“ONE TOGETHER AND ONE APART”:
INTERRACIAL MARRIAGES BETWEEN INDO-TRINIDADIAN WOMEN AND
AFRO-TRINIDADIAN MEN

By
SANGITA CHARI

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This study analyzes why Indo-Trinidadian women choose to marry Afro-Trinidadian men despite community norms against interracial marriages. Interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men are a contentious subject in the Indo-Trinidadian community. Despite a social structure designed to discourage Indo-Trinidadian women from considering interracial marriage (particularly with Afro-Trinidadians), Indo-Trinidadian women continue to challenge community norms by marrying men from the Afro-Trinidadian community. Why do Indo-Trinidadian women choose to marry Afro-Trinidadian men, and what does their decision represent to the Indo-Trinidadian community?

Research was conducted for 2 months, from August through October 1996, in Trinidad and Tobago. Feminist ethnographic research methods were used: primarily participant observation, written research, and in-depth interviews with Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages to Afro-Trinidadian men. Interviews lasted up
to 2 hours and focused on family background, courtship patterns, marriage, and the impact of the marriage on their identity and relationship to the Indo-Trinidadian community. Eight interviews were conducted.

Next I conducted a comparative analysis of patterns that emerged from the interviews with 14 Indo-Trinidadian community leaders. The purpose was to understand how opposing value systems could emerge from the same community. To do this, the decision-making process Indo-Trinidadian women used to marry Afro-Trinidadian men was compared with popular reasons given in opposition to such marriages by Indo-Trinidadian community leaders. Results show that Indo-Trinidadian women who choose to marry Afro-Trinidadian men adhere to a distinct set of values and norms that do not reflect the popular values regarding gender and ethnicity espoused by Indo-Trinidadian leadership. My study challenges social scientists to look beyond traditional structures of leadership and authority, to uncover the complexity and fluid nature of identity, gender, and ethnicity in the Indo-Trinidadian community.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Living in a mixed marriage can be an intimate performance of juggling identities and the ideologies associated with them, a dance sometimes threatening to perform as well as to behold. It is sometimes enriching, but always also calls into question deeply held assumptions about the nature of one’s own identities, and those of one’s reference groups (Breger and Hill 1998: 28).

I never quite put my finger on it. I was bold. I think I made a step that very few [made] at the time; few would have defied their parents and said that they were going to get married to an African….when I look back I think I was very brave….I just said— this is my life (Interview with Shalini).

Sexual behavior is one of the most highly symbolic activities of a society. Deconstructing the symbolic system implicit in sexual behavior is critical to understanding the culture of a community (Espin 1999: 124). Accad (1991) notes, “Sexuality is much more central to social and political problems…than previously thought, and …unless a sexual revolution is incorporated into a political revolution, there will be no real transformation of social relations” (Espin 1999: 123). My study examines interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men in Trinidad. Why do Indo-Trinidadian women choose to marry Afro-Trinidadian men, and what does their decision represent to the Indo-Trinidadian community?

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1 Indo-Trinidadian is a term developed in the mid-1900s to refer to Trinidadians who trace their ancestry to what is now India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Previously Indo-Trinidadians were commonly called East Indian or Indian. For purposes of this paper, I use the term Indo-Trinidadian. However, for quotes I have retained the wording used by informants or cited materials. I use the term Indian solely to refer to people with Indian citizenship.

2 Afro-Trinidadian is a relatively new term developed in the mid-1990s to refer to people of African descent in Trinidad. Various terms including Creole, Afro-Creole and African are commonly used. I used the term Afro-Trinidadian except when presenting a direct quote or cited material.
Background for Research

Researchers assert that sexuality is universal. However, what is considered sexual, how sexuality is expressed and how sexuality is regulated differs greatly by culture and community. Kerfoot and Knights (1994: 83) contend that the goal of clearly demarcated sexual identities and differences is to ensure an oppositional system of power that creates an us and other by dividing subjects between the good and the bad, or the deviant and the normal. This is accomplished by creating a set of routine and voluntary practices performed by members of a society that attempt to create a secure and fixed (albeit subjective) identity. This premise holds true for immigrant communities where the control of the acculturation process often centers around gender roles and woman’s sexual behavior in particular. Yuval-Davis (1992) writes:

The “proper” behavior of women is used to signify the difference between those who belong to the collectivity and those who do not. Women are always seen as “cultural carriers’ of the collectivity who transmit it to future generations, and the “proper” control of women in terms of marriage and divorce ensures that children who are born to those women are not only biologically but also symbolically within the boundaries of the collectivity (Espin 1999: 25).

Cultural traditions, forms of oppression, national identity, and historical processes inform the development of female sexuality and define what constitutes appropriate sexual behavior. Women’s sexuality is controlled through a variety of social constructions including nationality, identity, tradition, religion, morality, science and so forth. Women who interpret their sexuality differently, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are usually silenced, condemned, or de-legitimized by others who promote a conformist agenda (Espin 1999:124). Sheth and Handa (1993), two social scientists of Indian descent, examined how racism against Indians in Canada was reflected in the ways people of Indian descent interacted with each other. They explored how socially-
controlled definitions of Indian women in the Indian diaspora consciously and
unconsciously reinforce the notion of an insider/outsider status based on socially
prescribed attributes. Even in dialogues with each other, Sheth and Handa found that it
was difficult to avoid judging each other from an essentialist perspective of what it meant
to be Indian even though they were consciously trying to avoid stereotypes. Their own
ingrained acceptance of definitions of India and Indianness were reflected in the way they
interacted with each other:

Because we were both operating from a tacit fear of not being India/n enough, we
unconsciously moved into a frame of exclusion which meant that we could only
validate our own sense of identity by denouncing the other’s as false, tainted, and
less genuine (Sheth and Handa 1993: 48).

My study examines the relationship between marriage and community identity in
the Indo-Trinidadian community. Many researchers (Birth 1997; Mohammed 1995;
Reddock 1994b; Johnson 1984; Malik 1971) have long noted that relationships between
Indo-Trinidadian women and men outside of the Indo-Trinidadian community are
strongly condemned; particularly relationships with Afro-Trinidadian men. According to
Birth (1997) sexual relationships between Afro-Trinidadian men and Indo-Trinidadian
women are a popular topic of conversation and interracial couples often have to contend
with social rejection and ostracism from family and community members. Interestingly,
relationships between Indo-Trinidadian men and Afro-Trinidadian women are rarely
discussed and are considered non-threatening (Johnson 1984; Birth 1997).

To understand why the choice of Indo-Trinidadian women to marry Afro-
Trinidadian men is believed to have such profound implications for the Indo-Trinidadian
community, I examine who defines the values and cultural mores of Indo-Trinidadian
society. Why do Indo-Trinidadian women choose to marry Afro-Trinidadian men? Why
would the marriage of an Indo-Trinidadian woman to an Afro-Trinidadian man be perceived as a break from proper behavior? How have Indo-Trinidadian men and women been positioned to maintain the system of values, norms, and attitudes defined as appropriate for an ideal Indo-Trinidadian woman?

These questions were answered using qualitative research methods (specifically, in-depth interviews and participant observation). Drawing on feminist anthropology and native anthropology, I aim to privilege the voices of Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages as a way to counter dominant discourses on ethnicity, gender and marriage in Trinidad that presume to speak about interracial marriages without giving the opportunity for women in interracial marriages to present their perspective.

Research for my study took place from August to October 1996. I was housed in St. Augustine and used the University of the West Indies, Centre for Gender and Development Studies as the base for my studies. I conducted interviews throughout the island, particularly on the east/west and north/south corridor. The majority of the interviews were conducted with Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages with Afro-Trinidadian men, however, I also interviewed a number of Indo-Trinidadian community leaders, Afro-Trinidadian leaders and other Trinidadians in interracial marriages including Indo-Trinidadian men married to Afro-Trinidadian women, Indo-Trinidadian women married to white men and Afro-Trinidadian women married to Indo-Trinidadian men. For the purposes of my study, I use data primarily from the interviews of 8 Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages and 14 Indo-Trinidadian social and community leaders.
My Impact as Researcher

It would be an inaccurate portrayal of my 7 weeks spent in Trinidad plus the countless hours spent researching, analyzing, planning and writing for this project if I did not premise my work with a discussion about the personal and professional tension that defined the research and writing process; specifically the subjective, emotional context that shaped my study and turned what should have been a 1-year project into a 9-year exercise.

I was born in the United States to Indian immigrants who came to the U.S. in the 1960s. I had grown up learning to negotiate how to survive and balance two worlds; my home which comprised all things Indian; and the outside world, defined by white, middle-class culture. The result was that my sense of identity was fragmented. I had an intellectual sense of the various parts that made up who I was as an Indian-American woman; but no real cohesive, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual sense of what that meant.

When I joined the anthropology department in 1994 I did not plan on studying the Indian diaspora. However, Trinidad and the Indian diaspora quickly emerged as an area of interest for me. I was always uncomfortable with the personal sense that I wanted to study the Indian diaspora for selfish purposes; that I was using anthropology as a way of trying to resolve conflicts in my relationship to the Indian community. I had only a few Indian friends at the time and I felt lonely and marginalized from the Indian community because of my family history and liberal politics. I tried to assert a belief that I had a right to be the person I wanted to be but I was actually fighting a deep sense of shame and guilt for not being authentically Indian, for not fitting in. Internally, I rationalized that by
entering into the Indian community in Trinidad as an anthropologist, I could examine my own issues without having to deal with the complex emotional issues that surrounded my personal relationship to my community.

Initially, I tossed around the idea of exploring young Indo-Trinidadian women’s ideas around love. It was an idea that went nowhere. And frankly, I knew what the salient topic of the day was — interracial marriages. I was conflicted about choosing interracial marriages as a topic of research. It felt too personal, too uncomfortable and too dangerous.

At the time of my research, I had been engaged for almost 1 year to the man who is now my husband (who is African-American). I had dated my husband for 6 years before we decided to get married. While my immediate family knew of our relationship from the beginning, I had accepted my parent’s wishes to keep our relationship a secret from my close-knit extended family. My engagement brought to the fore the very issue my parents had been trying to avoid, the potential embarrassment of having to explain to other Indians that their daughter was allowed to marry an African-American. Marriage to a man of Indian descent is met with the greatest approval, marriage to a white person is also acceptable, but marriage to an African American is still considered taboo for my family and the Indian community I knew. I also had to deal with my own feelings of insecurity, the sense that I was permanently removing myself from my community and the possibility that I would regret my decision. Even though I was engaged, I struggled to justify my decision and to believe that our love for each other would outweigh the comfort and benefits of an intra-racial marriage. It was an uncomfortable time for me and my family.
My discomfort with the Indian community and my own conflicted decision to have an interracial marriage wove itself throughout the research process and the writing of this thesis. It manifested itself in:

- **Fear**: I had a sense that sharing information about my relationship would have been risky while I was in Trinidad and fear of the potential backlash once my thesis was written.

- **Guilt**: I believed I was using my access to women’s stories to justify my own decision rather than to understand their experience.

- **Insecurity**: I had an overwhelming fear of taking responsibility for my own writing.

For the sake of analysis, I broke these down into distinct categories, but in reality, the fear, shame and guilt operate simultaneously, wreaking havoc on my nerves and resulting in a perpetual pit in my stomach each time I sat down to work on my thesis.

The interview process, particularly with the Indo-Trinidadian leadership, was an emotionally exhausting experience for me. I had a hard time maintaining a healthy emotional distance from Indo-Trinidadian leaders during interviews. Even though I never discussed my marital status with them, I could feel myself internalizing their comments, which caused physical pain and stress. I took many of their harsh comments personally, which led me to genuinely fear their reaction if they knew I was engaged to an African-American. Trinidad is a small island and I realized quickly that little is hidden from the network of community leaders. I feared that they would refuse to talk to me, block access to other sources and worse yet, insult me for my decision. My anger at some of my informants often poured into my fieldnotes:

> He, in a very male way, never bothered to assume he may not hold the “truth” but rather a certain point of view and thus proceeded to tell me everything with an assumption that he was right.
I was also uncomfortable telling people I met in my daily interactions about my relationship. Two months on the island was not enough time for me to discern when it was and was not safe to reveal my relationship to others. On one occasion, I was planning to spend the day with the family of an Indo-Trinidadian friend. She asked me not to mention my relationship to her brothers since she was not sure how they would react. On other occasions, negative comments about Afro-Trinidadians made in casual conversation would keep me from mentioning my relationship.

Even upon my return to the U.S., I was emotionally unable to separate my identity as an anthropologist and my personal decision to marry a person of African descent. I was haunted by a nagging sense that my informants who held positions of authority could (and would) somehow attack me for my writings and I wasn’t ready to handle their criticism. I was angry at myself for not being honest about who I was during certain interviews, and angry at certain informants for thinking it was all right to share their racist and sexist views with me (Pheonix 2001: 206). I look back at my personal notes from my research am startled by an angry entry directed at my informants who spoke against interracial marriages:

I didn’t need to be told that I was wrong, that I was making a mistake, that I was bad, dysfunctional, stupid, un-Indian…I didn’t need to hear that…I chose to protect you, to shield you from others, because I didn’t feel strong enough to confront you, to tell you that you were wrong…I protected you by not printing your words …. I stayed quiet because I took responsibility for keeping the peace.

The patriarchal undertones of my entry are not lost upon me. Despite attempting to create a feminist ethnography, it took many years for me to come to terms with the deeply ingrained notion that as an Indian-American woman, my role was to support my community, no matter what the personal cost. I was hamstrung by my discomfort at shedding potentially unfavorable light on people that I consider an extension of my own
community. The same people whose opinions I abhorred invited me to their homes and supported my research and I felt pressured to positively portray their values and opinions. It was a difficult emotional struggle to take ownership over my writing rather than feel obligated to conform to those whose opinions I was about to disagree with. It seemed like no matter how I shaped my study, I was unable to balance my conflicting needs to protect my community from potential embarrassment, my need to process the anger and resentment I felt toward my informants, and the need to simply finish my thesis.

