interracial relationships depicted in YA novels?

Literature Review

In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on *Loving vs. Virginia* that it was unconstitutional for a state to make it a crime to marry interracially, or to participate in a romantic interracial relationship in general. Steinbuglar (2012) describes how “at every step” during the Civil Rights movement in the U.S., “the opposition to integration was linked to opposition towards interraciality,” thus for many the ruling seemed to represent an end to segregation in the U.S. (p. 10). Loving Day is celebrated annually across the country on June 12 to commemorate the ruling, and many in the U.S. today consider interracial intimacy to symbolize the strides that have been made in the U.S. to create an inclusive, racially equal society. This assumption is understandable; since the ruling, intermarriage has increased in the U.S., and overt, violent reactions to interracial intimacy have decreased significantly. Nonetheless, romance between races continues to be stigmatized in the U.S. This stigmatization is due largely to the stereotypes that remain in society as well as the fact that the U.S. continues to be unofficially segregated.

Adult Interracial Romances

The obstacles that plague adult interracial romances today are numerous, wide-ranging, and complex. Multiple studies examine these obstacles, giving attention in particular to the obstacles to interracial intimacy that stem from reactions to the relationship. Despite the fact that interracial marriage is in writing considered to be acceptable, the taboo that remains informally makes it hard for adult interracial couples to be in public. McNamara, Tempenis, and Walton (1999) conducted interviews with 28 adult interracial couples in the south over a three-year period, and highlighted the common, continual reactions to their relationships that bombarded the couples, ranging from relatively harmless, bothersome hypervisibility in public to more violent, more concerning responses such as obscene phone calls, hate mail, property damage, and actual physical assault. In a qualitative study of Black women in adult interracial romances, Craig-Henderson (2011) conducted in-depth, unstructured interviews with more than 25 heterosexual Black women who had been or were currently in a relationship with a White man. The study found that these women were subject to reactions in public that “ranged from overtly negative responses to curious looks to affirming nods” (149), and that stares from strangers in public were unavoidable. For the most part, these stares were merely shocked as often as they were overtly judgmental. Nonetheless, the women described that strangers, especially Black men, were frequently more than ready to voice their opposition. Eight women in the study stated that they did not receive unusual, noteworthy responses, but that does not mean that their relationships were without obstacles. For example, they stated that they faced the opposition to their relationships

that comes routinely from family as well as from friends. Additionally, interracial intimacy burdens couples in ways beyond shocked, hurtful reactions from people.

Steinbugler (2012) suggests that adult interracial romances necessitate “racework,” or what she explains is the labor that is required for a couple to maintain a relationship that crosses strict, sanctioned racial boundaries. This racework is a burden, and she argues that it is a mistake to believe the myth that race is rendered irrelevant when romance is involved. In fact, race is something that those in adult interracial romances are forced to consider constantly in order to navigate their relationship successfully. Her study is qualitative, using interviews as well as ethnographic observations to analyse how individuals in long-term, interracial relationships experience their relationships. The study includes heterosexual and homosexual relationships, but is limited to Black/White pairings, and focuses largely on middle class, urban couples. Steinbugler concludes that adult Black/White couples are forced to perform racework via navigating racial homogeneity, visibility management, emotional labor, and boundary work. Because these categories are relevant to the analysis in this paper, they are discussed in detail.

Most public spaces in the U.S. continue to be unofficially segregated, thus adult interracial couples are faced with a constant, exhausting struggle to find a place in public where both are comfortable. Steinbugler considers this effort that couples have to exert in “navigating racial homogeneity” to be racework, and it is a labor that adult interracial couples have to perform constantly. It is difficult, for example, for adult interracial couples to find neighborhoods that are mixed. If they settle in a neighborhood that is segregated, one partner in the relationship is rendered a minority, and the consequence is further, individual racework for that partner. In her interviews, Steinbugler found that

White partners in interracial relationships were generally unaccustomed to being racially marked before beginning an interracial romance, thus they experienced “race fatigue” when they settled in Black neighborhoods with their partners (23). On the other hand, Black partners in interracial relationships experienced race fatigue when they settled into White neighborhoods with their partners because in they became vulnerable to subtle, informal racism (28). Steinbugler explains that it can be especially difficult for couples in interracial relationships to “navigate social structures that privilege one of them over the other, that give special allowances to one partner’s group over the other partner’s group” (44). Until the institutional racism that segregates U.S. society is addressed, interracial couples are going to continue to be forced to navigate racial homogeneity.

Racework is evident, too, in what Steinbugler labels “visibility management,” or when adult interracial couples examine every social environment for cues in order to adjust their behavior accordingly. Steinbugler discusses how society today attempts to be colorblind, but this in essence means that “in public spaces, negative reactions are generally nonviolent and subtle. They take the form of curious glances, under-the-breath comments, expressions of disbelief, or verbal intimidation” (46). This veiled, informal racism renders them either hypervisible, or invisible. One way that couples attempt to respond to hypervisibility is to do everything in their power to avoid the attention. They may decide not to show affection in environments that seem hostile, for example. Some couples choose to respond to attention with a demand for recognition that they are a legitimate, acceptable couple, however, and this, too, is visibility management. Even when their hypervisibility produces attention that is well-meaning, it can be frustrating for couples. One participant in the study explained that it riled him when people looked at

them constantly “like we’re doing a community service project to promote harmony” (53). On other occasions, adult interracial couples are faced with an invisibility that stems from the assumption in society that they are not in a relationship because they are not the same race, and they are not showing clear, indisputable affection at the moment, e.g. kissing, hugging, or touching (54). This invisibility is common especially for homosexual interracial couples. “In other words, prejudice can visibly connect two people, making their marginalized identity hypervisible, or it can dislocate partners, rendering their intimacy invisible” (72). All couples participate in visibility management to a degree. Adult interracial couples are forced to manage their visibility in every public setting to combat the prejudice against them, however, and it is racework for this reason.

In private, adult interracial couples have to perform racework that Steinbugler calls “emotional labor.” Although many assume that race disappears for the individuals in a romance, that is not the case. Race shapes our experiences as well as our perspectives, thus people in an adult interracial romance are likely to possess different, at times conflicting perspectives, and the effort it takes to navigate that difference in perspective is racework (84). In her interviews, Steinbugler found that the way in which couples choose to perform this labor differs drastically among couples; while some choose to discuss race with humor, others choose to avoid the topic completely. Nonetheless, the fact remains that adult interracial couples experience a difference in perspective that is unavoidable, and they have to exert an effort to deal with that difference.

Lastly, Steinbugler found in her study that adult interracial couples performed what she refers to as “boundary work” in response to the stereotypes that exist about interracial intimacy. Steinbugler explains that “objections to interracial intimacy have

long depended on particular images, or stereotypes, of interracial partners and their motivations for engaging in mixed-race relationships” (104). Adult interracial couples respond to these stereotypes consciously as well as unconsciously, describing themselves, their partners, and their relationships in ways that are meant specifically to combat the stereotypes. For example, Steinbugler writes that Black partners are concerned especially with distancing themselves from the stereotype that they are trying to be White, and White partners are concerned especially with distancing themselves from the stereotype that they are trashy, or immoral (129). In conclusion, Steinbugler argues that “love is not a raceless space in a deeply racialized world” (161). Although adult interracial romances have increased steadily in the last several decades, they should not necessarily be taken to indicate clear racial progress. Race remains an issue even for adult interracial couples.

The obstacles to their relationships that require this racework are exacerbated when adult interracial couples are unable to rely on their family for support. McNamara, Tempenis, and Walton (1999) examined the way that families respond to adult interracial romances, and found that responses ranged from shock to anger to resigned, grudging acceptance; immediate, genuine acceptance was uncommon, especially among White families. The reasons for this negativity in response were steeped primarily in fear, e.g. fear that the relationship was going to cause the couple to be ostracised in society, to be subject to violence, to become estranged from their families, and to have their children similarly experience prejudice. Such intolerant, unaccepting reactions from families put a strain on the relationships. Moreover, it was harder for the couples to face the obstacles from society in general when they were unable to rely on their families for support. One limitation to this study, however, is that it included only Black/White couples, and a

family's reaction to their child, sibling, or relative's decision to marry interracially is likely to differ based not only on the race of the family but also on the race of the spouse.

These obstacles that interracial couples face are likely to explain at least in part why interracial marriage rates remain significantly lower than interracial dating rates. In a study on interracial dating among Asian Americans in college, Fujino (1997) found that Asian Americans date interracially more than they marry interracially. The study does not address why Asian Americans are more likely to date interracially than to marry interracially, but this discrepancy in rates holds for Whites, Hispanics, and African Americans. Fujino explains that the results from this study reflect the results from studies that have found that individuals from every race group date interracially more than they marry interracially (811). Looking at data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Joyner and Kao (2005) found that participation in interracial romances decreased with age for Whites, Blacks, and Latinos, and this decline was related to the transition to marriage that takes place when individuals reach adulthood; in other words, people are less likely to participate in interracial romances the older they get because they are less likely to marry interracially than to date interracially, and the chance that they are going to marry increases with age. One possible reason that a willingness to date interracially in adolescence seems to give way eventually to an unwillingness to marry interracially in adulthood is the experiences that individuals have with interracial intimacy in adolescence.

Adolescent Interracial Romances

In general, most studies on adolescent interracial couples examine what impacts their decision to date interracially, and the way in which they believe others view their relationship. One possible reason for this focus is that these factors are what differentiate adolescent interracial romances from adolescent intraracial romances. In a study comparing adolescent interracial relationships with adolescent intraracial relationships, Wang, Kao, and Joyner (2006) found that one major difference between the two is that adolescents in interracial couples were less likely to reveal their relationship to their families, or to display their relationship in public. These results suggest that adolescents believe their families as well as society in general are unlikely to support interracial intimacy (451). In addition, the study found that adolescent interracial relationships mirror adult interracial relationships in that they are generally less stable than intraracial relationships, and are more likely to terminate. It is not a stretch to conclude that the inability to reveal their relationship to their families, or to display their relationship in public, contributes in part to the instability that adolescent interracial relationships experience. Other studies have found, in fact, that parents as well as peers have an impact not only on the choice to date (or not to date) interracially but also on how adolescents experience dating interracially, and they may explain, too, why interracial dating rates are higher than interracial marriage rates.

Edmonds and Killen (2009) surveyed 193 ninth graders as well as 154 twelfth grade at three diverse schools about their intergroup contact, their experiences with interracial friendships as well as with dating interracially, and their perceptions about parental racial attitudes, and found that participants reported parental discomfort to be high when they dated interracially without regard to whether or not they reported high

intergroup contact, or whether or not they perceived their parents to have positive racial attitudes. The study found that “[w]hen parents expressed concerns over cross-race friendships, they used an indirect approach by appealing to concerns over safety” (16), but they were more direct in their response to cross-race dating, and “they were more likely to say that cross-race dating, in general, was wrong” (17). In other words, positive, “politically correct” rhetoric that parents tout is likely to fall to the wayside when their child begins dating interracial. This confirms what Djamba and Kimuna (2014) found when they analysed the data on attitudes towards interracial intimacy from the General Social Survey (GSS), concluding that people are more likely to say that they support interracial intimacy in general but are less likely to feel positively about a relative’s participation in interracial intimacy, and this was the case especially for Whites. This study looked only at Black/White pairings, however. McNamara, Tempenis, and Walton (1999) found that when adult interracial couples manage to maintain their relationships despite the fact that their families disapprove, in general their families come to accept the relationships eventually, especially after the couple marries, and when children are introduced (24). Obviously, adolescents are not in a position to prove to their families that their relationship is going to persist no matter what, and they do not have the ability to persuade their parents to accept the romance via grandchildren.

In addition to parents, peers have an impact on adolescent interracial romances, and there is a tendency for peers to discourage their classmates from dating interracial. Although overt violence in response to adolescent interracial romances is uncommon, studies have found that smaller, veiled microaggressions are typical. These informal sanctions on the relationship from peers may explain why interracial dating peters off

with age. In a qualitative study using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Vaquera and Kao (2005) found that, controlling for individual, relationship, and contextual factors, interracial couples participated in public displays of affection less than intraracial couples but reported similar levels of intimate physical contact. This finding suggests that they may face disapproval at school that discourages them from showing affection publically, and stigma management theory is at work in their choice not to participate in public displays of affection.

Likewise, Kreager (2008) found in a quantitative study using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health that peer trouble at school increases when an adolescent participates in an interracial romance, which supports previous qualitative research that adolescent interracial couples are challenged with negative social encounters. Kreager suggests that individuals cause trouble for adolescent interracial couples in part because social identity theory has found that there is a tendency for individuals to increase their self-concept via their association with a group that they deem to be superior. Adolescent interracial romances cross the borders between groups, threatening to dissolve the separation that allows for an individual to consider his group to be the best, which prompts individuals to participate in “border patrol” that causes trouble for adolescent interracial couples (889). Adolescents do not have many avenues from which to combat the resulting sanctions that their peers put on them. Kreager explains that “adolescents have limited control over their social environments, leaving few opportunities to avoid problematic peer encounters. Their homes, schools, and communities are all chosen for them and are unlikely to change should problems arise” (890). For this reason, adolescent interracial romances are likely to end prematurely, and

the problems that adolescents encounter in dating interracially may explain why they are unlikely to marry interracially.

Clearly, sanctions continue to exist against adolescents dating interracially despite statistics that show that tolerance for interracial intimacy has increased steadily for decades. Even if adolescents are open to dating interracially as individuals, they have to contend with what their parents as well as what their peers think, and studies indicate that peers especially seem to discourage teenagers from dating interracially. Studies have found, however, that interracial peer groups reduce prejudice among adolescents, allowing for adolescent interracial romances to flourish. In their study on the impact that intergroup contact has on cross-race relationships, Edmonds and Killen (2009) found that adolescents were more likely to make friends as well as to date interracially when they experienced high intergroup contact (16). The study revealed, in fact, that peers are more influential than parents on the decision to date interracially. If adolescents experience low intergroup contact, they are likely to agree with their parents when their parents discourage dating interracially. But when they come into contact with racially diverse peers, giving them the opportunity to form racially diverse friendships, they are likely to challenge what their parents say, and to choose to date interracially despite what their parents think. The study concludes that “cross-race friendships can provide personal experiences that help children to counter negative stereotypes about groups” (18).

In other words, one easy way to challenge persisting, negative stereotypes that discourage interracial intimacy is via contact. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) used meta analysis to test intergroup contact theory, or the theory that contact between groups reduces prejudices between groups, and confirmed that intergroup contact tends to reduce

intergroup prejudice. The study aimed to account for the variables that are likely to confound the results in a single, smaller study on intergroup contact theory, e.g. participation selection, or publication bias. It drew the data only from studies in which intergroup contact was the independent variable, and intergroup prejudice was the dependent variable, the contact under study was between distinct, separate groups, and intergroup contact was reported on directly rather than inferred due to proximity, and it analysed 713 samples from 515 studies (755). The study found not only that intergroup contact reduced prejudice between the groups but also produced a reduction in prejudice in general (766). Contact between races is able to challenge stereotypes about interracial intimacy, to remove the sanctions that families, peers, and society in general place on interracial intimacy, and to support stable, healthy adolescent interracial relationships.

In addition, intergroup contact allows individuals to recognize the interests, attitudes, and values that they have in common with others, and these commonalities are likely to encourage individuals to date. Fujino (1997) examined the reasons that Asian Americans chose to date interracially, looking in particular at the degree to which propinquity, acculturation, and attractiveness played a role in the choice to date interracially. The study gave 45-minute questionnaires to 559 heterosexual, monoracial undergraduate Asian American students, and was limited in that the participants were educated, English-proficient youth from families with above-average socioeconomic status. It found that although acculturation as well as attractiveness were factors in the decision, propinquity, or proximity to something, was “by far, the strongest predictor of interracial dating relationships with White partners” (824).

The Impact that Media Has on Adolescent Interracial Romances

In discussing what it means to be in an adolescent interracial relationship, and what impacts the romance, it is impossible not to discuss media. Evidence suggests that media shapes our self-concept as well as our perspectives on others. In Fujino (1999), the data on why Asian Americans choose to date interracially indicated that attractiveness was a factor, and that media representations of standards of beauty as well as of stereotypes of groups influence whom people find attractive, and whom they are likely to date. For example, the higher Asian American women rated attractiveness as important on the questionnaire, the more likely they were to date White men, which indicates the way in which media in the U.S. assigns a higher value to European standards of beauty. (825). Graves (1999) explains that studies have found that TV portrayals contribute to stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination in children. Either they exclude various racial minorities, which leads to “the implication that missing groups are unimportant, inconsequential, and powerless” (708), or they limit the features as well as the roles given to characters in specific minority groups (711). Moreover, contact between groups is limited on TV, and usually superficial when it is shown (712). It is likely that media perpetuates the stereotypes that exist about interracial intimacy, contributing to the small, veiled sanctions that continue to be placed on adolescent interracial romances. This means that media has the power to do the opposite, however: to erode the stereotypes that exist, changing how society views interracial dating as well as marriage.

Research demonstrates that extended, positive exposure to a group encourages an individual to feel more positively about that group. Media is a way to provide this exposure and to impact the way that people regard a group. Using online surveys

available to adults, Lienemann and Stopp (2013) examined whether extended, positive contact with Black/White couples via their portrayal in media was associated with more positive attitude towards Black/White couples, and the results indicated that it was. It was found, too, that personal, positive contact with Black/White couples was more strongly associated with positive attitudes towards Black/White couples than contact via the media. But media exposure is commonly accessible in a way that personal exposure is not always, thus there remains a benefit to contact via media. One limitation to this study is that it was correlational, thus the results may reflect, for example, how those with positive attitude towards Black/White couples seek media that portrays Black/White couples positively (E411). The evidence for the influence that exposure to a subject in the media has on our perspectives remains strong, however.

Although the research tends to focus on the impact that extended contact via visual media has, e.g. the impact that celebrities in the news have, or the impact that TV shows have, studies have found that extended contact via print media has the ability to impact perceptions also. Cameron et al. (2007) found that when children without disabilities were exposed in an intervention to children's literature that featured children with disabilities, their attitude towards children with disabilities became more positive. This was the case especially when the children's literature featured the children with disabilities in friendships with children without disabilities, allowing the children without disabilities in the study to identify with the story more easily (458). The study was replicated with children's books about refugees, and the results revealed that English children ages 6 to 9 had a more positive attitude towards refugee children ages 6 to 9 after they were exposed to literature that showed friendships between the two (464).

Literature is an easy, realistic way to expose an individual to a group, providing them with a prolonged, positive “contact” that broadens their perspective.

Novels that feature adolescent interracial couples are one possible way to expose adolescents to dating interracially, thus they are one possible way to encourage adolescents to have a more positive attitude towards dating interracially. But what do adolescent interracial couples in Young Adult novels actually look like? This study aims to examine how adolescent interracial romances are depicted in YA fiction. Are there patterns in the portrayal across novels? Does YA fiction about adolescent interracial romances attempt to challenge the stereotypes that exist? Does it perpetuate those stereotypes? Using several guiding questions developed from the literature, this study attempts to identify the consistent, overarching themes that exist in regard to how adolescent interracial romances are portrayed in YA fiction.

Methods

This study will use qualitative content analysis to examine Young Adult novels that feature adolescent interracial romances. Content analysis is a method for analysis that uses coding to extract, categorize, and examine the data that are found in documents. Since the data in this study are going to be extracted from documents, content analysis is fitting, and the purpose of this study requires the analysis to be qualitative. Quantitative content analysis examines the content in a document that is manifest, or what Babbie (2006) explains is “the visible, surface content” in a document (338). This is the content in a document that is measurable, that can be standardized. If you wanted to use quantitative content analysis “[t]o determine, for example, how erotic certain novels are,

you might simply count the number of times the word *love* appears in each novel or the number of appearances per page” (338). The disadvantage to quantitative content analysis is that measurable, manifest characteristics are likely to fail to represent properly the meaning that a text hopes to convey. Instead, it is the content that is latent in a document that reveals meaning. Qualitative content analysis is used for this purpose. Wildemuth (2009) explains that “[q]ualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes, and patterns” in a text (308). Because this study seeks to determine what meanings, themes, and patterns are common in YA novels about adolescent interracial romances, qualitative content analysis is appropriate.

Data Collection

In examining the themes that are common to YA novels with adolescent interracial romances, this study hopes to establish transferability rather than generalizability. In other words, this study attempts to identify the patterns that exist in YA novels about adolescent interracial romance, and the sample was purposive for this reason. In general, quantitative content analysis requires “large, randomly selected samples” for the results to be generalizable, but qualitative content analysis “requires small, purposively selected samples” for the results to be transferable. (Wildemuth, 2009, 298). The novels that were chosen for analysis in this study were chosen purposely to represent the variety that exists in YA novels about adolescent interracial romances.