To complicate things further, I was conflicted about the interviews I collected from women in interracial marriages with Afro-Trinidadian men. Finding Indo-Trinidadian women to talk to me about their marriage was the most challenging part of my fieldwork experience. Requests for interviews were mixed. Some women never returned my phone calls, some declined to be interviewed, and those who agreed to be interviewed were generally cautious with several refusing to be taped. Again, my own anxiousness about my choice to have an interracial marriage with an African-American colored my perception of my role as an anthropologist. Was I asking questions that were relevant to the interview process and my thesis or was I trying to justify my own decision? As with the other interviews, was I being disingenuous and hiding behind an academic façade by not revealing my own story or was I acting appropriately as an anthropologist by not revealing my true self to these women (Kulick 1995: 11)? There were personally uncomfortable moments when I found myself strongly agreeing with a statement because it resonated with something I had gone through, not because of its anthropological worth. Other times I found myself wanting to share my story with my informants as a way to validate my own decision. Thankfully my training as an
anthropologist combined with a keen sense of honor that these women were allowing me into a very secret and sacred space in their life rightly prevented me from derailing the interview process by inserting my own story. I felt overly responsible for portraying their stories in a positive light. My need to make sure that the reader left feeling like their decision was “right” overpowered any attempts at critical analysis. I was a warrior trying to defend the decisions of women who never asked for my help.

Completing this study meant more than providing me with a means to a masters degree. I had the power, for the first time, to make my own statement to the Indian and Indo-Trinidadian community. To my surprise, I was unprepared for the access to power and its implications. I was not ready to add my voice to the discussion. For years I hoped that the thesis could be written without facing my relationship to the research process and my informants. In fact the feelings of anger, shame, guilt, and frustration overwhelmed and stifled my ability to finish. And yet the voices of the women who put their trust in me to write their story, my professors who continued to support me and my friends and family that continued to push me and help me, kept me working at it.

In retrospect, I realize that the conflicted position I held had its advantages as well. The sense of community that bound me was also my greatest strength while in Trinidad. Even though I had never been to Trinidad and had no personal connection to the country, my shared connection to India was an asset in all my interviews. I believe my informants felt a deeper level of comfort with me because I was a woman of Indian descent. Ironically, the shared ethnic connection I felt with the Indo-Trinidadian leaders I interviewed was what made them feel comfortable sharing their honest opinions about a politically and socially sensitive issue with me. Likewise, the interviews with Indo-
Trinidadian women in interracial marriages felt productive in part because I intimately related to the cultural nuances of their lives and was not condemning their choice.

Ultimately, every community would prefer to be displayed in terms of its ideal state, even though they are aware of their internal flaws. Negative accounts of their community from outsiders “is bad enough” but can be dismissed as based on foreign prejudice or poor information. Accounts written by fellow insiders are harder to dismiss and therefore can be perceived as a betrayal of confidence. Anthropologists from the Global South who write for international audiences are caught between the expectations of their fellow professionals, moral and political convictions, and professional ethics, to provide accurate research on the community they researched and feel an affinity toward (Fahim and Helmer 1980). Native anthropologists are challenged to confront the underlying ethical and moral questions about their own desires to exploit their insider status through the anthropological process. My academic and anthropological interest in understanding how people of Indian descent were reacting to changes in marriage patterns was influenced by my desire to work through my relationship with my family and the Indian community. Thoughout the writing process, I often wondered whose interests were being served by my study. I realize that the critical question is not what my motivations were but how my personal agenda impacted my role as an anthropologist and shaped the outcome of my study (Slocum 2001: 146).

My position as an ethnographer is multi-faceted and changed and transformed over time, pushing me to continuously reconstruct who I am in relation to the people I study (Blackwood 1995: 55). My time spent with the Indo-Trinidadian community absorbing a variety of perspectives on ethnicity, nationality, identity, and personal
accountability to one’s community, pushed me to think and rethink my position as a woman, an Indian and an anthropologist. I came to better appreciate the unique opportunities that confront those of us who make up the Indian diaspora. As a researcher and woman intimately aware of the unique struggles faced by women in interracial marriages, I hope to accurately portray the reasons Indo-Trinidadian women choose to marry Afro-Trinidadian men and to add a valuable component to the current literature on ethnicity, gender and identity. As a South Asian woman attempting to negotiate my identity in the New World, I bring a perspective that my community is welcome to question, argue and build upon.

**Defining Interracial Marriage, Gender and Ethnicity**

For the purpose of my study, I use the term interracial marriage rather than mixed marriage or cross cultural marriage, primarily because interracial marriage is the term most commonly used in Trinidad. By marriage I refer to heterosexual unions recognized by Trinidad’s legal system, that accord the couple with the legal rights and benefits associated with marriage. Trinidadians use the term “interracial,” when referring to marriages between members of the island’s main ethnic groups – African, Indian, Chinese, white and Syrian/Lebanese. I found that when referring to marriages between a Trinidadian and a person from another country the term interracial was less commonly used. Instead the outsider spouse was referred to by their nationality (i.e., Canadian, Jamaican, American). This distinction appeared to reflect the importance placed on their country of origin as a point of difference. Racial categories (white, black, brown) were only used primarily when referring to marriage with a white person. Therefore, I chose to follow Yelvington’s (1995) lead, and use the term ethnicity as opposed to race. Since
Race is not based on any biological fact but rather a constructed notion of reality and because ethnicity usually implies the same social construction, ethnicity becomes a more viable term from a research perspective.

Yelvington (1995: 24) defines ethnicity as a “particular involuntary social identity seen in relation to a socially constructed ultimate ancestral link between an individual and a named group, which is presumed to have shared ancestors and a common culture.” Ethnic groups are defined by shared cultural processes such as religion, language, norms and expectations that mark the boundaries between those considered insiders and those considered outsiders (Yelvington 1995; Breger and Hill 1988). Breger and Hill (1988: 9) note that there is an implicit assumption that members of an ethnic group form a cohesive, interactive, self aware community. An ethnic group may be marked by numerous differences and nuances, but these can be subsumed under the umbrella of the ethnic group identity.

Gender is used as an identity marker and cultural construct for members who are assumed to share similar reproductive characteristics and supposedly defined biological traits. For this study “male” and “female” are used as identity markers and infer a particular set of behavioral norms and expectations (Yelvington 1995: 26). Ethnicity and gender identities simultaneously interact to shape and inform one’s experience of reality. These norms and expectations are further shaped by other social and cultural markers such as class, nationality, religion, or age. Mohammed (1993: 209) points out that ethnicity and gender are determined by birth and class by circumstances at birth. What becomes important is how these identities interact with experience, time in history, and circumstance to inform a person’s decision-making process.

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3 The word “race” was retained when it was used in all direct quotes and citations.
Popular Conceptions of Interracial Marriages

Whether a Trinidadian agrees or disagrees with interracial marriages, popular attitudes toward them are fraught with assumptions, stereotypes and premonitions regarding the future of the island. The significance of interracial marriages is evidenced by the extent of media coverage of the issue. I found over 50 articles, letters and essays written from the early 1980s to the present in Trinidad’s newspapers and magazines that cover issues of dating and marriage between people from different ethnic groups in Trinidad.

Vox a news magazine for youth published by the Trinidad Express newspaper ran a series entitled “Callaloo Complex” in 2000, a three week series examining the attitudes of young Trinidadians toward interracial relationships and marriage. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a young Afro-Trinidadian woman:

“Try your best and marry an Indian,” my mother always advised her five children. They hard working and they dedicated and they ambitious.” [Her daughter gives her point of view however, and writes] My sister and I would joke that they are also quick to chop you and drink “Indian tonic” – our pet name for gramazone. My choice of a future husband will certainly not be fueled by a profound desire for children with light eyes and hair that doesn’t break combs (Martin, 2000a: 2).”

A young Indo-Trinidadian man speaks of the pressure his parent’s placed on him to marry a suitable Indo-Trinidadian woman:

Would he disregard his parents’ wishes by running off into the sunset with a grinning Negro bride on his arms and a wailing dougla baby in hers? “Nah, never,” he exclaims. He has resolved to marry a fair, Hindu girl with a surname Maharaj – or Singh or Hosein… They (his parents) have revealed their fears about

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4 Gramazone is a type of metal lubricant that can cause death when consumed. It is a stereotype that Indo-Trinidadians commonly consume gramazone as a way to commit suicide.

5 The term dougla is derived from the Hindi term “dogla” and refers to progeny of inter-caste marriages, however, in Trinidad that term has come to define children with one Indo-Trinidadian parent and one Afro-Trinidadian parent. Originally the term had a decidedly negative connotation, however, the word is now commonly used (Reddock, 1994b: 101).
interracial relationships; “In ten years time there wouldn’t be any pure Indian race,” he repeats. (Martin, 2000b: 3)

And a youth of mixed heritage spoke of the difficulties he faces in trying to be accepted by dark-skinned Afro-Trinidadians:

It doesn’t matter what people choose to infer from his caramel skin and long, curly hair. It doesn’t matter that Frederick Street Rastas do not take too kindly to the fact that his girlfriend of more than four years is a “cute darkie.” It doesn’t matter that the “rango-tangos” and “rough necks” from his area feel offended by his supposed racial and intellectual superiority… “It don’t matter to me whether yuh peach, pink, purple or plaid or polka-dot, he says. He can tolerate a girl with patterns and primary colours, but he just can’t take a flat bottom. (Martin, 2000c: 3)

A daily newspaper called The Independent also ran two articles in 2000 exploring why Trinidadians were choosing interracial relationships. Like the youth interviewed above, the articles addressed racial preferences in relationships as well the issue of social acceptance. The articles in The Independent touched off a flurry of responses to the editor, many defending the choice to marry a person of another ethnicity and others questioning the intent of those choosing interracial marriages. Angry Afro-Trinidadians respondents perceived the articles as reinforcing stereotypes regarding Afro-Trinidadian men’s inability to manage money, care for their children, maintain their fidelity or value economic achievement:

Now you’ve opened the way for total assault on all African men. Look at those two letters sent in last week, ‘All black men have AIDS, All black men do not mind their kids’. This just goes to show you that we are not a racial melting pot…Well folks who are not or do not consider themselves to be black, there are many African men who do not have AIDS, who take care of their children, and do not abandon their wives at Carnival (Letters to the Editor, 2000: 12).

Other respondents took exception to what they perceived as the author portraying Indo-Trinidadian men as abusive, insecure and racial:
She must now demonstrate that she is a balanced journalist by interviewing one of the many African women who can tell this country millions of stories why they would never marry an African man...I love my Indian husband. He is in a class by himself and no fete machine can deny this (Letters to the Editor, 2000).

These articles and letters highlight the tension between the ethnic groups that comprise the nation of Trinidad and the power of stereotypes and prejudice. Discussions about interracial marriages are often couched in polarizing terms, assuming the superiority of one group over another rather than concentrating on the more subtle, individualized nuances of interracial relationships. The result has been the monopolization of the discussion by extreme opinions and little opportunity for a more balanced and multi-layered dialogue.

**Attitudes toward Interracial Marriages**

St. Bernard’s preliminary study, *Ethnicity and Attitudes Towards Interracial Marriage in Trinidad and Tobago* (1994) attempts to refocus the discussion of interracial marriages away from opinion leaders and extremists by using statistical techniques to examine how various ethnic groups perceive interracial marriages in Trinidad. St. Bernard surveyed a cross sample of 2,200 households. His survey showed a significant difference between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians attitudes toward interracial marriage. Of the 1,470 Indo-Trinidadians surveyed, 64.9% or 954 respondents stated that they would not object to their children marrying either Afro-Trinidadian or mixed persons while 93.9% (1,374) of the 1,471 Afro-Trinidadians surveyed reported having no objections (St. Bernard 1994: 7). Like Afro-Trinidadians, 93.8% of people of mixed descent reported no objections to having their child marry someone of a different ethnic background. Thus, Indo-Trinidadians voiced a greater opposition to interracial marriages as compared with Afro-Trinidadian and mixed Trinidadians.
St. Bernard further analyzed attitudes toward interracial marriages by religious affiliation. Indo-Trinidadians were categorized as Hindu, Muslim, Presbyterian and other Christian. Of the 1,462 sampled, Hindus had the greatest objection to interracial marriages with 42.4% of the 874 Hindu respondents admitting they did not approve. Among the other Indo-Trinidadian religious denominations, 35.8% of the 190 Muslim respondents objected, 27.9% of the 136 Presbyterians sampled objected and 13.7% of all other Christian denominations (262 samples) reported that they objected to interracial marriages.

St. Bernard found that Indo-Trinidadians, regardless of religion, ethnicity, class or gender, were more likely to object to interracial marriages compared to other Trinidadians. Furthermore, the strength of a religious community’s connection to India appeared to positively correlate with the strength of their objections to interracial marriage. Hindus and Muslims trace their religious roots directly to India, while Christian Indians were primarily converted by Christian missionaries in Trinidad. Indo-Trinidadian Christians also interact more with Afro-Trinidadians and people of mixed descent during religious and spiritual activities as compared to Hindus and Muslims (St. Bernard 1994: 21). Thus, marriage is seen as a critical factor in maintaining religious and cultural continuity in Trinidad especially among Indo-Trinidadians who practice traditional religions.

St. Bernard’s study is a useful place to begin understanding the trends in attitudes toward interracial marriages between Afro-Trinidadian men and Indo-Trinidadian women. While the newspaper articles mentioned above highlight the contentious nature of discussions on interracial marriage and the underlying stereotypes and attitudes that
are employed in popular discussions on interracial marriages, St. Bernard’s study outlines the differences in perspectives on interracial marriages by community.

However, I believe that St. Bernard’s study does not capture people’s attitude toward interracial marriage. As evidenced in the local newspapers, interracial marriages are a sensitive subject and opposition to such marriages opens one up to accusations of ethnocentrism and backwardness. Therefore, I would argue that people may have inaccurately completed the survey in support of interracial marriages in order to avoid accusations of prejudice or ethnic bias. Also, one could assume from St. Bernard’s analysis that only Indo-Trinidadians have a bias against interracial marriages. Given the historical tension between the various ethnic groups in Trinidad, such statistics seem unlikely. What is more plausible is that support for interracial marriage means something different to Afro-Trinidadians than it does to Indo-Trinidadians. It would be helpful if St. Bernard provided the reader with more information on the premise and underlying biases that influenced this study so that the meaning behind his statistics was clearer. What does support for interracial marriages mean to a community? Does support for interracial marriages by Afro-Trinidadians translate into less antagonism toward the Indo-Trinidadian community and does Indo-Trinidadian opposition to interracial marriages automatically determine ethnic prejudice? Although St. Bernard’s study provides an overview of attitudes toward interracial marriages, his survey does not provide the contextual data on the larger socio-political issues surrounding attitudes toward interracial marriages, particularly within the Indo-Trinidadian community. My study provides a historical and ethnographic analysis of Indo-Trinidadian attitudes toward interracial marriages, specifically between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-
Trinidadian men. I believe that in-depth interviews with community leaders and Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages will begin to provide an explanation for St. Bernard’s results.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the well-established body of research on ethnic relations in Trinidad, few studies focus on interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men, even though it is a controversial, emotional and divisive issue for Trinidadians, particularly Indo-Trinidadians. However, a review of the relevant literature yields insight into the underlying causes of interracial marriage and society’s response to such marriages in Trinidad. This chapter will summarize key studies on interracial marriage and provide an overview of the relevant literature on Indo-Trinidadian women and interracial marriages in Trinidad. Finally, I will end with an explanation of how my study will add to the current research on interracial marriages and Indo-Trinidadian women.

Predicting Rates of Interracial Marriage

Researchers (Saenz, et al. 1995; Anderson and Saenz 1994; Qian 1999) theorize that interracial marriages are an accurate predictor of the level of assimilation of a minority culture into a majority culture. A rise in the number of interracial marriages is considered an indication of the minority group’s successful integration into the majority group’s culture and society. Because interracial marriages are generally accepted as a marker of the final stages of a community’s acculturation and assimilation process, a rise in interracial marriages should mean that other barriers to assimilation have been successfully crossed to a great extent (Anderson and Saenz 1994). Barriers to
assimilation include racial prejudice, legal restrictions, social sanctions and isolated settlement patterns (Sung 1990).

Many researchers (Qian 1999; Anderson and Saenz 1994; Muhsam1990; Sung 1990) find that rates of intermarriage can be predicted based on a set of characteristics within a community, especially its social structure. The structural theoretical perspective states that social constraints will limit the number of interracial marriages independent of personal choices. Key determinants include the opportunity for contact, social differentiation within and between ethnic groups, ethnic language maintenance, group size, and imbalance of sex ratios (Anderson and Saenz 1994).

Not all factors impact rates of interracial marriages evenly. For example, Anderson and Saenz (1994) found that opportunity for contact through integrated residential patterns was the primary determinant of interracial marriages between Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans in California whereas Sung’s (1990) study of rates of intermarriage between Chinese-Americans and outside racial groups in New York City found that later generations of Chinese-Americans were more likely to marry out compared to newer generations. Age at marriage, level of education, and income levels were secondary factors. Sung further analyzed gender as a determinant and found that Chinese-American women with a college degree were much more likely to marry out (72%) than women without a college degree (20%).

Although criteria was developed for determining rates of interracial marriage within particular communities, universal applications of criteria are nearly impossible. In fact, issues of ethnicity, class, social history, religion, and power appear to be equally influencing criteria. For example, Qian (1999) found that education levels do not affect
rates of interracial marriage for white Americans; however, it has a high impact on
interracial marriages for minority groups in the U.S. Racial demographics also influence
marriage patterns; small racial groups in the U.S. have a higher chance to intermarry,
particularly if they live in areas with a significant white population.

Despite the inaccuracy of the assumption that interracial marriages predict rates of
assimilation (Breger and Hill 1998; Luke 1994), the structural theoretical perspective
provides important information regarding rates of interracial marriage. Researchers
(Qian 1999; Muhsam 1990) admit that the ability to accurately predict who will
intermarry solely on a fixed set of criteria is not possible. However, the predictors listed
above (gender, education, level of social interaction, etc.) provide valuable information
regarding the potential opportunity for interracial marriages to occur. In fact, the limited
quantitative research on interracial marriages conducted in Trinidad shows that certain
social structures such as age, economic status, education, and location do correlate to
increased levels of interracial marriage (Clarke 1993; Birth 19977; Malik 1971).
However, these studies do not provide an in-depth analysis of why certain criteria predict
rates of intermarriage in Trinidad. None provide qualitative data to explain why Indo-
Trinidadian women choose to intermarry. Furthermore, none of these studies explain
why social restrictions on interracial marriages are not an effective deterrent. My study
will broaden existing research on interracial marriages in Trinidad by adding a historical
and qualitative analysis of the rate of interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian
woman and Afro-Trinidadian men. This analysis will better explain the reason interracial
marriages continue to grow despite intense community opposition.
Interracial Marriage and Community Identity

Augustin Barbara (1994) examined the attitudes and belief systems surrounding interracial marriages in France. His research focused on the symbolic meaning of interracial marriages and the broader impact of interracial marriages on community identity formation and cultural politics. Barbara found that the rise in interracial marriages between immigrant groups and members of the host culture in Europe coincided with a shift in the control over marriage from the community to the individual. Traditionally, marriage held important practical and symbolic implications for a community. Marriages controlled kin groups and broader social networks and were used to preserve community identity. Interracial marriages were frowned upon because they “spoiled” the matrimonial order that societies established by moving the decision of who to marry away from community control and redefining marriage as a personal choice. As interracial marriages increase in Europe, they become less powerful symbolically and more a part of the marriage norms and customs, thus signifying a change in the perception of minority communities from immigrant to settlement populations (Barbara 1994: 580).

Espin (1999) adds a feminist analysis to Barbara’s theory that interracial marriages impact the symbolic codes of conduct within a community. She theorizes that because of women’s reproductive capacity, they are burdened with restrictive codes that monitor their behavior and choices in ways that men do not share. Controlling the sexual behavior of women is used to ensure that children born to the women are not only biologically, but symbolically within the boundaries of the community and nation. Her study of the psychological impact of migration to the United States on constructions of
women’s sexuality shows that women’s sexual behavior is commonly controlled by codes of familial honor and dignity and used to separate immigrant women from the supposedly modernized Western woman. Women who follow the strict codes are considered part of the collectivity while those who reject them are labeled as outsiders. Thus patriarchal power is reinforced within immigrant communities by limiting women’s choices and behavior.

These studies are based on the movement of numerically small immigrant groups who enter majority communities at a social, political and economic disadvantage. Interracial marriages are seen within a strict context of us and other and are believed to dilute the host and/or migrant community and challenge societal norms regarding the regulation of marriage and familial patterns. Ann Stoler’s (2002) study of the “management of sex” in the Netherlands Indies shows how interracial marriages can symbolize much more than community identity. In fact, interracial marriages were tightly wound into the socio-economic and political framework of Java and restrictions and regulations on interracial marriages were crucial to the maintenance of colonial rule.

Stoler’s (2002) study of colonial life in Java and what was previously known as the Netherlands Indies argues that race was a central organizing principle of colonial capitalism and the “management of sex” between Europeans and Javanese was critical to the maintenance of a colonial hierarchy. Stoler argues that interracial sexual unions were of little concern to European colonizers and were generally condoned by government officials as a “way to keep men respectable” during the initial development of a colonial state. However, as the economy developed and colonial society stabilized, such relationships were considered a sign of contagion and a loss of the “white self.”
and/or children produced from such relationships were considered a threat to colonial rule because they provided non-Europeans with a legitimate means of claiming property and wealth through inheritance. Thus, regulations against interracial marriage and laws limiting citizenship for interracial children were directly related to the protection of European power and wealth.

Breger and Hill’s (1998) edited book offer one of the most comprehensive anthropological examinations of interracial marriages with studies from various communities. Breger and Hill divide their book into three sections, first, what interracial marriages actually mean, second, who chooses an interracial marriage and third what happens within an interracial marriage. Breger and Hill deconstruct the basic premise of interracial marriage; the categories “Us” and “Other.” They write that assumptions that culture, tradition and identity are fixed and unchanging serve to magnify difference and maintain defined boundaries of “Us” and “Them.” Breger and Hill note that tradition is fluid and changing, and who belongs and who does not alters over time and circumstance. However, the maintenance of “Us” and “Them” is not a passive description but rather, underlies a more covert moralizing assumption about the “Other.” Mixed marriages are often viewed with suspicion precisely because they call into question these assumptions and force insiders to reconsider their relationship to the “Other.”

Barbara (1994), Espin (1999), Stoler (2002) and Breger and Hill (1998) provide a useful framework for understanding the role of interracial marriages in community formation and identity. Espin and Stoler’s feminist analysis of interracial marriages reveal how controls over women’s choices of marriage partners are directly linked to larger structures of power and the maintenance of ethnic and economic divisions. As
Stoler notes, white women were brought into Java specifically to prevent interracial unions with Javanese women and stop the perceived threat to colonial control and power (Stoler 2002: 33). These studies raise important theoretical issues about the Indo-Trinidadian community’s objection to interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men. The analysis of cultural boundaries and women as cultural markers can be applied to Indo-Trinidadians. Indo-Trinidadians closely regulate the sexual behavior of Indo-Trinidadian women, carefully designating who is and who is not an acceptable mate. This study shows how concepts of purity/pollution define gender roles and demonstrates how community formation is intimately linked to marriage patterns, gender and family patterns in Trinidad.

These studies (Stoler 2002; Qian 1999; Espin 1999; Saenz, et al. 1995; Anderson and Saenz 1994; Barbara 1994; Sung 1990; Muhsam 1990) provide important information regarding the factors influencing the growth of interracial marriages and their subsequent impact on community norms. However, most of these studies were based on research conducted within a context of a majority/minority population, where one community possesses greater access to institutions of power, including political, religious or economic power. Trinidad’s case is unique because Trinidadians of Indian and African origin comprise equal portions of the population and even though the power struggle is complex, both populations have representation at all economic, religious, political and social levels (Reddock 2001). Furthermore, although Afro-Trinidadians came to Trinidad over 300 years earlier than Indo-Trinidadians, both populations share a history of migration, oppression and eventual integration into Trinidadian society.
The following studies show how colonialism and its resulting racial structure created a gender and ethnic structure that opposed integration and interracial marriages in Trinidad. The following literature review examines what similarities are ignored or marginalized in order to justify perceptions of difference and incompatibility between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians. Studies examining the role of Indo-Trinidadian women in the maintenance of an ethnically distinct Indo-Trinidadian community are highlighted. The goal is to better understand why many Indo-Trinidadians are trying to suppress interracial marriages, particularly with Afro-Trinidadians.

Mixed Race Children and Community Identity

Some researchers have focused on the children of mixed marriages and the influence of their bi-racial or multi-racial identity on their sense of community and identity. Reddock (1994b) examines attitudes toward interracial marriages from the perspective of mixed race children, specifically children of Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian parentage (douglass). Although this group is arguably the most profoundly impacted by interracial marriage, their voices are noticeably absent from most discussions on interracial relationships. Reddock’s research shows that Afro-Trinidadians appear more accepting of douglas than Indo-Trinidadians. Using in-depth interviews, Reddock found that the attitudes of douglas vary greatly and appear to correlate with the degree of interaction they have with their parent’s community as well as the quality of their relationship with their parents and relatives (Reddock 1994b: 118). Thus, children of mixed parentage whose parents and community are open to differences appear the most positive about being mixed. Mixed race children who grow up in
communities that devalue their mixed identity have the most negative reactions toward either Afro-Trinidadians or Indo-Trinidadians, and elect to see themselves as belonging to one ethnic community.

Reddock’s preliminary study is one of the few conducted with children of interracial marriages in Trinidad. Her study underscores the importance of moving past generalizations about attitudes and reactions to interracial marriages and allowing people living interracial families to speak about their experiences. Her use of in-depth interviews successfully captures the nuances of being a child of an interracial marriage and highlights the diversity of experiences mixed children face in Trinidad. She also highlights the impact of family relationships and acceptance as a critical indicator of a mixed race person’s identification with either ethnic community.

Hernandez-Ramdwar (1995: 7) focuses her research on people of Caribbean descent living in Canada who consider themselves to be of a “mixed race,” meaning they find racial differences in their immediate family. Like Stoler (2002) and Espin (1999), she notes that interracial marriages threaten “the gatekeepers of purity who fear loss of control over self-designated territorial space (Hernandez-Ramdwar 1995: 4).” She found that mixed race people resisted political and social pressures to erase hybridity and align themselves with one homogenous identity because it forced them to reject or dismiss a part of their identity. Hernandez-Ramdwar calls for a “radical restructuring of the meaning of identity” and argues that as long as Caribbean people adhere to racial categories that ignore the complexity and dynamism of their community within the diaspora, they miss an important opportunity to build coalitions and organize, thereby
maintaining a system that privileges certain groups over others (Hernandez-Ramdwar 1995: 17-18).

Like Reddock (1994b), Hernandez-Ramdwar’s research shows that racially mixed children do have a different sense of identity compared to those who are not mixed. She shows how communities react to ambiguous identities by rejecting “hybridity” and forcing mixed children to choose a racial identity or to accept a single ethnic identity placed upon them. Like Stoler (2002), she shows the deep connection between attitudes toward interracial marriages and colonial structures and questions whether people of color want to support structures that are inherently racist by refusing to accept hybridity themselves. Although Hernandez-Ramdwar’s study takes place in Canada, her argument has much salience in the Caribbean today. Her challenge to build alliances across ethnic lines has interesting implications for Trinidad, a country grappling to remove a legacy of racial and ethnic stratification and division. She calls into question opposition to interracial marriages and suggests that rejecting hybridity ultimately supports the status quo.

Reddock (1994b) and Hernandez-Ramdwar (1995) show how popular opposition to interracial marriages is reflected in attitudes toward the children of interracial marriages. Children of mixed parentage must negotiate their identity in a society that does not accept the implications of blurred ethnic lines and are often forced to negate one aspect of their identity for another. And yet, interracial marriages continue to rise and the population of mixed children is increasing. My study shows why Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages choose to imbue in their children their set of values that were reflected in their decision to intermarry. However, before examining how
interracial marriages are influencing cultural norms and attitudes toward mixed children a clearer understanding of gender and ethnicity must be presented.

**Ethnicity and Gender in Trinidad**

Attitudes toward interracial marriages cannot be understood without understanding how ethnicity, gender and identity operate in Trinidad society. How does one’s ethnicity influence gender roles and how do gender roles influence and maintain one’s ethnic identity. Kevin Yelvington’s (1995) ethnography of a factory in Trinidad provides an excellent example of how gender, ethnicity and class define social relations and maintain a capitalist power structure. Yelvington found that despite three decades of independence, the ethnicity, class and gender dynamics that informed colonial history still operate in the factory. He analyzed how and why whites continued to occupy supervisory positions, Indo-Trinidadian men held some floor supervisor positions, and Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian women worked as laborers. Yelvington shows how the maintenance of power by the factory owners allows them to manipulate the workers’ social identities, specifically gender and ethnicity in a way that pits groups of workers against each other and prevents class consciousness.