Selection began with different keyword searches in NoveList Plus. First, a search was performed with the chosen genre keywords “love stories” and “interracial.” Next, a

search was performed with a single genre keyword “multicultural romances.” From the results of these searches, Title Read-alikes lists that Novelist provided were browsed to find other possible titles. In Novelist Plus, it is possible to limit the results from a search to “Fiction” or “nonfiction,” and to search by targeted age range; the results for these searches were limited to “Fiction” for “Teens.” To be chosen for inclusion in this study, a novel needed to feature the protagonist(s) in an adolescent interracial romance, and it needed to be realistic fiction set in the U.S. in order to be certain that the focus of the novel was on the relationship rather than on, say, a war going on in a fantasy novel. Originally, the intention was for those that featured a protagonist with a race that had not yet been represented in the novels chosen previously to be given priority so as to get the broadest possible representation of ethnicity. It was found that this prioritization was unnecessary, however; only seven YA novels that fit the parameters of the study were found. Table 1 provides an overview of these books:

Table 1. Study Sample

Date Published	Title	Author	Number of Pages	Races in Relationship
1985	<i>The War Between the Classes</i>	Gloria D. Miklowitz	158	Japanese female & White male
1998	<i>If You Come Softly</i>	Jacqueline Woodson	181	White female & Black male
1999	<i>Romiette and Julio</i>	Sharon M. Draper	236	Black female & Latino male
2009	<i>Perfect Chemistry</i>	Simone Elkeles	357	White female & Latino male
2013	<i>Eleanor & Park</i>	Rainbow Rowell	325	White female & Korean male
2014	<i>Before You</i>	Amber Hart	302	White female & Latino male
2014	<i>Like No Other</i>	Una LaMarche	347	White female & Black male

To gather the data effectively while reading the novels, notes on the themes that emerged in the novels were taken in memos. This strategy is recommended in White & Marsh (2006). These memos allowed the researcher to record not only the concepts that emerged in the novels as they emerged but also the ways in which those concepts seemed to relate throughout the novels (38).

Data Analysis

For quantitative content analysis, the researcher needs to develop a rubric for coding the documents before analysis begins in order to be able to transform the data into statistics that are able to be analyzed reliably (Wildemuth, 2009, 298). In other words, the researcher needs to decide what measurable, manifest characteristics are going to be used to answer his question, or to test his hypothesis. But because qualitative content analysis is different in purpose, it is different in process. “The qualitative approach allows themes to emerge from the data throughout the process of analysis: the coding framework is continually shaped by emerging information” (298). Quantitative content analysis is deductive, but qualitative content analysis is inductive; the coding that is used to categorize the data for analysis emerges *during* the analysis. Questions to guide the analysis are created initially, but the concepts that are revealed while the documents are under analysis are likely to suggest additional questions to consider in analysis “that were not anticipated at the start of the analysis” (White & Marsh, 2006, 37). This approach to coding, or what is called “emergent coding,” requires the documents under study to be examined repeatedly. One document is read with several guiding questions in mind, and notes are taken on the concepts that are found. Another document is read with these

concepts as well as several guiding questions in mind. If new, different concepts are found, the researcher is required to re-examine the first document with these new, different concepts in mind. In this way, “[t]he evidence plays almost as significant a role in shaping the analysis as the initial questions” (White & Marsh, 2006, 37).

For this study, several guiding questions were developed from the literature to direct the analysis initially, and include: (1) What benefits to adolescent interracial romances are in the novel, and how are they presented? (2) What obstacles does the couple face in relation to race? How do they cope with these obstacles? Or is race a non-issue in their relationship? (3) Does the couple seem to suffer from veiled, informal sanctions against their romance, from obvious racism, from both, or from neither? (4) Does the adolescent interracial couple in the novel engage in any of the types of racework that Steinbugler (2012) describes? Does one partner in the relationship engage in racework while the other does not? (5) How does the novel portray why the couple decides to date interracially? (6) What role do parents have in the novel? Siblings? Relatives? What is their impact on the romance? (7) What role do friends have in novel? Peers? Teachers? What is their impact on the romance? (8) What role do strangers in public have in the novel? What is their impact on the romance? Once the texts were under analysis via these questions, emergent coding was used with the constant comparative method, or the on-going, reiterative method in which the categories that are suggested via emergent coding are used as a basis for comparison among texts. It is helpful to compare the texts throughout the analysis in order “to stimulate original insights” as well as “to make differences between categories apparent” (Wildemuth, 2009, 311).

The themes under focus in the analysis were those that were common to adolescent interracial relationships in general. Overwhelmingly, studies on interracial intimacy focus on Black/White couples. Their experiences are applicable to other interracial pairs to a degree, but often what it means to date or to marry interracially differs based on whether the pairing involves Black, White, Asian American, Latino, or Native American individuals. To start with, different stereotypes exist for different races, and some races are seen to be more desirable than others. Although their results differ at times, studies have found that people have preferences about which race they date when they decide to date outside their race. Fujino (1997) found that when they dated interracially, Whites were most likely to date Asian Americans, and least likely to date Blacks, and their preference for Latinos fell in between; likewise, they found that Asian Americans were more likely to date Whites, least likely to date Blacks, and their preference for Latinos fell in between. Fiebert et al. (2000) found that when they date interracially, Whites were most likely to date Latinos, and less likely to date Asian Americans or Blacks, and that Latinos were most likely to date Whites, and less likely to date Asian Americans or Blacks. Overall, studies generally indicate that Whites are the preference for a partner when dating interracially, and Blacks are desired the least. This study does not seek to examine the differences in experience between various interracial pairings that are depicted in YA novels, or experiences that are specific to particular interracial pairing, although this is certainly a subject for more in-depth, future research. Instead, this study focuses on the patterns in portrayal that appear for every interracial pairing. For example, one pattern that might emerge in the novels under study is that

adolescent interracial couples are faced with the stereotype discussed in the research that minorities choose to date interracially with a White partner for upward social mobility.

The study was limited, too, in that it was subject to the biases that I, the researcher, brought to my analysis. I am a young, White female, and I was in an adolescent interracial romance. Additionally, my sister is currently in an adult interracial romance; she is White, and is married to a Korean American man. Although I attempted to analyze the texts through a scholarly, critical lens, I came to the study with ideas about what it means to participate in an interracial romance, and they are likely to have impacted my analysis. In general, it is a challenge to be objective in qualitative content analysis, but there are ways to ensure that findings are reliable, and they were employed in this study.

To establish reliability, the analysis needs to demonstrate credibility. This means the categories that are used in coding the data need to depict accurately what the data says. The thorough, reiterative process that is used when categories are created via emergent coding is a way to address this concern, demonstrating credibility, and that is the process employed in this study. Along with credibility, to be reliable the results need to demonstrate transferability. This is key; the goal in qualitative content analysis is transferability, or to identify the patterns that are found in a material. This study analyzes data from several different novels, pulling out themes, in an effort to identify the general, overarching themes that exist in YA novels about adolescent interracial romance. If findings are going to be transferable, the process in which the data is collected as well as analyzed needs to demonstrate dependability, or to be internally consistent. The memos that were kept during this study were used to ensure dependability. In addition, the process needs to demonstrate confirmability, or have the ability to be replicated.

Basically, this means that the results need to be trustworthy. Others have to be able to repeat the process, and to reproduce the results. One way to ensure that a study demonstrates this confirmability, or “coder reliability,” is to have a second, outside researcher code the data using the categories that the initial, main researcher developed, and to compare the results for consistency. In this study, a secondary, outsider coder was employed to assure that the findings were reliable.

Findings

Several different themes emerged from the novels, including most notably that race is a lesser, secondary issue for the characters in nearly every novel. The protagonists in these depictions are largely without prejudice when they meet, and the obstacles to their relationship are usually related to if not entirely separate from race. Although the protagonists find that their families are obstacles to their relationships in some of the novels, in general the families of the protagonists support or grow to support the couples in their relationships, and the majority of the friends of the protagonists are supportive of their relationship from the start. Overall, the findings reveal that these depictions are optimistic, expressing a hope that it is not only possible to love without regard to race but also likely that the future is going to be a more tolerant, integrated place where interracial friends, couples, and families are accepted. To discuss the findings in detail, they are sorted below into five larger, general trends: the decision to date, the role of family in the relationship, the role of peers, the experience of the relationship, and obstacles to the relationship. The novels are summarized with citations in Appendix A.

The Decision to Date

In the majority of the depictions, the characters decide to be together because each is able to be “real” with the other. The characters in these novels struggle with identity, trying to juggle who they think they are, who they want to be, and who they think others want them to be, but, ultimately, they are able to discover who they are through their romance with an equally uncertain, struggling teenager, and to embrace who they are. In *Like No Other*, Jax meets Devorah in an elevator, and thinks to himself afterward that “[m]aybe my parents don’t know the real me. Hell, I don’t know who I want to be half the time. But I do know one thing for sure: I was more myself in that elevator than I think I’ve ever been anywhere else” (p. 60). His belief that Devorah sees who he really is when others fail to continues throughout the novel. “I have a patchy mustache and old clothes, and nobody sees past to the person underneath. No one but her, anyway” (p. 86). In fact, Jax believes Devorah sees *the best* in him. “She made me feel like the best version of myself: brave and funny, but not trying too hard; romantic but not cheesy. She made me feel like a good man, maybe even good enough to deserve someone as open and guileless and beautiful as her” (p. 86). Similarly, her relationship with Jax allows Devorah to imagine a possible new identity for herself. She is attracted to him when she is not supposed to be, and “once I questioned why I wasn’t allowed to be with Jaxon, I started to question everything” (p. 293). Devorah thought she knew who she was before she met Jax, but their relationship makes her question what she was taught, leading her to shrug off the identity her parents gave her, and consider what she wants for herself.

The characters make the decision to date in *If You Come Softly* because they, too, feel that they are able to be real when they are together. In the beginning, Jeremiah

struggles with his identity; he contemplates everything that he is told about what it means to be Black in this world, only to admit that “sometimes, looking in the mirror, he had no idea who he was or why he was in this world” (p. 11). He does not have to worry about the way that the world sees him when he is with Ellie, however; when he is with her, he gets to be simply himself, simply Miah. He explains to her that he neglected to tell her who his parents were because he did not want her to use them to identify him; he wanted to be himself, wanted her to see him the way she always saw him. ““That day in the hallway,” he says, referencing when they met in between classes at school, “I wanted you to see . . . to see *me*, Ellie. Miah” (p. 154). Likewise, Ellie is able to be her real, true self when she is with Jeremiah. They talk, and she thinks to herself that “[i]t was not supposed to be like this—this real, this close to who I was. Like he could look right through me” (p. 104). The two are lonely, feeling neglected by their families, and they not only find comfort in their relationship but also see themselves in each other. Each is enamored with the other immediately upon meeting, and Ellie seems to see herself in him. “For a moment we stared at each other, neither of us saying anything. There was something familiar about him, something I had seen before. I blinked, embarrassed suddenly, and turned away from him” (p. 14).

Similarly, the protagonists in *Before You* as well as in *Perfect Chemistry* form a connection that is rooted in the fact that they are alike, and nobody realizes because nobody sees who they really are. They are drawn to date for that reason. It is established at the start that Brittany in *Before You* puts on a persona to meet the expectations that people have for her. “My closet is a place of secrets,” she declares. “This is where I change into Her, the girl everybody knows me as” (p. 1). She believes that no one sees

who she really is. “Everyone sees me as they want to see me, the pastor’s daughter who comes to church every week and says the right things. They miss who I really am” (p. 40). She hides who she really is on purpose, putting on a façade to make her father happy, to please everyone at church, but Diego is able to see through that façade. “I don’t trust myself around him. Not even my fake self. No, scratch that; *especially* my fake self. Fake Faith doesn’t stand a chance around Diego. He’s slowly unraveling the right wire I use to secure the real me. He’s trying to free her and he doesn’t even know it” (p. 67). Initially, she wants to stay away from him for that reason, but it is eventually what draws her to him. She begins to open up to him. She dresses the way she wants with him; she describes her clothes, then explains that her outfit is “[d]efinitely not what I would normally be seen wearing but I want to be the real me with Diego” (p. 201). Diego, too, is able to be himself with Faith rather than the thug that people assume he is, and that he allows them to assume he is. They realize that they do not have to pretend when they are together, that they can be who they are, and who they are is similar. “We’re alike, Faith and I,” Diego thinks. “And we are both messed up in different ways. Different, but the same” (p. 167). They share their secrets, and Diego feels connected to her. “When we’re together, we’re the rawest, truest forms of ourselves and both of us accept one another. Even with flaws. Especially with flaws” (p. 209).

The relationship develops similarly in *Perfect Chemistry*, and the decision to be together is the same. Brittany thinks to herself that “[e]veryone knows I’m perfect. My life is perfect. My clothes are perfect. Even my family is perfect. And although it’s a complete lie, I’ve worked my butt off to keep up the appearance that I have it all” (p. 1). She is unable to be who she really is around people until she is forced to work on a

project with Alex, who urges her “to be real,” and, in turn, he is real with her. “Truth is, this girl isn’t what I thought she’d be,” he thinks. “From the moment I told her about my dad, it was as if her entire body sighed in relief. As if someone else’s misery comforted her, made her feel as if she wasn’t alone” (p. 149). They share their secrets, and make a connection, leading Alex to think that she “is more like me than anyone I’ve ever met” (p. 196). Alex urges her to be real with him, and she is. “This is about me being real. To myself,” she decides. “And now I’m going to be real to Alex, like he’s always wanted. It’s scary, and I’m not convinced I’m doing the right thing. But I can’t ignore this magnetic pull that Alex has over me” (p. 216). The theme that the characters are able not only to discover who they are but also to *be* who they are in the relationship is seen most prominently in these novels.

The decision for the protagonists to be together in *Eleanor & Park* as well as in *Romiette and Julio* stems more simply from the fact that they are similar in interests, that they like each other. In *Eleanor & Park*, the search for identity is subtle. The protagonists know who they are, but they are insecure in their appearances especially. They strike up a friendship based on their daily, unavoidable proximity on their bus, shared music tastes, and interest in comics rather than based on the idea that they see themselves in the other, or are able to be “real” with each other. Nonetheless, each is faced with insecurities that the other is able to assuage when they begin to date. Eleanor hates that she is fat, and she refuses to make an effort with her appearance for that reason. Mrs. Sheridan gives her a make-over, and Eleanor is upset, telling Park that “I look like I’m in costume. Like I’m trying to be something that I’m not,” and she thinks to herself that “it was the *trying* part that was so disgusting” (p. 215). Park assures her that her fear is not the case. ““You look

like *you*,' he said. 'You with the volume turned up'" (p. 216). Park is self-conscious about his appearance, too, explaining to Eleanor that "everything that makes Asian girls seem exotic makes Asian guys seem like girls," and he thinks he looks like a girl, and hates it (p. 272). Eleanor assures him that he *is* attractive. He puts on make up, and she encourages it. "He looked like himself, Eleanor thought, but bolder. Like Park with the volume turned way up" (p. 223). Their self-confidence grows when they are together, and they are able to see themselves the way the other sees them. They do not find their identities when they are together, or learn to embrace their identities; their relationship does, however, encourage them to be happier with who they are.

The protagonists in *Romiette and Julio* are secure in themselves throughout the novel. Right at the start, Romiette writes in her diary that "[m]y parents love me, my friends think I'm OK, and I like myself most of the time" (p. 7). Julio is happy with his identity, too, although he is unhappy to be in a brand new school where he is a minority, telling Romiette that "[i]t's hard being the new kid in the middle of the year. It's even harder when you're different" (p. 51). They meet in an online chat room, and simply like to talk, deciding to meet in person for lunch when they realize they go to school together. Romiette tells Julio "I feel like I've known you forever and I want to know you forever more. When I'm old and wrinkled and eighty, I want to be able to talk to you" (p. 63). Their decision to be together does not seem to stem, therefore, from the fact that they see each other in a way that no one else does.

This theme is absent entirely from *The War Between the Classes*; in fact, the opposite is the case in this novel. The protagonists are dating already when the novel opens, and it is revealed that Amy subdues who she really is in order to be who her

boyfriend, Adam, wants her to be, and he does *not* see who she really is. “All I cared about lately was what Adam wanted, thought, or felt. When I didn’t agree with him, I swallowed my words and said nothing, sometimes even smiling approval. It seemed my whole self-image depended on Adam’s opinion of me.” (p. 39). Over the course of the novel, she learns to be herself around Adam, and he learns to accept her for who she is, realizing to his shame that he was forcing her to change based on his expectations. Their relationship is not the catalyst for this, however; it is the Color Game that they participate in school that encourages them to change their perspective. Amy indicates that she chooses to date Adam because she likes his personality, listing for him the characteristics that she likes about him, including “loyal, honest, kind, generous” (p. 10). On the other hand, she believes that Adam wants to date her because she is different, because she looks “exotic,” and is “inscrutable” to him. “It was my differentness that intrigued him, my quietness, for I often kept my thoughts to myself. In truth, I was a puzzle to him and a novelty” (pp. 1-2). In the majority of the novels, the decision to date is made without regard to race; the protagonists choose to date because they feel like themselves when they are together, and are more secure in themselves when they are together, because they are alike, or have interests in common. In *The War Between the Classes*, a character seems to make the decision to date interracial specifically because he wants to date a girl of a race other than his own.

Role of Family

The literature suggests that parents are wary when their teenagers choose to engage in an adolescent interracial relationship, and the families in these novels are

depicted similarly. Most are concerned to learn that their teenage family member is dating interracially, although the reason for their concern varies from family to family. In most of the novels, the reason is rooted in race. In *If You Come Softly*, the reason Ellie's sister is concerned seems to be simply that she is uncomfortable with the idea that the boy her sister likes is Black. She insists, however, that her concern is for the hardships that Ellie is going to face when others react negatively to her decision to date interracially rather than because she is against the idea. "I just never thought about it . . . for myself. Or for anybody else in our family, really. That's all. I don't think it's a bad thing. I just think to have a boyfriend or a girlfriend from a different race is really hard. I want to do the big sister thing and tell you to . . . I don't know" (p. 57).

Several different parents in these novels are concerned to learn that their teenager is dating interracially due to their own past, personal experience with a race other than their own. In *The War Between the Classes*, Amy's family is direct in their disapproval, and it is due to the ways in which Whites have treated them in the past. Her parents are upset when she arrives home after curfew from a date with Adam. "This would never have happened if you had been out with a Japanese boy," Papa went on. "A Japanese boy would have had proper respect. He would have had you home on time!" Her father says that he knows Whites to be disrespectful, and Amy tries to argue that he is not like that, but her father insists that he is. "He's one of them. And don't forget it. He's not one of our people, which should be reason enough. And he is from money" (pp. 12-13). Her parents are upset, too, that her brother chose to marry a White woman. It is revealed that her father's experience in U.S. detainment camps during WWII when he was a boy makes it hard for Amy's father to trust Whites. "The day people don't judge others by

their color is a day I never expect to see. That's just the way it is'" (p. 21). Similarly, Julio's father in *Romiette and Julio* does not want Julio to date Romiette because she is Black, and his experiences when he was a teenager have led him to distrust Blacks. To explain his concern, he tells Julio a story about the time that rowdy, drunk boys in a car ran him off the road when he was with his girlfriend, hitting his girlfriend with their car, and killing her. "I know you know the tale, Julio. But did you know the young men in the car were black? I have had a fear of black people since then, and what they can do. I will not allow you to develop a relationship with one of those people!" (p. 116).

Race is not always the only issue that leads parents to be wary about their teenager dating interracially in these novels, however. It is secondary in some, in fact, and irrelevant in others. In *Perfect Chemistry*, Brittany's family doesn't want her in a relationship with Alex due to differences in class as well as in race. Her mother explains to Brittany that "if you start hanging out with trash like that, people will consider *you* trash. That's not how your father and I have brought you up" (p. 102). His race is certainly a factor, but it is established early on that the divide in their town is between classes, and although racial lines usually fall along class lines, they do not always. In addition, her family is concerned primarily that he is in a gang. Brittany yells at her mother for how critical she is, focusing on the bad about people rather than on the good. In response, her mother asks, "[y]ou don't want me being concerned because you've decided to date a gang member?" (p. 323). Brittany insists that her parents need to get to know Alex, need to learn his name, and give him a chance. "Knowing his name doesn't change the fact that he's in a gang, Brittany," her father says (p. 323).

In *Eleanor & Park*, their families are against the relationship initially, but race is not the issue at all. Park's mother is in an adult interracial relationship, in fact. She is against Park's relationship with Eleanor because she thinks Eleanor is unfriendly, and blames Eleanor for the trouble that Park gets into. "I don't like her," his mother said adamantly. "She comes to my house and cries, very weird girl, and then next thing I know, you're kicking friends and school is calling, face broken. . . . And everybody, everybody, tell me that family is trouble. Just trouble. I don't want it" (p. 142). Eleanor's mother, on the other hand, is against the relationship because she knows it would upset Eleanor's stepfather for Eleanor to be in a relationship with anyone. Eventually, her stepfather learns about her relationship, and he tears her rooms to shred, leaving her a note that reads "*do you think you can make a fool of me? This is my house do you think you can hore around my neighborhood right under my nose and i'm not going to find out is that what you think? I know what you are and it's over*" (p. 278). Park's race is not brought up; it is the fact that Eleanor is dating at all that infuriates him. In *Like No Other*, religion is the issue rather than race. Devorah's family is Hasidic, which isolates her from everyone who is not, including Jaxon. "We're taught early on that strangers can't be trusted and that we are never to speak to anyone who isn't Hasidic" (p. 87). He is Black, and she is White, but her family is against their relationship because he is not Hasidic, and, even if he were, she is not allowed to date. Jaxon is Black, and her family does not like that about him. Her brother-in-law, in particular, looks down on Jaxon, saying "[h]e looks like every other thug on that side of Eastern Parkway" (p. 256). Ultimately, however, the reason that her family disapproves is their religion rather than his race.