Yelvington argues that gender and ethnicity are constructed in such a way to maintain historical structures of economic and political power. If this is the case, then what does it mean for Indo-Trinidadians who resist interracial marriages? Who is served by their resistance to a blurring of ethnic boundaries between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians? My study examines the larger implications of interracial marriages on gender and ethnic identities, specifically its perceived impact on Indo-Trinidadian gender roles and ethnic identity. By examining interracial marriages the role of gender as
a signifier of ethnic identity is illuminated and the importance of maintaining strict separation between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men to maintain the current power structure is revealed.

**Indo-Trinidadian Attitudes toward Interracial Marriages**

One of the earliest examinations of attitudes toward interracial marriages in the Indo-Trinidadian community is Yogendra Malik’s (1971) study of 89 Indo-Trinidadian community leaders. Malik found that regardless of the Indo-Trinidadian leaders’ religious, political, professional or class affiliation, there was an overwhelming disapproval of marriages with Afro-Trinidadians that ranged from 79% among professionals to 88% among social leaders. However, disapproval rates of marriage to whites were much lower (25% among social leaders to 71% among party and union officials). Malik found that if he broke down his informants by location, the majority of his rural informants (97%) rejected interracial marriages to Afro-Trinidadians and less than half (45%) rejected marriage to whites. Conversely, only 57% of his urban informants rejected marriage to Afro-Trinidadians and 29% rejected marriage to whites. Malik concluded that marriage to an Afro-Trinidadian was seen to lower a person’s social status whereas marriage to a white person raised their position. Malik noted that attitudes toward interracial marriage reflected the adherence to ascriptive values of color and caste as a means of social stratification in Trinidad. He also noticed a general lack of interaction between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians, which he felt created greater ethnic prejudice. Of his 89 informants, only 12 went to ethnically mixed social clubs whereas the remainder socialized exclusively among their kin groups or at segregated venues.
Malik’s (1971) survey provides a valuable baseline for examining Indo-Trinidadian perspectives on interracial marriage. His extensive survey, blending statistical analysis with qualitative information helps situate the Indo-Trinidadian community’s intolerance of marriages to Afro-Trinidadians within the larger ethnic, political and economic structures of the island post-independence. This study hopes to build off his research by examining if attitudes toward Afro-Trinidadians and interracial marriage have changed over the past thirty years.

Other scholars such as Vertovec (1992), Stuart and Haniff (1989) and Johnson (1984) have examined the role of ethnicity and caste in defining attitudes toward interracial marriage within the Indo-Trinidadian community. The ethnic hierarchy established on the island long before Indians arrived in Trinidad gave whites social, political and economic dominance over all other ethnic groups. They hypothesize that Indo-Trinidadians quickly came to understand how the racial/ethnic classification system impacted their access to economic, social and political power and adjusted the ethnic structure fit into the conceptual structure of their caste system. Afro-Trinidadians became associated with untouchables and were considered polluted and white skin was associated with purity and spirituality. Because marriage based on caste was not workable in Trinidad, marriage by ethnicity became the focal point. Thus, interracial marriages to Afro-Trinidadians were considered “polluting” while marriage to white Trinidadians became acceptable and even desirable.

In contrast to the scholars mentioned above, Diptee (2000) disputes arguments that Indo-Trinidadians did not approve of marriage to Afro-Trinidadians due to traditional caste restrictions, stating that such assertions, “present prejudice within the
Indian community as a seemingly innate quality and implies that it is static and unaffected by circumstance (Diptee 2000: 6).” She agrees that cultural retention is important, but argues that the assumption that Indo-Trinidadian prejudice is the key factor prohibiting interracial marriages assumes that there is no Afro-Trinidadian response to interracial relationships, particularly that Afro-Trinidadian women have no perspective or role in negotiating sexual relationships with Indo-Trinidadian men.

Diptee’s analysis of interracial relationships during the late 19th century argues that structural factors gave Afro-Trinidadian women little incentive to marry Indo-Trinidadian men. First, Afro-Trinidadian women were urban-based and Indo-Trinidadian men were living under extremely harsh conditions on plantations with very strict rules about their movement. Second, a skewed plantation wage structure that penalized women meant that financially, Indo-Trinidadian women had a greater financial incentive to be in a cohabiting relationship with Indo-Trinidadian men than did Afro-Trinidadian women. Finally, the Indo-Trinidadian community faced a severe gender imbalance. However, the Afro-Trinidadian community did not face the same imbalance; therefore Afro-Trinidadian women had little incentive to choose a mate outside their community. As long as Afro-Trinidadian women were able to maintain a level of economic independence, they had little incentive to look beyond Afro-Trinidadian men for a partner among men they considered to be economic rivals.

Birth’s (1997) study of interracial marriages in Anamat, a rural village in eastern Trinidad, shows that interracial marriages appear to heighten animosity between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians. Birth finds that interracial marriages disrupt family structures for both Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians. Indo-Trinidadians
emphasize relations with paternal kin whereas Afro-Trinidadians emphasize relations with maternal kin. Intra-racial marriages within the Indo-Trinidadian community result in the bride moving into the groom’s family, while marriages within the Afro-Trinidadian community result in the groom moving in with the bride’s family. When an Indo-Trinidadian woman marries an Afro-Trinidadian man, neither person provides a family structure for the couple. Birth notes that households headed by Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men tend to be established outside of the household clusters both Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian families customarily establish, allowing the interracial couple to remain free from traditional kinship entanglements, but isolating the children from both kin groups. Birth suggests that community reactions to interracial relationships that are consistent with the kinship patterns of both parties are seen as models of transracial ties and racial harmony whereas, marriage patterns (primarily Hindu Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men) that conflict with kinship patterns appear to heighten mistrust and competition.

Diptee’s (2000) and Birth’s (1997) articles are important because they move the discussion away from symbolic and religious theories to the impact of interracial marriages on family structure and economic survival. Diptee’s article challenges the premise that women are passive actors in the creation and maintenance of ethnic relations on the island. She accurately portrays Afro-Trinidadian women as economic and social actors who made choices based on criteria that was best for their survival. Diptee and Birth counter the assumption that interracial marriages are solely discouraged by the Indo-Trinidadians and that Afro-Trinidadians are merely passive recipients of Indo-Trinidadian stereotypes and cultural biases. Instead, both articles show that attitudes...
toward interracial marriages between Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians operate within a dynamic economic and social structure that is tied to the larger socio-economic goals of the island. While Indo-Trinidadians may appear more vociferous in their opposition to interracial marriages, animosity and distrust operate within both communities.

**Factors Influencing Rates of Interracial Marriage in Trinidad**

Clarke’s (1993) survey combines spatial analysis with an analysis of social interaction to interpret rates of intermarriage between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians. Clarke conducted a comparative analysis of marriage and housing patterns in two towns in Trinidad, Débé and San Fernando, between 1964 and 1980. He found that while there has been a pattern of increased housing segregation between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians, there has also been a corresponding increase in interracial marriages between the two groups. The rate of interracial marriage, while overall still a small percentage of total marriages, more than doubled in both San Fernando and Débé between 1964 and 1980. Clarke postulates that the high number of Indo-Trinidadians converting to Christianity (75% of interracial marriages were between Christian couples), the increased independence in the choice of mate selection, and the delay in age of marriage from the late teens to the early to mid-twenties, are contributing factors to the rise in interracial marriages. Clarke found that interracial marriages between Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadians occur later in life compared to intra-racial marriages, the average age for males being 33.1 and for females 30.3 years old. Reddock (1994b) suggests that factors relating to maturity and possibly economic security may influence a person’s decision to enter into an interracial union later in life.
Clarke’s (1993) study shows that Trinidad’s changing social and economic structure influenced cultural patterns and supported the opportunity for interracial marriages to occur. Increased independence and a delayed age of marriage meant that Indo-Trinidadians increased their opportunity to meet and interact with Afro-Trinidadians and economic security afforded individuals the ability to make decisions that contradicted community norms without suffering economic consequences.

Clarke’s research is important because he shows that interracial marriages in Trinidad are not necessarily a reflection of improved ethnic relations or community integration but rather a function of opportunities for social contact and personal independence. However, he missed an opportunity to further explain the rise in interracial marriages despite continued segregation strategies by omitting potentially valuable data such as gender, profession, and education levels about those who choose interracial marriages. Furthermore, by limiting his study to a quantitative analysis, he does not explain why people were motivated to enter into an interracial marriage despite community opposition. This question is best answered by using the qualitative methods in my study to understand the complex personal decision-making process that informs why certain people choose interracial marriages.

**Overview of Research on Indo-Trinidadian Women**

Numerous researchers (Mehta 2004; Brereton 1994; Haniff 1996; Reddock 1988a; Poynting 1987) have critiqued the lack of writing by and about Indo-Trinidadian women. Much of what has been written in both academic and fictional literature stereotypes Indo-Trinidadian women as static, one-dimensional and rooted in Indian tradition and culture. For example, Mahabir’s (1994) article, “The Changing Role of the
East Indian Woman,” provides a sociological analysis of how the role of women has evolved over time in the Indo-Trinidadian community. Beginning with the creation of villages after indentureship and following the development of the Indo-Trinidadian family through to the present, Mahabir outlines how the major social, political and economic changes in Trinidad have affected the role of Indo-Trinidadian women within the family and the community. Throughout the article Mahabir refers to her subjects in the singular (i.e., “Indian woman”) thereby appearing to relegate all Indo-Trinidadian women to a homogenous group who think and behave as a uniform entity. In addition, socio-cultural transitions are described as forces that exist beyond their control. The “Indian woman” appears to simply adjust to circumstances as they arise without impacting the conditions which create change.

In his article exploring the role of Indo-Trinidadian women in Caribbean literature Poynting (1987) analyzes the exclusion of women’s voices and the co-optation of their role and reality by Indo-Trinidadian authors. Poynting notes that texts by Indo-Trinidadian men demonstrate little evidence that they possess any knowledge of Indo-Trinidadian women’s experiences. Indo-Trinidadian women are portrayed in very limited, passive, and non-threatening roles as the girl who is seduced and abandoned and either suffers terrible beatings or chooses to commit suicide, the suffering wife who is abandoned, or the stoic mother who endures terrible hardships to keep her family together. Most notably, the role of Indo-Trinidadian women as mother is overemphasized and characters portraying Indo-Trinidadian women as sexual beings whether as wives or unmarried women are under-emphasized or omitted. Although the Indo-Trinidadian mother is often portrayed with great sympathy, there is no exploration
of her inner feelings and desires leaving her as a two-dimensional, stereotypical figure (Kanhai 1999, Poynting 1987). Literary artists are striving to counter such deterministic images through new forms of expression and feminist perspectives. Feminist researchers such as Puri (1997), Haniff (1996), Mohammed (1995), Niranjana (1995) and Reddock (1994b) seek to deconstruct the notion of a passive, one-dimensional Indo-Trinidadian woman.

Mehta’s (2004) recent book examines the specific challenges Indo-Trinidadian women face when they choose to write. According to Mehta, Indo-Caribbean women writers remain marginalized due to (1) a heritage of indentureship and plantation labor, (2) the inhibiting impact of repressive social and familial structures, particularly the revival of Hindu and Muslim fundamentalism and their misogynistic views of women, (3) the lack of support and validation from family members and the resulting sense of insecurity, self-censorship, exile and pressure to placate their family and community, (4) an ambivalent connection to the dominant Afro-Caribbean culture, and (5) limited access to the wider network of diasporic writers. Indo-Caribbean women who write become part of a highly politicized process challenging deeply ingrained notions of identity and definitions of ideal womanhood, Hindu insularity and cultural chauvinism and often risk ostracism, accusations of betrayal and intimidation.

Poynting (1987) notes that literature published by Indo-Trinidadian women focus more on social injustice, bigotry, religious intolerance and personal relationships as compared to male authors. The emphasis on social issues appears to reflect their role in society and the higher importance such issues play in their everyday lives. By gradually adopting what Mehta calls “migrating subjectivities” Indo-Caribbean women writers are
beginning to occupy multiple subject positionings that are gradually allowing them to confront their own gender, ethnic and religious biases and the double standards within Indo-Caribbean communities which have been tightly masked from outsiders. This awareness has necessitated the development of an insider/outsider position of double consciousness as a means of negotiating marginality both within and outside of the Indo-Trinidadian community (Mehta 2004: 9).

Kanhai (1999) developed an anthology of writings by Indo-Trinidadian women entitled Matikor which she claims is the only “formal, public testament to date that there is an Indian, female identity in the Caribbean that does not come under male jurisdiction” (Kanhai 1999: 4). Kanhai explores the development of an authentic Indo-Trinidadian woman’s voice in the arts noting that woman are not breaking from Indo-Trinidadian tradition by mimicking Afro-Caribbean culture, but rather are developing their own unique re-invention of Indo-Caribbean cultural practices.

Feminist social scientists are beginning to analyze the relationship between Indo-Trinidadian gender relations and ethnicity, particularly in terms of interracial relationships. Puri (1997) examines how the persistent use of colonial stereotypes, particularly as they apply to Indo-Trinidadian women, are used to divide Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians and maintain the current political and social system. She notes that the Indian orthodoxy considers any form of syncretic identity a threat to their construction of Indianess whether it is through interracial marriage (termed douglarization) or a fusion in cultural practices, behaviors or values (creolization). Any perceived deviance from a strictly defined notion of Indian womanhood is associated with creolization and considered oppositional to the construction of Indianess. Douglas
are considered especially dangerous to the Indo-Trinidadian orthodoxy because they draw attention to the reality of interracial marriages and they break the stranglehold on racialized politics and the popular purist ethnic discourse that Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians are not interconnected.

Like Puri, Niranjana (1995:11) writes that “Indianness is seen to be inextricable from cultural purity which in turn is seen to hinge on questions of female propriety and morality (Niranjana 1995: 11).” Niranjana notes that when Indo-Trinidadians make a claim to Indianness, they are attempting assert a similarity to India and emphasize their cultural dissimilarity with other ethnic groups in Trinidad, particularly Afro-Trinidadians. How women are defined and what behavior is considered proper is critical to the maintenance of a supposed unbroken link to India and serve to define Indo-Trinidadian women in opposition to both white Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian women. According to Puri, any creolized behavior by Indo-Trinidadian women is seen to threaten the community’s tenuous hold on their claim to Indianness and to compromise their claim to an “ancient past and purity narrative (Puri 1997).”

Writers and scholars are gradually overcoming the lack of allowable space for Indo-Trinidadian women to express their identity and relationship to Trinidad. However, none of these works include the perspective of Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages and their unique contribution to the debate on gender roles, identity and ethnicity. The omission of their voices reinforces perceptions that women who choose interracial marriages are somehow deviant, marginal or have chosen to reject their Indo-Trinidadian identity.
My study will highlight the voices of women normally marginalized from community studies. By expressing the voices of 8 Indo-Trinidadian women married to Afro-Trinidadian men, this study will shift the focus from quantitative analyses that examine rates of interracial marriage to a deeper examination of why an Indo-Trinidadian woman would choose to challenge family and community norms by marrying a man of Afro-Trinidadian descent. My study builds on models that predict rates of intermarriage (Qian 1999; Espin 1999; Saenz, et al. 1995; Anderson and Saenz 1994; Barbara 1994; Clarke 1993; Sung 1990; Muhsam 1990) by using qualitative data to develop a set of attributes found in women who choose interracial marriages. In-depth interviews allowed me to go beyond statistical observations to understand how women in interracial marriages reshape their perceptions of gender, ethnicity, and identity to align with their decision to choose an interracial marriage. In-depth interviews with women in interracial marriages also provide a better understanding of the perceived benefits of choosing an interracial marriage over marriage to an Indo-Trinidadian and explain why strong social opposition to interracial marriages is not a sufficient deterrent. Finally, by examining the decision-making process of Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages a clearer understanding emerges of how the process of integration and assimilation is changing in Trinidad, particularly within the Indo-Trinidadian community.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN

My study is conducted within theoretical and methodological frameworks espoused by feminist anthropology and native anthropology. It is political and emancipatory in that it seeks to expose underlying systems of power and control that limit choices Indo-Trinidadian women can make through social controls and restricted access to power and institutions. By incorporating theories and methodologies that actively seek to highlight women’s perspectives, one can more accurately reflect the realities of their lives. The purpose of this chapter is to (1) outline how native anthropology and feminist anthropology challenge patriarchal, western-centered theoretical paradigms and deliberately highlight the voices of women of color, (2) provide an analysis of feminist research in the Caribbean with a particular emphasis on the findings of Trinidadian feminist researchers, Patricia Mohammed and Rhoda Reddock, (3) describe the methodological techniques used for this research study and (4) outline the research group and the specific tools used to conduct this research project.

Native Anthropology and Feminist Anthropology

Native Anthropology

Native anthropology is the product of challenges to anthropology put forward in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is an approach generally understood to refer to those anthropologists of color that share a history of colonialism and political and economic
domination from the West and who are “native” to or claim an “insider” status in the region they are researching (Slocum 2001; Motzafi-Haller 1997). Native anthropology critiques the collusion of positivist anthropology with the hegemonic nature of colonialism. Much of western anthropologists’ work has been framed by two central “needs”; the need to justify the conditions created in both white and Third World societies in the wake of capitalism and colonial domination and the need to criticize certain aspects of these same structures. This paradox has defined much of anthropology and explains the abundance of negative perceptions of people of color found in the discipline (Willis 1974).

Native anthropology is based on the production of an alternative insider’s viewpoint as a result of the “native” anthropologist’s unique position as both an insider and outsider in the community (Slocum 2001; McClaurin 1996). Thus, native anthropology began as a theoretical perspective which attempted to undermine the traditional power dynamics between the “colonizer and the colonized” through a reformulation of the ethnographer-informant relationship (Slocum 2001). Unlike other approaches to anthropology, native anthropologists make explicit the fact that when they present the Other, they inherently present themselves. This contradiction is what compels them to examine the political and ethical challenges of their situation (Motzafi-Haller 1997; Abu-Lughod 1991).

Native anthropology implies a qualitatively different research process from traditional anthropology due to a more intimate connection with a nation-state, culture or ethnic group (Fahim and Helmer 1980). Those who practice native anthropology do not assume that their position provides a better ethnography. Instead, they argue that it
provides a different perspective due to their unique role in the society (Jones 1988). Native anthropologists draw upon the experience of oppression in their own lives to critically inform their research and writing process. They are explicit in their desire to write from a position of social and political engagement and see their work as a means of creating transformative action (Slocum 2001). Motzafi-Haller suggests that the “nativist turn” is more about a trend toward more radical and politically conscious scholarship advocated by self-identified native scholars than the ethnic origin of the researcher (Motzafi-Haller 1997: 217).

Fahim and Helmer (1980) argue that there are many methodological advantages as well as disadvantages to the unique positionality of the native anthropologist. Identification with the cultural group leads to greater expectations of conformity in behavior. Native anthropologists are often subject to the same constraints as members of the local community making access to certain data in the field difficult. In addition, certain questions regarding folk knowledge may appear obvious and redundant to informants since they will assume that the anthropologist already knows the answer. Non-native scholars are often allowed a certain degree of flexibility because of their outsider status and research authority. This can be a useful asset in asking questions that may appear embarrassing and accessing normally restricted parts of society. Finally, the native anthropologist is not always able to break down the social categories they are placed into thereby, once again, sometimes losing access to information (Fahim and Helmer 1980).

However, the advantages are equally important. Native anthropologists have a greater ability to understand and accurately interpret the underlying symbols and values
that may remain a mystery to “outsiders” (Fahim and Helmer 1980). In addition, native anthropologists have a greater awareness of potential holes or gaps in their project, which allows for a more complete analysis. Delmos Jones (1988) writes that as an African-American, he maintained a cynical view toward previous research projects on the black community and knew what to critique and what to accept as accurate.

In summary, native anthropology is a useful approach for anthropologists from the Global South because it, (1) explicitly outlines the unique positionality of the anthropologist as both insider and outsider, (2) draws on a number of theoretical disciplines, however, it situates itself as a “bottom up” approach, and (3) is based on the assumption that theoretical models can be derived from this approach. Native anthropologists challenge the notion that accurate anthropology requires an “objective researcher” who is “outside” of the community being studied (McClaurin 1996; Jones 1988; Fahim and Helmer 1980). Instead, native anthropologists have the unique ability to gather information both as insiders and outsiders giving them the potential to interpret culture in a deeper, more politically explicit and transformative manner than traditional anthropology (Slocum 2001; Motzafi-Haller 1997).

Working as a Native Anthropologist

Working as a native anthropologist had a number of advantages and unique challenges. Because I am a woman of Indian descent I was able to easily blend into Trinidad society and avoid potential barriers that a non-Indian anthropologist would have had to work harder to overcome. Time and again Trinidadians I interacted with told me that it was my Indian background that helped gain access to interviews. Because I was already familiar with Hindu imagery, patterns of deference and respect, and some aspects
of Indian popular culture, I was able to move through interviews with greater ease. This shared background extended itself to create an impression in my informants that I was sympathetic to their sentiments on ethnic relations, the maintenance of Indian culture and their statements about Hinduism. Being of Indian descent increased my comfort level as well. I felt safer and enjoyed the fact that no one knew I wasn’t Trinidadian (until I spoke) when I went to the local markets or walked around town by myself. This was the first time I felt surrounded by things Indian outside of India and soaked in the feeling of being in the ‘majority” culture. I heard Indian music in the maxi-taxi’s, saw Hindu iconography in stores, ate on palm leaves, listened to Hindu music on the radio and passed Hindu and Muslim temples in small towns. It wasn’t that I felt more Indian in Trinidad, in fact, I was very aware of the difference between my identity and life as a second generation Indian-American and Indo-Trinidadian culture. However, I felt a sense of belonging, of having my culture, my religion, my skin color and hair, feel mainstream.

Albert Memmi (1965: 113) wrote that “the colonized must stop defining himself through the categories of the colonizers. If he ceases to be colonized, he will become something else.” I try to identify the “something else” in my study. I approached this study with the intention of unmasking intra-racial behaviors that can trace their existence to the legacy of colonialism and racism imposed upon Indians and people within the Indian diaspora. Sheth and Handa (1993), both academics of Indian descent, explore concepts of “India/n” and “India/ness” and how people in the Indian diaspora relate to each other. They note:

We began to realize that we had to create a space for our different identities that were informed, in very concrete terms, by different histories and locations that we
redefined and reformulated at specific junctures in our lives. The focus changed from speaking about our different geographical locations...in a bid for proving our India/ness to a form that kept intact the India/n in us. (Sheth and Handa 1993: 53-59).

I will attempt to provide a greater understanding of interracial relationships, an emotionally charged issue affecting the Indo-Trinidadian community. My goal is to build on Sheth and Handa and suggest alternative ways of relating that accept the ever-changing nature of the Indo-Trinidadian community while respecting and preserving the unique richness and value of their Indian identity.

**Feminist Anthropology**

Feminist anthropology’s main contribution to anthropology is the demonstration that gender relations must be a central question to the discipline and to the social sciences as a whole (Moore 1988). Feminist anthropology seeks to create an alternative view of culture that illuminates contradictions, acknowledges oppression, and supports social change. It is value laden, political, and attempts to expose, critique, and change institutions of power (Mies 1991).

Feminist anthropologists seek alternative ways to communicate, share and interpret the informant’s experiences. It shifts the focus from discrete events to the everyday, mundane events because it is usually during those acts performed on a daily basis that gendered experiences are best reflected (Fonow and Cook 1991). At its core, feminist anthropology is reflexive, always critiquing the nature of research and the researcher’s role in the data collection process, action oriented, collaborative and spontaneous. It redefines the role between the researcher and the informant by valuing emotional reciprocity. It negates the concept of an “ivory tower” and requires that the researcher listen to critiques, whether it comes from peers or research subjects (Freeman...
Feminist anthropology challenges traditional anthropology by requiring the researcher to go beyond just recording women’s circumstances to understanding the “logic” and motivation behind their situation (Freeman and Murdock 2001).

Chapter 2 discussed the dearth of research and literature by and about Indo-Trinidadian women. Furthermore, most of what has been written has failed to present Indo-Trinidadian women as active participants in community life; instead, they reproduce stereotypical constructions of Indo-Trinidadian womanhood. Feminist anthropology is best suited for my study because it explicitly attempts to represent women’s lives as integral to community and societal structures. Indo-Trinidadian women married to Afro-Trinidadian men are commonly portrayed as marginal to the Indo-Trinidadian community and not representative of authentic Indo-Trinidadian culture. Feminist anthropology is best equipped to demonstrate that Indo-Trinidadian women are actively creating, maintaining and re-creating social structures and institutions and they do not always support mainstream ideology. However, by understanding why Indo-Trinidadian women might choose to marry Afro-Trinidadian men, researchers will be able to better understand the complexity of Indo-Trinidadian culture.

**Feminism and Methodology**

Feminist research seeks to create an alternate space for meanings and interpretations that historically were not revealed due to gender-biased research (Fonow and Cook 1991; Harding 1987b). Harding argues against the idea of a feminist methodology stating that feminists can and should use any method available. What is important is not what method is chosen but how it is used in the research process.
Feminist empiricism argues that the scientific method is not effective at eliminating widespread biases. Traditional theories have been applied in ways that make it difficult to understand women’s participation in social life, systematically exclude the idea that women can be agents of knowledge, and do not analyze the meanings of women’s contributions to society for women (Harding 1987a: 187). Feminist researchers provide more accurate scientific results because they focus on the “context of discovery,” as well as the “context for justification” (Harding 1987a: 183), meaning that feminist researchers counter the traditional, objectivist perspective that allows the researcher to remove themselves from the study leaving the researched “on display” (Harding 1987b: 9). Feminist researchers put themselves on the same critical plane as the subject matter by stating their biases as part of the research. Feminist researchers expect women’s experiences to differ based on a number of factors including ethnicity, class and location. They generate hypotheses from the perspective of women’s experiences and use women’s experiences to test the validity of the research. Finally, feminist research does not just uncover a “truth” but it looks for a way to change the oppressive conditions under which “truth” is maintained. Thus, feminist inquiry creates less biased, and therefore better, results than traditional scientific inquiry (Fonow and Cook 1991; Harding 1987b).

Jill Vickers (2002) writes that while there are no discreet, identifiable set of feminist methodologies, best practices in feminist research can be identified. Vickers notes that the best feminist research is able to connect the local, national and transnational factors that influence women’s lives. Although women worldwide are linked by global socio-political and economic factors, how women interact to them is shaped by very local characteristics and depends upon the form of nation-state they
function under (Vickers 2002: 83). Best practices in feminist research reflect how the common experience of global forces produce a shared feminist concern, yet represent the diversity of responses to the concern based on the way the issue manifests in a particular location. Conversely, best practices show unique historical and ideological differences can produce very different experiences of global issues at a local level and yet show how responses from women in different locations can be used to respond to that unique situation (Vickers 2002: 83-84). Thus, effective feminist research can situate women within the diverse, multi-layered context that shapes and defines their lives and provide the tools to create social change in a way that is meaningful, collaborative and appropriate for the location.

Antoinette Burton (1999) stresses the connection between feminism and historical analysis as an effective means of positioning the local, regional and global impact of imperialism and colonialism on women's lives. Situating women's lives within a historical context is critical because it simultaneously treats women as subjects impacted by outside forces on multiple levels as well as agents who are actively impacting and controlling their lives and surroundings. Thus, adding women's voices to the historical record reinterprets historical events to more accurately portray the role of women in shaping society. Through the provision of a feminist historical backdrop, feminists can more accurately study women's current contributions and meaningfully engage women in interpreting and improving their lives (Burton 1999).

Feminism and Theory

Feminist theory has undergone significant changes over the past decade as it grows and changes in response to the global and local conditions which impact women’s
lives. The early 1990s were marked by challenges to the hegemonic tendencies in feminism to reflect the privilege, values and lives of white, middle class women. In her groundbreaking article, Mohanty (1994) challenged feminists of color to reclaim their political and historical authority and recapture the multiplicity and complexity of their lives and experiences by examining the ways in which women are constituted as “women” within structures and institutions rather than as actors functioning on the periphery of society’s institutions. Much western feminist research assumed that women were a singular, universal group that shared identical interests, desires and goals regardless of history, ethnicity, or class, thereby assuming a universal definition of gender and patriarchy which could be applied cross-culturally.” This belief in the universal oppression of all women resulted in the creation of an “average Third World woman” who was juxtaposed against the “modern, free western woman” (Mohanty 1994: 200). Thus, western feminism continued to perpetuate the original power relationship upon which cultural anthropology was founded; the West was the primary signifier or referent and all non-western cultures are understood in relation to the West. Third World women were defined by the way they were or were not affected by institutions and structures, thereby robbing them of their agency.