In every single novel, the reaction of the families to the relationship is touched on, and, in every single novel, at least one of the families is upset at the relationship in the beginning, and grows supportive by the end. In *The War Between the Classes*, Amy's parents begin to accept their daughter-in-law into the family when she is pregnant, and they agree to support Amy in her relationship with Adam. Her mother explains that they have realized "[i]t is different now than we were young . . ." Again she paused. "Papa says . . . it is only proper that you ask Adam to have dinner with us after all this time" (p. 152). In *Perfect Chemistry*, Brittany's parents agree eventually to try to understand her relationship with Alex after they have a heart-to-heart, and she pleads with them. "I agreed to have Alex come by the house so they could meet him. And to tell them where I'm going and who I'm with. They haven't agreed to approve or like my choice in boyfriends, but it's a start" (p. 324). In *Romiette and Julio*, their parents become friends when the protagonists are missing, and Julio's father tells him "I was wrong to forbid you to see her. Her parents and your mother and I spent many hours together. I have learned much" (p. 224). In sharing their worry over their children, Julio's parents become friends with Romiette's parents, and that allows Julio's father to set aside his prejudices, and support the relationship. In *Eleanor & Park*, Park's mother is sorry for how she treated Eleanor after she learns about Eleanor's family, and she apologizes to Park. "I'm sorry for how I welcomed your Eleanor" (p. 189). She is polite to Eleanor throughout the rest of the book, giving her a present for Christmas, and she is happy to give Eleanor a make-over. Park's father tells Eleanor that she is welcome to come to their house whenever she wants, showing his support for Park's relationship with Eleanor.

Only a few of the families in the novels are supportive from the start. In *If You Come Softly*, Jeremiah's mother is. Jeremiah neglects to tell his mother that Ellie is white before he introduces them, but his mother is not fazed, and is nice to Ellie. "Nelia took Ellie's hand and placed her other one over it. She held it a moment. Jeremiah smiled. He loved his mama—so, so much" (p. 160). Ellie is thrilled. "She likes me. It wasn't weird. I was afraid it was going to be" (p. 161). In *Before You*, Diego's father is supportive from the start, and invites Faith to come for dinner as soon as he meets her. "Faith smiles from ear to ear. 'Your dad invited me back over,' she says. 'It's like he doesn't care that we're different'" (p. 212). His cousin, too, is supportive, urging Diego to reconcile with Faith when they have a fight. "You need to call her. I'm sick of seeing you mope around. You're playin' the game with the wrong girl. Because whether you admit it or not, you have it bad" (p. 230). In *Perfect Chemistry*, Alex's family seems similarly to be unconcerned that his girlfriend, Brittany, is White. Alex takes Brittany to his cousin's wedding, and his family welcomes her; his cousin hugs her, saying, "[a]ny friend of Alex's is a friend of ours" (p. 232). In every single case, the family that accepts the relationships from the start is colored. Other than these exceptions, the families in the novels tend to be wary about the romance at first, and learn to be supportive.

That is not to say that every single family grows supportive with time, however. Several never do, and the book ends that way. In *The War Between the Classes*, Adam's mother fails to treat Amy nicely throughout the novel, and that is not resolved when the novel ends. In *Eleanor & Park*, Eleanor runs away from home when her stepfather learns about Park, and neither her mother nor her stepfather comes to support her relationship. In *Like No Other*, Devorah's family continues to insist that she cannot date Jaxon after

they learn about her relationship despite her pleas, and she agrees not to date him in the end. These characters know their families are never going to support their relationships for reasons that have nothing to do with race; in fact, neither is allowed to date anyone. They know that their relationships are going to end as soon as their families are made aware, which is why they keep their relationships a secret for as long as possible.

Secrecy from parents was a theme that arose in several different books. In *If you Come Softly*, Ellie avoids telling her parents after her sister reacts negatively. “Who would understand that in this stupid family—the way our hands looked together—dark and light all at once. The way his hair felt so different from my own. Who in this family of people who married people who looked just like them would ever *get it?*” (p. 138). She admits to Jeremiah that she is afraid to tell her family because she is afraid to know their reaction. “‘I used to think my family would accept anybody,’ I said slowly. ‘No matter what color they were. I’m not so sure of that now.’ I looked at him and swallowed. ‘It scares me. I mean, a part of me doesn’t want to find out’” (p. 163). She tells her family in the end, but their reaction is left to the imagination; Jeremiah dies before they are able to meet him. In *Before You*, Faith keeps her relationship with Diego a secret from her family because she believes they will never be supportive. She introduces Diego to them eventually, and it turns out that, in her case, her family is supportive, and would have been from the start. Her father explains to Diego that he wants his daughter to be happy. “‘I see the way you look at her,’ he continues. ‘I’m not going to pretend I like the tattoos. Don’t take it personally. I don’t like hers, either. But I also don’t believe that a person should be judged by their appearance’” (p. 272). He gives Diego his approval. “‘It’s tough for me to get used to the new clothes and a new boyfriend, but I think you might be

good for her” (p. 273). His approval removes what throughout the book was an ongoing, major obstacle from their relationship.

Overall, the way that parents feel about the relationship was shown to be important to the protagonists. They want their families to approve, and keep it a secret when they fear their family will not, believing that their families will put an end to the relationship when they learn about it. In most cases, their families are unsupportive initially, and it was not always due to race; their reasons for disapproval ranged from class to misconceptions to religion. Mostly, the families come to be supportive over the course of the story, overcoming their prejudices, and this acceptance allows the couples to be together without tension. Those families that remain staunchly opposed to the relationship at the end of the book are opposed for reasons other than race, and in two of the three books where this is the case, the couple is apart at the end of the novel.

Role of Peers

In the novels under study, friends were revealed to be a constant, repeated source of support to the protagonists in their relationships. Most are supportive from the start, encouraging the relationship. In *If You Come Softly*, Jeremiah’s friend Carlton is biracial, and Jeremiah chooses to confide in Carlton, therefore, about his crush on Ellie. He admits to the doubts that trickle in when he considers the fact that she is White, and Carlton assuages those doubts. ““Hello, Miah. Look who you talking to, man. It happens. And you know what? It ain’t the worst thing in the world”” (p. 89). Similarly, Alex’s friend Paco in *Perfect Chemistry* encourages Alex’s relationship with Brittany throughout the novel when Alex as well as Brittany is doubtful. Brittany asks Paco what he thinks about

their relationship, and Paco replies, ““seriously, you’re pro’bly the best thing that’s ever happened to the guy”” (p. 241). In *Before You*, Faith’s friend Melissa is more than supportive verbally; she orchestrates the opportunity for Faith to be with Diego away from prying, judgmental eyes. Repeatedly, she pushes Faith to pursue a relationship with Diego when Faith is uncertain, and tells Faith it is because ““I want to see you happy and I think Diego is a good start”” (p. 155). She is a source of advice for Faith, too, and guides Faith throughout the novel. ““I love you, girl. I’ve seen you through a lot. You. Need. To. Have. Fun. I think it’s great that Diego’s your boyfriend. Really, I’m your biggest fan, but this secrecy stuff is not going to work. Trust me”” (p. 214). In *Romiette and Julio*, it is more of the same. Romiette’s friend Destiny is unfazed when Romiette tells her that Julio is Latino, and continues to support the relationship, and Julio’s friend Ben is supportive, too; when a gang at their school threatens the couple because they are interracial, Romiette, Destiny, Julio, and Ben come up with a plan to see that the members of the gang are arrested. They want the pair to be together.

In the cases where friends are unsupportive at first, they grow to be supportive. Early on in *Perfect Chemistry*, Alex’s friend Isa warns him that a relationship with Brittany is never going to work. ““I’m just pointing out facts. You’re a smart guy, Alex. Add it up. No matter how much you might want her in your life, she doesn’t belong. A triangle can’t fit into a square”” (p. 121). Isa becomes friends with Brittany, however, and begins to support the relationship, laughing in delight when Brittany admits that she kissed Alex, and telling Brittany, ““[i]f you like him, girl, go for it”” (p. 207). Brittany’s friend Sierra proves to be supportive eventually, too. She is upset when she realizes that Brittany is interested in Alex, only to change her mind after Brittany begins to date Alex,

and convinces Sierra to spend a day with them. Sierra begins to like Alex, and, eventually, she encourages Brittany to be with Alex when Brittany is unsure, telling her “if he’s what you really want, well, then, who am I to tell you not to go for it? I hate seeing you sad, Brit.” She assures Brittany that, with Alex, she was happy. “Happier than you’ve been in a really, really long time” (p. 301). In some books, friends play a much lesser role, but they remain supportive. In *The War Between the Classes*, Amy feels uncomfortable around Adam’s friends at times because they are an entirely White, wealthy group, but they are nice to her. In *Eleanor & Park*, a boy on the bus named Steve harasses Eleanor constantly until Park gets into a fight with him and shouts at him not to bully his girlfriend. Steve replies that he did not know Eleanor was Park’s girlfriend, and when Park says it should not matter, Steve insists that it does. “‘It matters,’ Steve spat. ‘You’re my friend. I didn’t know she was your girlfriend’” (p. 132). Although he is a bully, it is clear that Steve does not have a problem with Park’s relationship with Eleanor, and, in fact, he is nice to Eleanor after that.

In general, the protagonists in almost every book have at least one good, supportive friend to count on. The exception is Devorah in *Like No Other*. Jax is able to rely on his friend Ryan, but Devorah is not as lucky as Jax. She tells her friend Shoshana about her crush on Jax, and Shoshana is thrilled for her. But when Shoshana realizes that it is possibly more than a crush, she is horrified. “Shoshana’s face suddenly changes. Her smile disappears and is replaced by a look of true shock” (p. 93). She reminds Devorah that a relationship with Jax is impossible. “‘Pretend he’s your boyfriend in your head if you want. But you know that it can never, *ever* happen in real life. That’s not an option’” (p. 94). Devorah is forced to keep her relationship with Jax a secret from her friend as

well as from her family. In most of the novels, close, trusted friends are the reason the relationship is able to weather the obstacles that the couple faces, and Devorah is without this support; it is unsurprising, therefore, that her relationship is unable to continue at the end of the novel. In regards to peers at school who are not close, trusted friends, their role in the novels is not as large as the role of friends. Instead, they are in the novels simply to provide the microaggressions that the protagonists suffer individually, and the hypervisibility that the couple faces when people learn about their relationship.

Experience of the Relationship

Racework is minimal in the novels, and is nonexistent in two of the novels, in fact. In *Eleanor & Park*, the fact that their relationship is interracial is unimportant to the plot, and neither has to perform any of the types of racework. Likewise, the fact that the relationship in *Like No Other* is interracial is irrelevant; it is religion that separates them, and carries the conflict of the novel. In the five remaining novels, however, there is reference to at least three of the types of racework. In particular, the need to perform visibility management is an issue for several different couples, and most perform this management with the decision simply to ignore their hypervisibility. The protagonists in two of the novels are forced to perform emotional labor, and it is shown to strengthen their relationships. Lastly, the need to navigate racial homogeneity is brought up twice, and the emphasis is both is the way in which it makes the protagonist who is forced to perform that racework for the sake of the relationship uncomfortable.