Narayan (2000) argues that feminist attempts to avoid western hegemony through gender essentialism fail when the focus on cultural differences is overemphasized and culturally essentialist, binary categories such as western and non-western/Other are produced (Narayan 2000: 82). Cultural essentialism conflates socially dominant cultural norms with the actual values and practices of the entire society. Narayan 2000: 82). Women’s conformity to the status quo is assumed to be a reflection of cultural
preservation and resistance to westernization and feminist resistance is perceived as a cultural betrayal (Narayan 2000: 85).

Narayan writes that cultural essentialism can be resisted by dismantling the prevailing ahistorical view of culture with a critical understanding of the community’s history and politics (Narayan 2000: 86). Rather than portraying culture as separate and distinct identities, cultures need to be understood as being created from a unique set of complex discursive practices linked to a political agenda (Narayan 2000: 87).

**Transnational Feminism**

Grewal and Kaplan (1999: 349) argue for what they call “transnational feminist cultural studies” as a form of resistance and critique. Transnational feminist inquiry links together postmodernity, nationalism, issues of race and racism, critiques of global feminism, imperialism and emergent patriarchies. In particular there is a focus on understanding how patriarchies are constituted and maintained within the scattered hegemonies of the postmodern world and how feminists can resist them. In order to avoid the pitfalls of essentialism, transnational feminists use the concept of links to understand the connection between the networks of economic and social relations that occur in response to global capital and its effects. Linkages do not infer reciprocity or sameness, nor do they obscure power differentials. Links provide a means to understand how various, seemingly unconnected elements, such as fundamentalism, capitalism or nationalism operate together and impact women’s lives (Grewal and Kaplan 1999: 359). Thus transnational feminist cultural studies “encompass the national, the global, the historical as well as the contemporary diasporic and the space in between (Grewal and Kaplan 1999: 360).”
**Black Feminist Anthropology**

The above mentioned theories are useful for understanding and analyzing how to conduct feminist research that does not reproduce the underlying systems of power inherent in the “ivory towers” of academia that privileges objective inquiry, and white, patriarchal power. However, while they call for the dismantling of oppressive structures, they do not address the unique role women of color play in shaping the discipline. What is the contribution of feminist, women of color anthropologists to the study of gender and anthropology?

*Black Feminist Anthropology* (2001) was the first publication of original essays that specifically addressed, from an anthropological perspective, how “race, gender and sometimes class have produced an ethnographic praxis informed by identity, social race, discriminatory practices in the academy and society, and field encounters influenced by colonialism” (McClaurin 2001: 11). The goal is to advance a theory of black feminist anthropology that is founded on advancement of understanding the intersection of race, class and gender and a commitment to dismantling the structures that support oppression. Black feminist anthropologists reject objectivity and explicitly define themselves as “Black” first and “anthropologist” second. They reject the idea that their experiences as black women and as members of an oppressed group can be set aside to meet an objective ideal. Therefore it makes sense that black feminist anthropologists situate their research within the African diaspora since they are explicitly concerned with issues that affect their community. Black feminist anthropologists have paved the ground for women of color to break away from a hyphenated, marginal position within anthropology and situate their work within theories and practices that reflect their
realities and perspectives. It draws on the work of other disciplines but challenges anthropology to look within to reveal its own racist and sexist biases.

As a feminist “native” anthropologist I build on the work of transnational feminism by creating a work which connects the global processes of colonialism, post-colonialism, race, and gender on the localized practice of interracial marriage. Interracial marriages push the bounds of Us and Other and challenge the researcher to understand how modern day notions of womanhood, community member and citizen wind around the lives of Indo-Trinidadian women. I am intentionally reflexive, revealing the conflicting struggles and biases I brought to the research process. I situate the research in a historical context showing how the identity of Indo-Trinidadian women has evolved since their arrival. And finally, I use feminist ethnographic techniques to interview women and record their perspectives. I write my study with the hope that future feminist researchers in the Caribbean can better understand how Indo-Trinidadian women’s lives are linked to their community, nation and the Indian diaspora.

Caribbean Feminism and Social Science Research

Since the 1970s historians of Caribbean history have actively sought to rewrite the historical record and influence contemporary discussions to include the role of women in shaping current cultural, social and political systems. The gradual acceptance of social history methods, the emergence of “women’s history” in the 1960s, the international women’s movement and the development of a group of social scientists interested in women’s studies all contributed to the development of women’s history in the Caribbean (Shepherd 1999: xvii).
Christine Barrow (1998) notes areas that distinguish the Caribbean from the rest of the Americas. Key differences include, (1) the near disappearance of indigenous communities from contemporary Caribbean society, (2) the lack of a pre-capitalist agricultural system, (3) a system of slavery that negated gender differences and therefore resulted in greater equality and autonomy between Afro-Caribbean men and women, (4) the deep-rootedness of female-headed households in Caribbean culture dating back to slavery, and (5) the appearance that Eurocentric ideologies influenced the black population in the Caribbean more than many other Third World populations that survived colonialism and imperialism,” including European concepts of respectability and domestication for women. And yet Caribbean feminists note that in spite of these shared historical and social trends, women’s lives in the Caribbean greatly differ based on a number of factors including ethnicity, class, geography, and language. Rahim quotes Thorpe’s (1975) analysis:

The nature of the West Indian experience has mitigated against the emergence of any single set of characteristics that might be said to describe the West Indian woman. West Indian history is of several different peoples who have come from countries that are racially and culturally very dissimilar, one from the other. Only the Caribbean experience links the members of the ethnically diverse West Indian population, and this Caribbean experience has not been the same for the various immigrant groups (Rahim 1997: 228).

Caribbean feminists are challenged to develop a gender analysis that reflects the local circumstances that influence women’s lives within the broader socio-economic, political and cultural context of the Caribbean. As Sherezada notes, if the Caribbean was to think of itself as a nation, women writers would need to develop a “definition of sameness and diversity that respects the universal humanness of the Caribbean, that tries to assimilate all our cultural peculiarities and yet is not fundamentally shaped or defined by the West (Sherezada 1998: 116).”
Lisbeth Paravisini-Gebert (1997) cautions against studies on Caribbean women’s lives that assume that feminism did not exist in the Caribbean before the 1970s and was largely influenced by western women. This assumption serves to dehistoricize Caribbean women and casts them as backwards or oppressed compared to American and European women and results in studies that do not reflect the unique reality of Caribbean women’s lives or their perceptions of feminism.

Paravisini-Gebert (1997: 11) further criticizes post-colonial theories for falsely assuming that Caribbean women’s lives are primarily shaped by the effects of colonialism. This theory is particularly erroneous because it mandates that all actions taken by the “colonized” whether it be assimilation or revolution are reactive to the control of the “colonizer.” Power relationships are assumed to be vertical and do not take into account the horizontal and local relationships that influence women’s lives (Paravisini-Gebert 1997: 167). Paravisini-Gebert also warns against common assumptions that negate the interconnectedness of Caribbean women’s lives to each other. Interregional structures for communication as well as heavy migration within the Caribbean as well as to the United States and Europe have played a major role in developing leadership skills and feminist agendas in the region as women translate their ability to survive in a foreign country into leadership skills at home. Sherazada (1997: 117) calls for the creation of a “national” Caribbean literature influenced by new voices “To begin to define what really defines us and the techniques or forms of expression to express it…to create and define a notion of Caribbeanism.”

Caribbean feminist social scientists have risen to the challenge and continue to develop and expand research techniques to accurately capture the important role and
contributions of all women. Freeman and Murdock (2001: 435) write that the new feminist ethnographies coming from the Caribbean and Latin America are increasingly focused on “diversity, agency, and ideological/discursive forms, and paying attention to local meanings as well as to the structural inequalities that impinge upon and constrain social actors.” In their analysis of 5 recent feminist ethnographies about Latin America and the Caribbean, Freeman and Murdock (2001) note that the ethnographers successfully portrayed women’s lives in a manner that was relevant and meaningful to the Caribbean and Latin America as well as to international policy without falsely adopting issues considered central to contemporary western feminist ethnography, thus paving the way for future studies that truly serve the interests of Caribbean people.

**Caribbean Feminism and Indo-Trinidadian Women**

Trinidad’s ethnic composition highlights the complexity of trying to interpret women’s experiences in the Caribbean. Despite the shared history of living in Trinidad, the experiences of white, Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian women are each unique. Furthermore, efforts to reinterpret the historical record to better reflect the history of women in Trinidad are hampered by the fact that historical documents outlining the lives of women over the past 400 years are virtually non-existent, especially documents revealing information regarding Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian women (Mehta 2004; Shepherd 1999).

In Rahim’s (1997) examination of published women’s writings in Trinidad between 1920 and 1960, she found that extremely few literary pieces authored by women were available. Of the 177 literary pieces published by The Beacon, Trinidad’s most widely read newspaper in the 1920s and 1930s, women wrote only 32 articles.
Even fewer literary works were published during the 1940s and 1950s. The 1960s were not much better with only 5 major publications authored by women. Brereton (1994) focused on non-published works (letters, diaries, memoirs and other personal journals) and found that the majority of documents which survived the past century were written by the white Creole elite, many of whom were not born in the Caribbean. Only 2 diaries written by Afro-Caribbean women from the 19th century exist and there is only 1 memoir by an Indo-Trinidadian woman written in the 20th century. Clearly, the written record is extremely limited and certain communities are particularly underrepresented, presenting a challenge to scholars reinterpreting the historical record. Feminist social scientists working to construct a gendered understanding of Trinidad have had to find alternatives to the written word to reconstruct and understand women’s lives and experiences.

In 1995, at the 150th Anniversary of Indentureship conference held at the University of the West Indies, Dr. Nesha Haniff stated that the biggest failure of the Caribbean feminist movement had been its “inability to advocate for and support East Indian women (Haniff 1996: 9).” While Indo-Trinidadian women have benefited from policy changes that impact all women regardless of ethnicity, there was a noticeable lack of scholarship on Indo-Trinidadian women. Haniff charged that the lack of a feminist analysis contributed to the continued stereotyping of Indo-Trinidadian women as poor, uneducated victims, hidden behind a large family and tradition. However, she noted the emergence of several Trinidadian and Caribbean scholars including Rhoda Reddock, Verene Shephard, Rawidda Baksh-Soodeen, and Patricia Mohammed whose works were beginning to fill the void (Haniff 1996). Since Haniff’s lecture, studies by and about Indo-Caribbean women remain underrepresented compared to their Afro-Caribbean
counterparts (Mehta 2004: 2-3). However, there has been a noticeable increase in feminist scholarship on Indo-Trinidadian women (Mehta 2004; Kanhai 1999; Mohammed 1995; Yelvington 1995; Reddock 1994a) which has begun to dismantle ingrained myths and stereotypes.

Two feminist scholars who have broken new ground on research related to Indo-Trinidadian women are Patricia Mohammed and Rhoda Reddock. Building on the connection between the reconstruction of the historical record to include women’s participation and the importance of alternative methodological techniques for accurately representing women’s voices, they have begun to dismantle the dominant stereotype of Indo-Trinidadian women as “passive observers” or “truncated, Third World women” so accurately described by Mohanty (1994).

Mohammed (1998, 1996, 1994, 1993, 1985), a historian of Indo-Trinidadian descent argues that the norms and behaviors of a society are tied to an emotional legacy invested in retaining the unique identity of the community. She states that gender relations are critical markers of community and are used to shape and define a community’s identity as much as language, religion, customs, or kinship structure. Mohammed defines gender relations as interactions premised on concepts of masculinity and femininity such as sexuality, marriage, kinship, the sexual division of labor, and women’s position relative to men in economic, social and political settings. Because gender relations are changing, localized, and interconnected, Mohammed stresses that social historians should not draw broad conclusions regarding gender relations within a community but must analyze spheres of negotiation in gender relations under particular historical circumstances (Mohammed 1995: 92).
Much of Mohammed’s theory is drawn from her groundbreaking work, *A Social History of Post-Migrant Indians in Trinidad from 1917 to 1947: A Gender Perspective*, which examines the interplay of ethnicity, gender, power and identity in the Indo-Trinidadian community from 1917 to 1947. Mohammed argues that although gender relations are sanctioned by a particular ideology and function within a set of social mechanisms that determine appropriate behavior, they are not always reflective of the dominant social structure. However, they are influenced by and reactive to the dominant structure (Mohammed 1995). According to Mohammed a colonial system was created to ensure competition between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians for scarce resources, which neither community owned. Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians, were constantly waging a battle against each other for control of economic, social and political resources and power. At the macro level, institutions such as government and economic structures were shaped and reshaped to respond to this struggle for validation and power. At the micro level, both groups developed systems of gender relations, marriage, kinship, and family structure to respond to their understanding of acceptable behavior within a racially divisive environment. Functioning at the bottom of the economic and social ladder, Indo-Trinidadians felt threatened by the other ethnic groups and therefore turned inward and developed a set of rules guiding femininity and masculinity which they believed would allow Indian culture to survive in Trinidad. A gender system was created based on a strict patriarchy similar to what Indo-Trinidadians had in India and became one of the most significant markers to separate Indo-Trinidadians from the other ethnic groups and communities on the island (Mohammed 1995, 1993b).
Mohammed writes that a critical concern for social scientists is to understand a woman’s choice to challenge culturally-prescribed norms. She notes that some people choose to function within the constraints of ascribed norms while others may choose or circumstances may force them to redefine culturally accepted notions of gender, class or ethnicity (Mohammed 1993a: 209). Two key factors impact one’s decision, (1) the moment in time when one decides to make a decision and (2) the life stage in which the decision is made:

Ethnicity and gender are determined by birth, class by circumstances at birth, but how these are shaped in subsequent years is perhaps a complex mix of experience and collective consciousness, the latter being itself modified by experience and so on (Mohammed 1993a: 209).