Hypervisibility becomes an issue for the protagonists in *If You Come Softly* as soon as they begin to date, and they are faced with it in many different forms. It starts

when they are walking in the park, and two older, white women see them, and ask Ellie if she is okay. Jeremiah is upset. ““They asked that ‘cause you’re with me, you know,’ he said, eyeing me. He looked hurt and angry all at once. ‘If you were a white boy, they probably would have just smiled and kept on going’” (p. 106). It bothers Ellie for a while after they walk away, especially how upset it made Jeremiah, but concerned, judgmental eyes on them in public become the norm. They go to the library, and “Ellie smiled, then leaned forward and kissed him again. A black woman eyed them suspiciously as she headed in the library” (pp. 130-131). They take the train to his house, and “Miah had to lean into me to speak. He smiled and touched my cheek. People stared, but we made believe we didn’t notice. People always stared. *I feel like I’ve grown an extra leg since we started going out*, Miah once said” (p. 153). Their hypervisibility leads to more than stares at times. Miah thinks about an occasion when boys hollered at them because they were together. “[H]e and Ellie had been walking along Fifth Avenue holding hands when white boys started acting stupid—saying stuff like ‘jungle fever’ and ‘who turned out the lights?’” (pp. 135-136). He admits to himself that “[i]t scared him sometimes. Those white boys making fun of them had scared him” (p. 143). Their hypervisibility at school manifests differently. Their peers seem to pretend they are invisible. “It was strange the way the students seemed to turn away from it, from him and Ellie holding hands on the Percy stairs. From his arm around Ellie’s shoulder as they walked through the halls. Turn away from them kissing outside their classrooms” (p. 123).

Their solution to the hypervisibility that surrounds them in public and at school is simply to bear it, and to do their best to ignore it. This response is how the protagonists in *Before You* react to their hypervisibility, too, when they begin to date publicly, although

the book touches on their hypervisibility only briefly in comparison to *If You Come Softly*. They go to the movies, drawing attention from their peers immediately. “Some kids laugh off to the side. My ears are pierced by their mockery. My eyes are shot through with their stares. They go to my school. ‘Ignore them, *mami*,’ Diego says” (p. 247). Faith asks Diego if they are going to be subject to this attention forever. “‘Probably. People from your side of town will always look at you and wonder what a beautiful *chica* like you is doing with a Latino like me’” (p. 249). The pair decides to ignore the stares, enjoying the movie. Diego mentions that at school, too, his relationship with Faith draws attention to him. “There are a lot of eyes on me today. Watching, watching, always watching” (p. 252). He seems unfazed, however, and, overall, the hypervisibility that is directed at them when they begin to date is a non-issue from that point on. In *Romiette and Julio*, the protagonists are targeted with attention from a gang when they begin to date. This hypervisibility is more direct, more purposeful bullying than the hypervisibility that the protagonists in *If You Come Softly* as well as *Before You* are subject to, but it is hypervisibility nonetheless, and they respond to it with loud, dramatic gestures. The gang circles their table at lunch, and Julio explains to his friend after that “‘just before the bell rang, Romi pulled her portable CD player out of her book bag, turned it up as loud as it would go, we jumped up on the table, and we started dancing!’” (p. 87).

In two of the novels, the protagonists perform emotional labor in relation to race over the course of their relationship. Again, it is seen most prominently in *If You Come Softly* when her relationship with Jeremiah forces Ellie to recognize not only what it means to be Black but also what it means to be White. “Once I asked Miah if he ever forgot he was black. *No. I never forget*, he said. . . . Then he asked me if I ever forgot I

was white. *Sometimes*, I said. *And when you're forgetting, what color are you? No color.* Then Miah looked away from me and said, *We're different that way*" (pp. 174-175). They begin to discuss race, and Ellie makes an effort to understand Jeremiah's perspective, strengthening their relationship. "He nodded, loving this about her too—that in the little bit of time they'd been together, Ellie had come to see it, to understand how stupid the world could be sometimes" (p. 131). *If You Come Softly* addresses the efforts of a couple to perform emotional labor, but it does not explore it in detail.

The same is the case for the protagonists in *The War Between the Classes*. In the beginning, Adam claims that the differences between class as well as between race are unimportant, insisting that at their school "we don't really have class differences. Look around. We're all friends here. I don't care how much money anybody's got, and I don't give a hoot what color anyone is" (pp. 30-31). He learns over the course of the book, however, that differences exist, and he is forced to consider a perspective other than his own when the Color Game they play in school places him in the poor, struggling lower class, and he suffers from discrimination, scorn, and an unjust, unreasonable system. In a way, the game forces Adam to perform emotional labor, and he is able to understand how Amy feels. He admits to Amy that "I never thought much about poor people, minorities. I always figured most people felt good about who they were, like I did. Then today . . . I felt ashamed. As if I was dirt. . . ." (p. 47). Adam begins to understand the perspective of another class in addition to the perspective of another race, and this understanding is important for his relationship with Amy, suggesting that couples need to perform emotional labor in reference to more than race; in fact, it is necessary for couples to

perform emotional labor whenever there is a difference in their race, class, religion or background that gives rise to an inevitable, often conflicting difference in perspective.

The need to navigate racial homogeneity when dating interracially is addressed twice in the novels, including in *The War Between The Classes*. Amy begins to hang out with Adam's friends when they become a couple, and it isolates her. Since the students in their school generally make friends in their own race, Amy is forced to hang out with only White peers when she wants to hang out with her boyfriend. This is difficult for her. "Being the only nonwhite in his crowd, I didn't always feel entirely comfortable. Sometimes I swallowed things I wanted to say" (p. 6). She adds that his friends that seemed offensive to her, but "I distrusted my judgment because the jokes he often told didn't seem to offend anyone except me" (p. 7). Amy is the minority whenever she is with Adam's friends, and she becomes subject to their informal racism. Adam's friend Justin calls the Latinos in their class "enchiladas," and Amy is upset. "I hated it when Justin called Latinos that. Did he call me *rice cake* or *slant eyes* when I wasn't around?" (p. 42). Later in the conversation, Justin refers to "Adam's sweet, exotic Amy," and Amy thinks angrily "[s]o that's how Justin saw me, how the others thought of me. No wonder I often felt uncomfortable" (p. 44). To be in a relationship with Adam, Amy is forced to navigate racial homogeneity at their school, and it is hard for her. Over the course of the book, she begins to hold them accountable for their veiled, informal racism, and they learn how they are being hurtful through the Color Game. The need to navigate racial homogeneity at school is rendered unnecessary by the end of the book because the students begin to integrate, forming interracial friendships.

The stain that is put on a relationship when one is forced to navigate racial homogeneity is touched on briefly in *Perfect Chemistry*, too. Once they begin to date, Brittany convinces Alex to go to the opening of an art gallery, and he is immediately uncomfortable at the atmosphere there. He is assumed to be the help, and treated rudely, and he storms from the gallery eventually. Brittany confronts him. ““You didn’t even give it a chance. If you’d relax and take that chip off your shoulder, you could fit in. You can be one of them”” (P. 268). He wants to go on a date with his girlfriend, but the activity she chooses to do lands them in a situation in which he is rendered a minority, and she fails to understand why it is uncomfortable for him. Alex apologizes for his behavior when he sees that Brittany is upset, and the issue is not raised a second time.

Other themes arose in the novels in regards to the experience of the relationship. In multiple novels, the relationship leads the protagonists to begin to question their families, the way in which they were raised, and what they have always taken to be true. This is the case especially for Devorah in *Like No Other*. She knows that it is impossible for her to be with Jaxon, but she wants to be with him, and it makes her think to ask *why* it is impossible. “Growing up, I was taught that it was a blessing not to have to worry about dating and romantic love,” she explains. “I truly believed that freedom of choice was a burden, and that girls who wasted their thoughts on dating were pathetic. But the deeper I get into whatever this is with Jaxon, the more I question all of that” (p. 191). Once she begins to doubt what she was taught about love, she begins to question *everything* she was taught. “But something is overflowing in me now—years of compartmentalization, years of pushing down the questions, years of accepting the pat answer of *Because that’s what it says in the Torah* with an obedient nod” (p. 94).

Ultimately, the fact that she comes to question her family is shown to be good for her. It allows her to open up to her feelings about what she wants. She does not end up with Jaxon, but she is able to go to a four year, secular college.

Likewise, Ellie's relationship with Jeremiah in *If You Come Softly* prompts her to begin to question what her family believes about race, and the book seems to indicate that she is right to ask these questions. She explains that her family raised her to believe that race was irrelevant. "I used to think it didn't matter—that everyone in this world had the same chance, the same fight" (p. 69). Once she begins to date Jeremiah, her perspective changes, and it leads her to question the way that her family purports to be colorblind. "Just because no one in this family had ever said a hateful thing about black people," she believed they were colorblind. "But where were they then—these black people who were just like us—who were equal to us? Why weren't they coming over for dinner? Why weren't they playing golf with Daddy on Saturdays or quilting with Marion on Thursday nights? Why weren't they in our worlds, around us, a part of us?" (p. 70). Ellie begins to realize that race *is* relevant. Strangers put her relationship with Jeremiah under a microscope simply because they are interracial, which alongside her efforts to perform emotional labor allows her to realize that it does, in fact, mean something to be Black, and it means something to be White, and she is right to question her family. It is impossible to be truly colorblind.

This message makes *If You Come Softly* an exception to another common theme that arose in those novels, however. In three of the novels, there is a hope that the world is going to learn to be colorblind, and this hope underpins the relationship. Faced with unwanted, unkind attention when they are at the movies in *Before You*, Faith asks Diego

if he thinks things are going to change in the future, and he replies that hopefully they will. “That’s all we really have, isn’t it? *Hope*. Hope that this world will stop seeing people in terms of the color of their skin and the size of their paychecks, and start seeing them in the size of their hearts and the love they offer” (p. 169). For them, the hope that the world is going to be colorblind in the future is a buoy to support them through their struggles. In *The War Between the Classes*, Amy’s brother, Hideo, is hopeful for this future, too. ““Don’t you think if we were all color-blind, we’d get along better together?”” he asks their father, and when his father says that is never going to happen, Hideo insists it might. ““We don’t judge others by their skin,’ Hideo said. ‘And we expect our children to be the same way”” (p. 21). He believes it is possible to be colorblind, and Amy agrees with him. The book supports the characters in this belief, ending on a happy, hopeful note when the students have begun to form interracial, cross-class friendships, and Amy’s parents have invited Adam to dinner.