Reddock (2001, 1994a, 1990, 1988a, 1988b) seeks to bring a feminist analysis to the current debate over definitions of Trinidad and Tobago’s national culture and identity. She analyzes the use of women as symbols of national or racial identity by dissecting the correlation of women’s roles in an ethnic community to the community’s concept of identity. She notes that historically, elite members of an ethnic community regulated women’s behavior in order maintain cultural boundaries and to achieve greater power over another community. However, Reddock’s research illustrates the ambiguity and near impossibility of creating a reified, separate national culture that supports discrete ethnic groups. By breaking down behavior and perceptions toward women of African and Indian descent as well as children of mixed race marriages, Reddock successfully demonstrates that gender, class, ethnicity and identity are interconnected, fluid, and constantly changing and calls into question dogmatic rhetoric that seeks to demonize one community from another.
In keeping with feminist social scientists in the region, Reddock uses oral testimonies to counter dominant perceptions of ethnicity, gender and national identity. Reddock promotes feminist history as a means of providing women with a greater understanding of how socio-economic and political structures shape their lives and the tools to develop strategies to create social change:

The perspective on history gives us a perspective on change. Many women are trapped in the web of the unchangeable, feeling themselves unable to change their situation or that the situation itself cannot be changed. A sense of history gives us an understanding of the process of change and the possibility of change (Reddock 1988b: 11).

It is not just the individual who is transformed when history is revised to more accurately reflect women’s experiences, but rather, communities of women, originally pitted against one another are transformed when they to come together under a shared experience.

Reddock notes that much of the feminist literature written on the intersection gender, class and ethnicity is based on the experiences of women in western societies and South Africa where race and ethnicity are reasons for exploitation by the dominant white culture over the other groups. Reddock argues that the western binary constructions of race, class and gender (ie. man/woman, black/white) do not reflect the reality of Third World countries where two or more Third World groups co-exist (Reddock 2001, 1994a).

Furthermore, although issues of ethnicity and class are central to Caribbean post-colonial thought, Reddock cautions that the black feminist critique situated in the United States and Britain does not fully reflect gender and ethnic relations in the Caribbean. This is primarily because black men in the Caribbean have had much greater political and economic power since independence (albeit not to the same extent as white men) due to their numerical majority and black women have continued to remain marginalized,
thereby adding a layer of gender and ethnic complexity unique to the region (Reddock 2001).

Reddock calls for a conceptualization of difference in the Caribbean that isolates and examines how such constructed differences have been used to define identities:

The long term project of a feminist understanding of difference would not be simply to come to terms with the Other but rather to understand the Other within ourselves as we have in many ways been defined in opposition and in relation to each other (Reddock 2001: 208).

She notes that the real and constructed set of differences that exist between her and Indo-Caribbean women seems to serve the interests of men who used the cultural distance to maintain their control of women and competition between ethnic groups (African, Indian and white) narrows options and opportunities for women:

It was for this reason; therefore, that in my own historical research begun some years ago, my efforts at understanding the experiences of Indian women was as important to me as understanding African women. Not simply because it was politically correct to do so but because our differences had in some way contributed to what we had now been constructed to be. In other words, it was impossible to know myself if I did not know my Others (Reddock 2001: 209).

In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, Reddock notes that Indo-Trinidadian women, as symbols of “pure Indian culture” are juxtaposed against Afro-Trinidadian women, “the Afro-Trinidadian woman was what the Indo-Trinidadian woman was not, and the Indo-Trinidadian woman was what the Afro-Trinidadian woman was not (Reddock 1988: 11b).” By understanding each other’s history, women of Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian descent can begin to recognize and share commonalities and build coalitions across ethnic boundaries.

Caribbean feminism has not only reversed centuries of marginalization and prejudice faced by women of color in the Caribbean but has called into question ethnic, economic and political systems that continue to perpetuate divisive and socially stratified
societies. Because the role of women in the Caribbean was ignored for so long, feminist social scientists such as Rhoda Reddock, Patricia Mohammed, Bridget Brereton and others have focused on re-centering Caribbean women within a revised historical setting in order to better understand women’s current position in society today. As more research focuses on gender and women, greater emphasis has been placed on examining how overarching issues such as ethnicity, gender and class intersect and unfold within and throughout the diversity of experiences that comprise Caribbean women’s lives (Mehta 2004; McClaurin 1996; Mohammed 1995; Yelvington 1995; Reddock 1994a).

Most important to the study of Indo-Trinidadian women has been the role of Trinidadian scholars of both Indian and non-Indian descent who are spearheading research and studies on Indo-Trinidadian women and society. By rewriting the social sciences to more accurately reflect Indo-Trinidadian women’s role in shaping and transforming Trinidadian society, they have begun to dismantle dominant myths and stereotypes of Indo-Trinidadian women as passive, unengaged participants within Trinidad society. This has resulted in a deeper, more accurate understanding of the dynamics of ethnicity, gender and identity in Trinidad and challenged social scientists to broaden their understanding of how critical gender has been to the construction of Caribbean society.

**Research Methodology and Techniques**

This research seeks to continue in the same tradition of examining how larger macro issues of ethnicity and identity interact with individual circumstances, a major methodological component of Caribbean feminist research. Historical perspectives are provided to frame the discussion on gender and ethnic identity in the Indo-Trinidadian
community and to highlight the power dynamics that underlie Indo-Trinidadian opposition to interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men. This is followed by in-depth interviews with Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages with Afro-Trinidadian men. These interviews serve to counter popular perceptions of interracial marriages and provide an in-depth analysis of interracial marriages from the perspective of those who choose such marriages, a perspective not currently found in either the popular literature or academic canon. Finally, their testimonials are compared against interviews conducted by Indo-Trinidadian leaders. This serves to highlight similarities and differences between what Indo-Trinidadian leaders perceive as “proper” Indo-Trinidadian behavior for women and women’s perceptions of their decisions and their lives. By using theory and methodologies that allow for women’s experiences to be the central point of focus, I hope to further efforts to reconstruct a more accurate picture of Trinidad, one that takes into account all its people.

Both feminist theory and native anthropology (Slocum 2001; McClaurin 1996; Mohammed 1995) cite the importance of building rapport with the community under study and the value of alternative sources of information including oral histories, participant observation, and daily interaction with the community being researched. My study uses qualitative research techniques to both elicit as well as analyze information from informants marginalized from traditional anthropology. Ethnographic techniques, specifically in-depth interviews and participant observation, frame the research for this study.
The Ethnographic Method

Ethnographic methodologies, informed by feminist theory and my role as a native anthropologist formed the basis of the research methods used for this research project. Ethnography seeks to provide a holistic description of a culture through first hand experience of living within the society being researched. Ethnography goes beyond studying a culture to learning from a community. Ethnography “seeks to build a systematic understanding of human cultures from the perspective of those who have learned them...It seeks to document the existence of alternative realities and to describe these realities in their own terms (Spradley 1979: 11).” Thus, ethnography cannot be done apart from the community studied, but rather requires the anthropologist to participate in the daily lives of the people under research. Ethnographers systematically record and analyze evidence presented through interviews, from information the researcher gathers through observations of community behavior, and through cultural artifacts (Emerson et al. 1995).

Central to the idea of ethnography is the use of the ethnographer as the main source of data collection since primary data is collected by the ethnographer themselves through fieldwork (Wolcott 1999: 45). Ethnographers use multiple techniques to collect data, primarily participant observation and interviews (Wolcott 1999: 44). Wolcott (1999: 46-47) breaks down participant observation into 3 categories, experiencing (information that comes directly through the senses), enquiring (interviewing or specifically asking an informant for information), and examining (looking at the work of others to elicit information).
Ethnographic techniques are particularly useful for this study because the only access I had to women’s perspectives on interracial marriage were through interviews and participant observation. Traditional sources of information were dominated by those in opposition to interracial marriage and provided little evidence to support my research. By living in Trinidad and participating in the Indo-Trinadian community, I was able to understand firsthand the daily conditions that influenced my informants and shaped their decisions.

**Reflexive Anthropology**

McClaurin (1996: 8) writes in her introduction to *Women of Belize*: “The ethnography is built around their voices primarily, with my own voice as the anthropological ‘interlocutor’ whose role is to reveal the linkages that exist between the women’s understanding of the power of gender…and larger social processes.” This sentence counters traditional anthropology by explicitly locating the researcher within the community being studied. Harding (1987b) writes that feminist research methods require the researcher to situate themselves on the same plane as those being researched. Reflexive accounts grew out of the critique of the supposed objectivism of earlier anthropological accounts that “hid the conditions of knowledge production (Ebron 2001: 215).” Reflexivity challenges the power imbalance inherent in objectivist anthropological methods and improves the quality of the research by allowing the reader to understand the inherent biases and perspectives the researcher infused throughout the work (Harding 1987a: 187). By explicitly stating their role in the research process as well as their intent, the reader is able to discern author’s voice among the informants and better understand the research.
As a “native” and feminist anthropologist and as the collector of the data, I must systematically explain what thoughts, beliefs, prejudices and traits I bring to the research process. As Kulick so aptly asks:

Where exactly is the rapport one might ask, in a set of disciplinary practices that seem to demand (in order to avoid rejection and expulsion) evasion, concealment, and lying about one’s own opinions, identities, and activities outside the field…even as it conditions anthropologists to resist and resent it if local people do the same (Kulick 1995: 11).

Research Methods

I conducted my research primarily through participant observation, research and in-depth interviews. Participant observation allowed me to be actively involved in the Indo-Trinidadian community. I found that by participating in daily activities and special events, I was able to gain a greater understanding of the lived experiences of my informants which resulted in more relevant questions that better reflected the language and nuances of their culture rather than the language and terms I had used in the United States. It also helped me gain the trust of several of my informants. I felt they appreciated my efforts to get to know them and were then willing to be interviewed (Bernard 1995).

In addition to participant observation, I conducted a thorough review of written material including newspaper and magazine articles, research papers, and academic presentations examining the issue of interracial marriages, ethnicity, and identity in Trinidad. Material was gathered primarily from local and university libraries, the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) and the Hindu Women’s Organization (HWO). I concentrated on approximately 100 articles published since 1975 that focused on ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and Indo-Trinidadian identity as
they were most relevant to my topic. In addition to articles on ethnicity and marriage, I found a number of articles debating the acceptability of Indo-Trinidadian women’s participation in “Creole” activities especially Carnival and calypso. A particularly heated debate was also raging regarding the impact of chutney shows, a distinct Indo-Trinidadian music and dance form, on Indo-Trinidadian women’s morality. Lastly, I attended several college classes, conferences and seminars at the University of the West Indies and through the Hindu Women’s Organization that were relevant to my subject of study including a conference on the status of Hindu women in Trinidad.

The most critical data came from in-depth interviews with Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages with Afro-Trinidadian men and Indo-Trinidadian community leaders. Feminist researchers find in-depth interviews to be especially important for studies focused on women’s lives because women are generally marginalized or omitted from traditional sources of information (McClaurin 1996; Gluck and Patai 1991). In-depth or semi-structured interviews, allow the researcher to choose the topic of the interview while letting the informant direct how the discussion flows. The researcher prepares a list of questions or topics they need to cover and uses them as a guide throughout the interview. Effective interviews focus on the process and foster the “dynamic unfolding of the subjects viewpoint” so that both the story as well as the logic behind the narrator’s story is captured (Anderson and Jack 1991: 23). In order to effectively interview women I became an active participant in the conversation, immersing myself in the interview, allowing the informant to lead the interview and supporting the informant throughout the interview, through gestures and comments (Minister 1991). I then had to ensure that my conclusions were truly a result of their
voices and experiences rather than a biased interpretation to prove my hypothesis (McClaurin 1996: 9).

For my interviews with Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial relationships, I developed a questionnaire (Appendix A) with 75 questions that were divided into five sections. Part I focused on general demographic information including age, education, religion, and income. Part II addressed the informant’s family and childhood, their parent’s attitude toward marriage and expectations for their daughter. Part III dealt with the informant’s relationship with her husband before marriage including when and where they met, how their families reacted to their relationship, and their wedding day. Part IV focused on questions related to the impact of their marriage on their relationship with their family and community and the impact their marriage had on life choices including friendships, career and spirituality. Finally, Part V sought to understand my informant’s sense of identity, their relationship to the Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian community and their perception of the role of interracial marriages in the future of Trinidad. The survey was used as a guide for my interviews rather than as a written survey for participants to fill out.

Interviews with the 14 Indo-Trinidadian community leaders followed a similar format. Interviews were conducted at the informant’s workplace and ranged from 1 to 2 hours. I asked my informants questions related to 2 general areas (1) their opinion of interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men and (2) their opinion regarding why Indo-Trinidadian women were choosing to marry Afro-Trinidadian men despite widespread community objections.
Study Groups

The primary source of information for this study comes from 2 groups of informants, (1) Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages with Afro-Trinidadian men, and (2) religious, political, social, and educational leaders in the Indo-Trinidadian community.

Study Group 1: Indo-Trinidadian Women Married to Afro-Trinidadian Men

The first study group consisted of Indo-Trinidadian women married to Afro-Trinidadian men. These informants were the main focus of my study primarily because it was their decision to marry Afro-Trinidadian men and their lives that formed the basis of my study. As a feminist anthropologist, I strongly believe this study will be relevant to the Indo-Trinidadian community, particularly Indo-Trinidadian women, only if it centers on the voices of women living in interracial marriages.

Twelve in-depth interviews were conducted. Of the 12 informants, 10 women were still married at the time of the research and 2 had divorced their husbands. For this study, I included interviews with Indo-Trinidadian women married to mixed race men because the women considered their husband’s African ancestry to be their primary ethnicity.

Four of my informants identified themselves as housewives, and the other 8 worked out of the home. Of the 8 who worked outside the home, 1 was a domestic worker, 2 had secretarial posts and the remaining 5 had professional positions in marketing, journalism and business. All the women interviewed had received some level of schooling but educational levels varied from primary school to university level. Four women received a primary education, 5 completed the equivalent of a high school degree
and 2 were university graduates. Five had received certificates in administrative trades. Two of my informants identified themselves as working class and the other 10 identified as middle or upper middle class. Study participants varied by religion. Six informants practiced Christianity (2 Presbyterians, 1 Roman Catholic, 2 Jehovah’s Witnesses and 1 evangelical Christian). Three practiced Hinduism and 2 considered themselves spiritual but did not adhere to any formal religion. Ten of my informants lived along the east-west corridor in Trinidad in towns with a majority Afro-Trinidadian population and 2 lived in the southern part of the island where the population was predominantly Indo-Trinidadian.