This implication that a more tolerant, understanding colorblind society is in the future is supported in *Romiette and Julio*, too. Julio tells his father that he is wrong to assume the worst about Romiette because she is Black, that it is wrong to see people in color like that. ““The world is changing. Our generation looks at people as humans, not as races. Suppose everyone looked at me as just a Hispanic.”” His father replies that he *is* Hispanic, and Julio exclaims that ““I am so much more than that! I’m a musician, and a swimmer, and a person able to make my own decisions!”” (p. 116). This suggestion that the world is on the way to being colorblind already is emphasized at the end of the novel when the protagonists are in trouble, and the community unites to help them. In telling off a nosy, clueless reporter, a man explains how “[p]eople from all races and

neighborhoods are working together to find those kids” (p. 213). Julio, too, repeats the fact that he is colorblind when he is talking to Romiette after they are rescued. “I don’t care what color you are, or what color your daddy is, or the color of your car or your dog. I just care about you, and the person you are. I am so glad that we are both alive so that I can tell you that” (p. 236). The protagonists in these novels are hopeful that the future is going to be a place where no one sees race, and the novels indicate that they are right to believe in this future. In *If You Come Softly*, however, the message is that people are always going to see race. Ellie tells Jeremiah that she wants the subtle, informal racism they receive to go away. “It only goes away if we go away, Ellie. From each other,” he replies (p. 132). Nonetheless, *If You Come Softly* suggests that it is possible to love a person without regard to their race, and every single novel agrees on this point.

Obstacles to the Relationship

In every single novel, the protagonists are portrayed to fall in love without regard to race, and it is established early on in the novels that, at least for the protagonists, race in itself is not an obstacle to their relationship for them personally. Faith in *Before You* explains clearly to the readers that she is open-minded, and race is not a problem for her. “I would date a Mexican if he treated me nicely. True, it might be a little hard to date someone outside of my culture because of the social pressures and expectations on me. But being Mexican is not a reason for me to turn someone down” (p. 23). Her dislike for Diego at the beginning is based on his attitude, and, more importantly, his association with a gang. In *Romiette and Julio*, Romiette brings up to her friend the fact that Julio is Hispanic, and she is Black, and “neither one of us noticed” (p. 58). It is never an issue for

Eleanor that Park is Asian in *Eleanor and Park*, or for Park that Eleanor is White. In *If You Come Softly*, Jeremiah thinks about the way that Ellie looked at him when they meet. “He liked the way she looked at him. It was different. She didn’t seem scared or anything” (p. 45). The protagonists in these novels are without prejudice based on race, although some are prejudiced for other, related reasons; their hesitance to be in the relationship is never because it would be interracial. Similarly, the obstacles that the protagonists face in these novels arise largely from issues other than race. Race is the largest, primary issue in a few, however, and a secondary, related issue in others.

External Obstacles

Direct, overt racism towards their relationship is only the obstacle in one of the novels, *Romiette and Julio*. Once the two begin to date, they become subject to attention from a gang at the school that claims to want to “protect” Romiette from Julio. The gang tries to intimidate them at school, corners them individually to warn them against the relationship, and, eventually, approaches them on the street to threaten them physically. The gang shoves Romiette to the ground, and puts a gun to Julio’s head. “This wasn’t planned to be no killin’, but it could be. Don’t make this be more than it’s s’posed to be. You know what I’m sayin’? Stay away from Romiette, or we’ll hurt you. That’s a promise. And Romi, if you continue to hang with Tex-Mex here, we can’t promise to protect you anymore” (p. 135). Later, they kidnap the pair, tie them up in a boat, and set the boat on a lake in the middle of a storm. The members of the gang are arrested in the end, however, removing that obstacle, and the couple is able to be together. In *If You Come Softly*, more informal, veiled racism towards the protagonists as well as their

relationship is the obstacle. It comes primarily in the form of the hypervisibility that the couple receives when they are together, but they are able to maintain their relationship despite these microaggressions against them. The novel makes the point that microaggressions are as dangerous as more direct, overt racism, however, when Jeremiah walks Ellie home after a date, and, after he drops her off, is mistaken for a criminal simply because he is a young Black man in a White neighborhood, and is shot.

Gangs are the obstacles to the relationships in *Perfect Chemistry* as well as in *Before You*, although not in the way that the racism of the gang is an obstacle in *Romiette and Julio*. In *Perfect Chemistry*, Alex is in a gang in order to protect his family, and he believes he is trapped in the gang for life, which means that Brittany's pleas for him to leave the gang are wasted, and their relationship is not going to last. "She has to know it'll always be like this, I'll have to leave her for the Blood time and time again. This white girl who loves with her heart and soul so intensely is like an addictive drug. She deserves better" (p. 315). In the end, his efforts to learn who killed his father lead to an attempt on his life, and he is beaten nearly to death when he decides to leave the gang. He is able to leave, however, and be with Brittany once the gang is no longer in their way. In *Before You*, Diego was in a gang before the start of the novel, but he left the gang when he left Cuba, and is trying to hide from the gang now. This becomes impossible when a gang in the U.S. attempts to recruit him. The gangs are more a threat to Diego's life than to his relationship with Faith, however, since the pair is determined to be together despite the fact that it puts her life in danger. They, too, are able to escape the gang in the end when Diego fakes his death, and the couple is together at the end of the novel.

Class separates the protagonists in several different novels, providing an obstacle to their relationships that is emphasized in the novels equally if not more heavily than the differences in race. In *Before You*, Faith worries about her father's reputation were she to date a boy who is not only another race but also another class. Similarly, the obstacles to Amy's relationship with Adam in *The War Between the Classes* stem from their difference in class as well as in race; the two are connected. Amy describes where Adam lives, saying "[t]he homes on Valley Vista were huge, with fourteen or more rooms and land around them so that you couldn't hear the neighbor's television or his dog barking. When I first saw his home I thought of a castle on a hill away from the noise, the worries, the poverty, and the crowds. As far as I knew only white people lived on the Vista" (p. 4). Over the course of the book, Adam learns what it means to be treated poorly because of your class as well as because of your race. In *Perfect Chemistry*, class is emphasized *over* race. Class is what defines a person to the characters in *Perfect Chemistry*. Alex explains that "Diego Vasquez, a guy from school, was born on the north side of Fairfield. Of course my friends consider him a white guy even though his skin is darker than mine. They also think Mike Burns, a white guy who lives on the south side, is Mexican even though he doesn't have any Mexican blood in his body" (p. 72). The fact that Alex is beneath Brittany in class is, alongside his association with a gang, the reason that her parents disapprove of their relationship. Brittany is desperate to please her parents so that they continue to allow her older, disabled sister to live with them, thus their disapproval of her relationship with Alex is an obstacle that threatens to keep the pair apart.

In two of the novels, obstacles that are in no way connected to race are to blame for keeping the couple apart, and in both of these the novel ends with the couple apart. In

Like No Other, the primary external obstacle to their relationship is Devorah's religion, and it is ultimately why they separate at the end of the novel. They cannot be together as long as her family adheres to their religion, and that is not something they have the power to change. "And there's no hatch for me to kick in and save the day this time," Jax thinks. "I could throw myself against it until I'm bloody and bruised and never make a dent" (p. 322). In *Eleanor & Park*, race is not an issue either. Eleanor's controlling, abusive stepfather makes it impossible for her to be with Park. His interest in her sexually forces her to run away from home at the end of the novel, bringing her relationship with Park to an end. Park is self-conscious about his race, but the issue is never substantial to the point that it becomes an obstacle in their relationship.

Internal Obstacles

In multiple novels, the relationship struggles when one of the characters is unable to commit fully to the relationship due to individual, internal obstacles. In *Before You*, Faith's mother left her when she was a girl, and she explains that she suffers from autophobia for this reason, or a fear that she is going to be abandoned, and she is going to be lonely. "It makes me skeptical of everyone. What it comes down to is this: I'm afraid to know someone, really know them, because what if I end up loving them? Will they be like my mom? Will they love me, too? There is always a chance. I cannot take that chance" (p. 55). That is part of the reason why she puts on a façade for people; it keeps them from truly getting to know her, and truly getting close to her, and it is why she resists a relationship with Diego for most of the novel. Although her insecurities are different, Eleanor in *Eleanor & Park* struggles, too, to open up fully to a relationship with

Park because she is unhappy with herself, and embarrassed by her family; she doubts that Park could really, truly like an overweight, unattractive girl from a poor, dysfunctional family. Park invites Eleanor to his house, and her insecurities about her family especially make her feel like a freak in a house that is nicer than her own, around a family that is better than her own; she leaves nearly as soon as she arrives, thinking, “Park was probably going to break up with her tomorrow, and not even because she was huge. He was going to break up with her because she was a mess. Because she couldn’t even be around regular people without freaking out” (p. 126). Throughout the novel, Eleanor pulls away from Park with the assumption that he wants to push her away, and it is not until close to the end of the novel that she comes to trust his affection for her.

Conclusion

This study attempted to examine how Young Adult novels depict adolescent interracial romances with the understanding that portrayals in media have the ability to influence the way in which people view a topic. Only seven YA, realistic fiction novels with protagonists in an adolescent interracial romance were found, and qualitative content analysis revealed several different themes ran throughout the novels. Some of these themes reflected the reality of dating interracially that is described in research on the topic, and others seemed to present a more optimistic, hopeful perspective. Overall, the relationships in these novels are depicted positively; they are shown to be beneficial to the protagonists. Race was only a major obstacle to the relationship in two of the novels. It was a less important, secondary obstacle in three of the novels, causing problems for

the relationship alongside differences in class, association with gangs, and concern for reputation, and was largely irrelevant to the relationship in two of the novels.

One major way that the depictions in the novels differ from the experiences that are described in the research is in regards to the families of the protagonists. In general, families in the novels are shown to be supportive of the relationship by the end of the book if not from the start. On the other hand, the literature finds that families are unlikely to support their relatives in dating interracially. That said, there are instances in the novels that are similar to findings in the research. Ellie's sister in *If You Come Softly* reacts negatively to the news that Ellie's crush is Black, only to claim that her reaction is because she is concerned for how others are going to treat Ellie. The fact that her supposedly open-minded, liberal sister is upset to learn that Ellie is interested in dating interracially reflects the research that describes the way in which families that spout open-minded, accepting rhetoric are often less likely to be tolerant when their relative dates interracially. Similarly, the research finds that parents are more likely to accept their children's decision to be in an adult interracial romance when grandchildren enter the equation, and this is the case for Amy's parents when her brother's wife becomes pregnant in *The War Between the Classes*. Although earlier they are upset that their Japanese son is married to a White girl, they begin to accept her into the family when she is going to give them a grandchild, and that situation is what allows Amy's parents to begin to support Amy's decision to date interracially. The novels depict the reaction of friends to adolescent interracial relationships more positively, too, than the research indicates is the case, although the research is focused more broadly on peers than on friends. In the research, unsupportive, informally racist peers are found to discourage the

relationship. In these novels, friendships bolster the relationships; in almost every novel, friends encourage the protagonists to pursue the relationship when the protagonists are hesitant, and this support allows several of the novels to end with the couple together.

Analysis of the novels sought to see specifically whether the novels include the need to perform the four, unavoidable types of racework that Steinbuglar (2012) outlines, and found that racework is minimal in the novels. This is most likely because the novels focus largely on how the couple meets, and their decision to be together despite the more obvious, more external obstacles rather than on the experience of their relationship over a long, extended period of time. In five of the novels, however, the subject of racework is touched on at least briefly, and the need to perform visibility management in particular is addressed more thoroughly, especially in *If You Come Softly*, which focuses on race the most of all of the novels. In two of the novels, characters perform emotional labor, benefiting from it, and the novels have a couple of instances in which a character is forced to navigate racial homogeneity, too. The type of racework that these novels fail to address entirely is the need to perform boundary work. Possibly, this is because in general the books choose not to focus on stereotypes that exist about individuals who choose to date interracially, and it is unnecessary, therefore, for the protagonists to try to define their relationship in reference to stereotypes.

In general, the novels in this study choose not to focus on race. Certainly, it is discussed in every single book, but more often than not the protagonists are faced with obstacles that are only related to race. In several of the novels, the race of the characters could have been changed, and the plot would not have been largely impacted. One possible future study might be a comparison of the way in which adolescent interracial

relationships are portrayed in YA novels to the way that adolescent intraracial relationships are portrayed. Overall, these novels seem to suggest that dating interracially is not entirely dissimilar to dating within a race. The research on the subject, however, indicates that dating interracially *is* different than dating within a race, and this difference between the two raises questions. Do these novels fail to portray adolescent interracial romances accurately? If teenagers are dating interracially, will they feel that their experiences are reflected in these novels? What about teenagers whose parents continue to disapprove of their relationship? Can their relationship last in the future the way that the relationships in several of these novels continue happily at the end of the novels? What about teenagers who are without a completely supportive friend who encourages their relationship without question?

On the other hand, research shows that media is able to impact how people feel about a subject, and the positive, loving relationships that are portrayed in these novels are likely to encourage the readers to feel more positively about adolescent interracial romances. For that reason as well as to portray the experience of dating interracially more accurately, there ought to be more YA novels on the subject. This study was able to locate only seven Young Adult, realistic fiction novels that feature protagonists in adolescent interracial romances, limiting the variety in portrayals that was possible. If participation in, acceptance of, and support for interracial intimacy among adults as well as adolescents is to increase, there need to be more novels about dating interracially, portraying more, different racial pairings, and offering more, different perspectives on what it means to be in an adolescent interracial romance.

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Appendix A: Book Summaries

Draper, Sharon M. *Romiette and Julio*. New York: Atheneum Books, 1999.

Julio's family moves to Cincinnati to escape the gangs in Corpus Christi, Texas, but he is unhappy in Cincinnati, and hopes to make friends through an online chat group. There he begins talking to Romiette, striking up a friendship, and learns that she not only lives in Cincinnati but also attends his school. They meet in person, and their friendship blooms quickly into a romance with the encouragement of their friends. They are cornered by members of the gang called "The Family" repeatedly, and warned against a relationship because Julio is Latino, and Romiette is Black, and the gang means to "protect" her. Eventually, the threats escalate into violence. The couple devises a plan to record the gang's threats in order to turn them into the police, but they are foiled when the gang kidnaps them, taking them to a lake, tying them to a boat, and setting them on the water in the middle of a storm. They are able to swim to safety after the storm destroys the boat, but are injured, freezing, and unable to escape the woods around the lake. Their parents learn the truth about the gang, and lead the community in a search for the couple, finding them in the morning, and taking them to the hospital in time to save their lives. Now that the gang is out of the way, they are free to be together.

Elkeles, Simone. *Perfect Chemistry*. New York: Walker Books, 2009.

Brittany struggles to be perfect because she believes that her parents will then allow her sister, Shelly, to continue living with them despite her disability, and everything in her life revolves around the image that she created for this purpose, including her relationship with her boyfriend, Colin. She is forced to talk to Alex when they are assigned to be partners in chemistry, however. Initially, their relationship is antagonistic, and Alex makes a bet with his friends that he is going to be able to sleep with Brittany. He begins to fall in love with her when he gets to know her, and she returns his feelings, agreeing to date him in secret at first, and openly after her parents declare they are going to send her sister away regardless. Their relationship is frowned upon because she is from the wealthier, whiter side of town, and he is from the poorer, Latino side of town, but they persist, and her friend, Sierra, as well as his cousin, Paco, support their relationship eventually. Complications arise from the fact that Alex is in a gang to protect his family, and he insists that it is impossible for him to leave the gang despite Brittany's pleas. Eventually, he discovers that the head of the gang is responsible for his father's death, and when the gang kills Paco, he takes the risk to leave the gang, and is able in the end to escape, and to renew his relationship with Brittany.

Hart, Amber. *Before You*. New York: Kensington Publishing Corp., 2014.

After her mother leaves, Faith begins to struggle with a fear of abandonment, but she is determined to be perfect for her father, his wife, and the church where her father is the pastor. She puts on a façade for this purpose, pretending to be happy when she is not. She is attracted to Diego immediately despite the fact that she is in a long-term, serious relationship. Her friend, Melissa, encourages her to give Diego a chance after she leaves

her boyfriend, and they begin to date, although Faith insists on keeping their relationship a secret in order to protect her father's reputation. Diego was in a gang in Chile before he came to the U.S. with his father, and it shows on his skin. She falls in love with him, agreeing to date him openly when he is unable to date her in secret, and it turns out that her father supports the relationship because it makes her happy. Diego refuses to join a gang in the U.S., but this refusal allows his past in Chile to catch up with him, and he is shot. Faith believes that he is killed, but it turns out that his death was faked. He meets up with Faith in Nicaragua, and the two are able to be together.

LaMarche, Uma. *Like No Other*. New York: Razor Bill, 2014.

The night her sister's baby is born, the hospital loses power from a storm, and Devorah is trapped in the elevator with Jaxon. The two are strangers, but they strike up a conversation, forming a connection, and Devorah develops a crush on Jaxon in the days that follow. Coming from a devout Hasidic family, Devorah was raised never to be alone with boys, and never to talk to those outside the community. She is attracted to Jaxon, however, and seeks him out, learning that the feelings are mutual. They date in secret, and Devorah begins to question her religion, her family, and the assumptions she used to have, hoping to find a way for her to remain a good, loving daughter as well as have a relationship with Jaxon. She decides to reveal her relationship to her parents by spending a weekend with Jaxon, leaving them a note, but her brother-in-law stops her from leaving, beating up Jaxon, and dragging her to her parents to explain. They send her to a center for rebellious Hasidic teenagers run by a rabbi, and it is there that she realizes it is impossible for her to be with Jaxon. He comes to visit her, and she breaks up with him, explaining that she loves him, but it is impossible for them to be together right now. Their relationship taught her to go for what she wants, however, and she does. Jaxon is able to move on, cherishing the memory of their brief, happy relationship, and her parents agree to support Devorah in her decision to attend a four-year, secular college.

Miklowitz, Gloria D. *The War Between the Classes*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books, 1985.

Amy is in a relationship with Adam despite the fact that her Japanese American parents as well as his White, upper class mother disapprove, and they are happy, although at times the way that Adams's friends talk about minorities upsets Amy, who is a minority among them, which makes her shy around them, and often uncomfortable. That changes when Amy, Adam, and several of their friends participate in the "color game" at school, a game in which students are assigned a class, and have to treat others in the game according to their class. The game is designed to teach the students about class, racial, and gender prejudices, and it begins to challenge the assumptions that Amy, Adam, and others have about class, race, and gender, and the fact that they are not necessarily as colorblind as they imagine. It is a challenge to Amy's relationship with Adam, too, when she is assigned to the upper class, and he is assigned to the lower class. Their relationship is able to survive the game, however, and they as well as their friends come to understand the prejudices that exist in society by the end of the game. In the meantime, Amy's parents are struggling to adjust to the fact that Amy's brother married a White girl

without their permission. They begin to warm up to her when she is pregnant, only for her to lose the baby. Still, the experience brings them to welcome their daughter-in-law into the family, and to accept Amy's relationship with Adam.

Rowell, Rainbow. *Eleanor & Park*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2013.

In 1986, Eleanor returns to live with her mother, her siblings, and her mother's new, abusive husband after a year in which she was estranged from them due to a fight with her stepfather. She starts at a school where she feels self-conscious about the fact that she is new and fat. She meets Park when he allows her to sit next to him on the bus, and they are forced to share a seat on the bus regularly after that. The antagonism between the pair starts to fade when Park shares his comics with Eleanor on the bus, and they become friends, sharing an interest in music, too; it turns quickly into a romance. Park is self-conscious about the fact that he is biracial, and he takes after his mother, who is Korean, in appearance, and Eleanor continues to struggle with doubt about her appearance, too, they fall in love despite their own, individual issues, and are happy when they are together. Eleanor keeps their relationship a secret from her parents, knowing it would infuriate her stepfather, but he learns the truth, and his reaction allows her to discover that he is responsible for the creepy, predator notes that have been left on her books. Park takes Eleanor to live with her uncle several hours away for her safety, but the distance between them makes it impossible for them to maintain a relationship.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *If You Come Softly*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1998.

Jeremiah starts at a brand new school, and runs into Ellie in the hall, feeling drawn to her immediately. His parents are divorced, and while both remain in his life, he struggles with loneliness and the fact that his parents are famous, reducing him to the son of the famous, and making him feel like nobody sees him for who he is. Similarly, Ellie is lonely now that her siblings are grown, and her relationship with her mother is tenuous due to her mother's sudden, temporary abandonment when Ellie was young. They become friends, and begin to date soon after, feeling a connection. Jeremiah is Black, and Ellie is White, and they are faced immediately with silent, informal sanctions on their relationship from their peers as well as the public. They are happy, however, and ignore the reception to their relationship. Ellie is afraid to learn that her parents are not as colorblind as they claim, thus is afraid to reveal her relationship to them. But after Jeremiah's mother is supportive, Ellie decides to introduce Jeremiah to her parents. Jeremiah walks Ellie to her house after she meets his mother, and she tells her parents about him that night. But they are unable to meet him; after he drops her off, he is alone in her neighborhood, and is mistaken for a criminal. He is shot, and killed.

Appendix B: Coding Categories

Influence of family on relationship	Supportive throughout Unsupportive initially, growing supportive Unsupportive throughout Effect on relationship
Influence of friends on relationship	Supportive throughout Unsupportive initially, growing supportive Unsupportive throughout Effect on relationship
The decision to be together	How did they meet? Were they prejudiced initially? Do they resist the temptation to date? Why do they decide to date?
Performance of racework	Navigating racial homogeneity Visibility management Emotional labor Boundary work
Obstacles to the relationship	Race Class Religion Gangs Self-esteem Other
Questioning of authority	Question what they know about race Question their family Question their peers Question their religion
Keeping the relationship a secret	Both of the protagonists keep it a secret One of the protagonists keeps it a secret Neither of the protagonists keep it a secret Why?
Colorblind	Are the protagonists colorblind? Are their peers colorblind? Do characters grow colorblind with understanding, or does understanding make them aware that they are not colorblind? It is possible to be colorblind It is NOT possible to be colorblind