Several of my informants were personal acquaintances I had developed during my stay in Trinidad. For example, I informant was a friend of the woman I boarded with during the first weeks of my stay in Trinidad. We grew to be friends, occasionally spending an evening or afternoon together. Another woman worked as a domestic servant for a family I lived with for several days. However, the majority of my informants were friends or acquaintances with people related to my studies including (friends of university staff members, my host family and other informants). I found that it was not uncommon for several people to refer me to an informant, particularly my better known informants. Many women agreed to meet with me as a favor to their friend who knew of my research. The majority of interviews were conducted at the informant’s home, but interviews also took place at the University of the West Indies, at cafes, and at the informant’s place of business. One interview took place over the phone because we could not find a time to meet. Interview times ranged from 50 minutes to 2 hours with the majority lasting approximately 90 minutes. The majority of my interviews were taped, however, 2 informants declined to be recorded.
Because of the personal nature of their stories I felt particularly anxious to ensure that my informants knew I was not biased against them. I did find that 15 or 20 minutes into the interview, my informants would relax and share more openly. Using the questionnaire as a guide rather than a prescribed format helped ease the distance between me as the interviewer and them as the informant and often resulted in them re-shaping and leading the interview, resulting in richer ethnographic information. I found that the majority of my informants had spent a great deal of time analyzing their decision to marry outside of their community, however, I was often the first person they talked to about their decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian man. Some women even stated that they did not discuss their marriage with friends. I found that my informants appeared to enjoy the opportunity to reflect on their marriage and its impact on their lives.

These interviews provided me with an in-depth understanding of the motivating factors and lived reality of interracial marriages in Trinidad. I gained first hand knowledge of what Indo-Trinidadian women experience once they choose to marry an Afro-Trinidadian and how it impacted their relationship to their family, community and identity as a Trinidadian. The interviews brought out how issues such as spirituality, education, and personal values impact a woman’s decision to enter an interracial marriage. By interviewing Indo-Trinidadian women I gained a much deeper understanding of how concepts of ethnicity are personalized, constantly shifting and sometimes challenged.

**Study Group 2: Indo-Trinidadian Community Leaders**

The second group of informants I interviewed was Indo-Trinidadian community leaders. I focused on community leaders because I was able to elicit the key reasons why
Indo-Trinidadians consider interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men to be detrimental to the Indo-Trinidadian community.

A leader had to meet the following criteria (1) they had to be heavily involved or lead an organization that represented an interest of the Indo-Trinidadian community, (2) they were referred to me by other Trinidadians (often multiple times) as a leader, or (3) they held public views on the Indo-Trinidadian community such as newspaper articles, books, or lectures. This group is problematic because time restraints did not allow me to ensure that I had a representative sample of leaders. I am particularly aware of the noticeable lack of progressives, younger informants and leaders of more marginalized sectors of the Indo-Trinidadian community such as service providers or lesbian and gay men in my study group. I conducted 14 interviews with 7 women and 7 men representing a cross section of the community. Their professions were as follows: professors (2), religious leaders (3), medical doctor and civic leader (2), student leader (1), school counselor (1), business owner and civic leader (2), director of religious school for girls (1). Many of the leaders interviewed were prominent in several areas of Indo-Trinidadian life. For example, 1 informant was a religious and political leader. Informants ranged from extremely conservative to liberal thinkers. Several informants held well-publicized views on interracial marriages. Others had publicly known opinions regarding ethnicity, politics, or cultural identity, but had not publicly stated their opinion regarding interracial marriages.

Indo-Trinidadian community leaders were willing and even eager to speak to me about interracial marriages and I had little trouble gaining appointments. I found that my informants consistently misjudged me for being much younger than my actual age, and
established a patronizing, teacher-student relationship with me. This became an important element during the interview. I realized that it caused my informants to feel they could control the interview and resulted in surprisingly frank discussions, some requesting that certain opinions not be quoted for my study.

One outstanding observation among the Indo-Trinidadian leadership was their unwillingness to discuss interracial marriages in personal terms and the use of stereotypes and blanket judgments about men and women in interracial relationships. Judgments ranged from statements such as, “Once a man marries a Negro woman, it is without a doubt that she will be unfaithful,” to “a mixed child will treat Indian culture as second class.” Ironically, this was despite the fact that many of my informants were aware of successful interracial marriages, either through friends, coworkers or family members. For instance, one informant strongly believed that Afro-Trinidadians did not appreciate Indo-Trinidadian culture. When asked if he knew of any Afro-Trinidadians who had taken an interest in Indo-Trinidadian culture, he mentioned a friend of his who was an accomplished performer of Indian classical music and married to an Indo-Trinidadian woman. However, he quickly dismissed him as an exception. In another case, I found out several weeks after an interview that the child of an informant who was particularly opposed to interracial marriages had recently married an Afro-Trinidadian woman. Another informant had not talked to a sibling who had been in an interracial marriage for over 20 years because of their choice to marry an Afro-Trinidadian. Thus, while all my informants spoke of interracial marriages in very broad, general terms, for many of them, the topic of interracial marriages had much more significant personal impact.
Lastly, despite the fact that my informants shared similar concerns and beliefs about the rate of interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men, it does not mean that they agreed with each other’s philosophy and role in the community. For instance, a female informant recommended that I speak to a particular male community leader. Upon hearing who had referred him to me, he told me that he considered her to be a hypocrite and a fraud! Thus, the near unanimous agreement that interracial marriages were detrimental to the Indo-Trinidadian community did not necessarily mean agreement on social or cultural issues.

**Length of Study**

My study was conducted in Trinidad over 2 months, from August to October 1996. Eight weeks in Trinidad provided me with the time needed to figure out how to get around and a basic understanding of daily life on the island. Due to Trinidad’s small size and efficient public transportation system, I was able to travel easily and conduct interviews throughout the island. However, as soon as I felt like I was really starting to unveil the nuances, contradictions and complexities of ethnic and gender relations in Trinidad, it was time to return home.

Although my stay was relatively short, I believe my study provides a useful overview of the fundamental tensions of Indo-Trinidadians that oppose interracial marriages and Indo-Trinidadian women who choose to marry Afro-Trinidadian men. It highlights how perspectives on ethnicity, nationality and gender roles influence a person’s willingness to transcend ethnic boundaries in favor of personal values and beliefs. As a feminist and “native” research project it seeks to provide Indo-Trinidadians (particularly women) with more information on the intersection of ethnicity, gender and
identity in their lives and to provide a space for Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages to share their stories. Although preliminary in nature, my study can serve as a blueprint for further research on interracial relationships in Trinidad.
CHAPTER 4
BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF INDO-TRINIDADIAN WOMEN

Although no firm data regarding the current percentage and frequency of interracial marriages has been collected, there is a popular belief that interracial marriages are on the rise, particularly between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men. The perceived increase in interracial marriages appears to have produced a corresponding rise in the number of public denunciations of the practice by Indo-Trinidadians (Reddock 1994b: 108).

It appears that for the first 45 years (1845 to 1900) of the Indian presence in Trinidad, there was very little mixing between Indo-Trinidadians and other ethnic groups. There are no recorded marriages between Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians and few instances of sexual unions (Brereton 1979). The case is somewhat different between Europeans and Indians as Indian women had to deal with sexual harassment from white overseers. In addition, there are several cases of legal unions between white men and Indian women (Reddock 1994b). While specific numbers of interracial marriages are not available, it is clear that interracial marriages between women of Indian descent with men outside of the Indo-Trinidadian community have been a source of concern and disapproval for much of the Indian community since their arrival in Trinidad. In 1916 Muhammed Orfy, an Indo-Trinidadian civic leader, wrote the following to colonial officials regarding indentured Indo-Trinidadian women in unions with European men:

Another most disgraceful concern, which is most prevalent, and a purforating plague, is the high incidence of immoral lives led by the female section of our
community. They are enticed, seduced and frightened into becoming concubines and paramours to satisfy the greed and lust of the male section of quite a different race to theirs… (Reddock 1994b: 103).

And yet available records show that after 1900, both men and women of Indian descent were involved in interracial unions. In 1911 statistical data shows that there were 1,514 people of mixed descent (975 had Indo-Trinidadian fathers and 539 had Indo-Trinidadian mothers). By 1921 there were 2,229 mixed children (1,580 had Indian fathers and 649 had Indo-Trinidadian mothers). Census data from 1931 shows that 115,705 Indian-Trinidadian residents were not born in India, of that 1,713 had Indian fathers only and 805 had Indian mothers only. According to census data collected in 1946, the last year to track the specific racial breakdown of Trinidadians of mixed descent, 8,406 persons claimed East Indian Creole to be their ethnicity. Presumably, most were of Indian and African heritage. Unfortunately, there is no way to ascertain how many Trinidadians are of mixed Indian and African heritage after that point because they are categorized only as “mixed” and no further information regarding their ancestry is collected (Reddock 1994b). Assuming that the majority of Trinidadians who are mixed are a combination of the islands two main populations, Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian, there has been a slight increase over the past 50 years.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of the population at census dates

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This research demonstrates that negative attitudes toward interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men stem from the pivotal role Indo-Trinidadian women play in the maintenance of a politically, socially and economically distinct Indo-Trinidadian identity. Therefore, it is essential to examine how
the historical, socio-economic, cultural and ideological forces behind migration and identity formation affected the emergence of an Indian diaspora in Trinidad. The history of indentureship and community formation, the deified image of women perpetuated by Indian nationalism, and the socio-economic conditions that fostered separatism between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians were critical elements affecting women’s roles in maintaining an Indo-Trinidadian identity separate and opposed to an Afro-Trinidadian identity.

**Trinidad’s Colonial Roots**

The coexistence of many ethnic groups, primarily people of Indian and African descent is a central feature of Trinidad’s history, people and social structure. Both Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians share a common history of oppression and survival against slavery, indentureship and colonization. Both cultures influence, define and shape the national landscape politically, socially, economically and spiritually. Trinidad has not experienced the devastation of violent ethnic strife affecting many post-colonial societies, particularly Guyana. However, this picture of racial harmony is far more complicated than popularly portrayed and the interplay of ethnicity, gender, and class infiltrate interactions both between and within Trinidad’s ethnic groups. Ethnicity and prejudice were critical constructions in the development of the island as a colony and continue to play an integral role in Trinidad’s social, political and economic structure.

Trinidad’s colonial history brings together a diverse group of people from several continents including South America, Asia, Europe and Africa. Trinidad was originally settled by a number of Arawak and Carib speaking tribes. When Christopher Columbus landed in Trinidad in 1498, over 35,000 people already inhabited the island. Trinidad fell
under Spanish domain for several hundred years after Columbus’ landing, primarily serving as a port to South America and the Caribbean as well as a colony for Spanish settlers who grew tobacco and cocoa for export to Europe. Until the late 1700s less than 5,000 non-natives lived on the island. Despite this, Europeans had a devastating impact on the Amerindians whose numbers were reduced to less than 2,000 due to slavery, war and disease in 200 years (Saft 1996).

Trinidad rose in importance as a potential plantation economy similar to Haiti and Barbados in the late 1700s due to a loosening of immigration restrictions. The Spanish government offered generous incentives to Catholic, white settlers to settle with their African slaves in Trinidad. French settlers were being pushed out of British-controlled Grenada and responded in droves. By the 1790s Trinidad had become a French-dominated colony with essentially French political, social and cultural customs. In addition, a small but significant community of free coloureds (Africans who were not enslaved) was established on the island. Although free coloureds could not hold a political office, they were offered 15 acres of land for each member of their family and 7.5 acres for each slave. However, the largest populations to enter Trinidad during that period were African slaves brought over to work on sugar plantations (Birth 1997; Saft 1996).

The British invaded Trinidad in 1797 and hopelessly outnumbered, the Spanish government surrendered control of the island. Unlike the Spanish government who established a local governing structure, Trinidad was directly supervised from England. The British focused their attention on increasing the economic potential of the island, and in the first 6 years of British rule, the slave population doubled. Even so, Trinidad never
became a full-fledged plantation colony because the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 prevented white plantation owners from bringing the required number of slaves for such large-scale production (Saft 1996).

Two important developments occurred with the abolition of slavery in 1833. First, African ex-slaves migrated to urban areas away from the plantations causing a severe labor shortage in agriculture. Second, because Trinidad suffered from a chronic labor shortage, Afro-Trinidadians were able to command higher wages than their Caribbean counterparts as well as more reasonable working conditions. Desperate to minimize the labor shortage, plantation owners sought immigrants from as far away as the United States, Sierra Leone and South America, but the few who came either quickly joined the urban labor force or left to other destinations.

In 1845 the British government devised a solution to the labor issue for the plantation owners. The government decided to bring poor farmers from India desperate for a better life to work on the plantations. In May of that year, a ship carrying 225 immigrants from Calcutta docked in Port of Spain. The immigrant Indians, themselves devastated from years of famine, unemployment and political turmoil were anxious to find new economic opportunities. However, the British soon realized that even these Indian migrants were not willing to voluntarily toil under the harsh strain of plantation labor. The first group quickly deserted to the urban centers just as those before them had done. The solution was to develop a system of indentured servitude later described as “a new system of slavery” (Clarke 1993, Tinker 1974).

In India, contracts were signed outlining terms of agreement and wages binding Indian workers to work for 3 years on a plantation. Once the contract was completed
they were required to stay an additional 2 years on the island with the choice of remaining on the plantation or paying a heavy tax and working in another occupation. During that time the plantation owners were required to maintain them and only after 5 years were Indians provided with a return passage to India (Saft 1997; Vertovec 1992). Once in Trinidad, plantation owners were known to discard their commitments, particularly during recessions in the sugar market, without any fear of penalties, while any breach in the contract by an Indian was considered a criminal offense.

Despite the hardships associated with the first 5 years, only 1 in 5 Indians chose to return to India and most chose to do so before 1885. The vast majority chose to remain in Trinidad trading their passage home for government issued parcels of land to farm. Migration from India continued until 1917 when the Indian government finally outlawed the practice. Over the 70 years of indentureship 144,000 Indians came to Trinidad and only 33,000 returned to India. By the early 1900s the number of Indians born in Trinidad outnumbered those who had migrated from India, forming a group who would always consider Trinidad to be their first home (Clarke et al. 1990).

By the turn of the century, 3 ethnic groups dominated the island, African, Indian and European. White Trinidadians were comprised mainly of French Roman Catholics and British Protestants. They remained at the top of Trinidad society and controlled the majority of the wealth and power. Indo-Trinidadians remained predominantly in the rural areas, living in village settings and serving in agricultural occupations. Afro-Trinidadians lived primarily in urban settings and worked as tradesman and laborers. A small Chinese and Syrian/Lebanese population settled in urban areas and dominated in small businesses and industrial occupations. Racism, prejudice and economic oppression
were determining influences over the social and economic structure of Trinidad society. Yet, despite these rigidly segregated social and economic structures, Trinidad also developed a rich cultural, social and intellectual tradition that emerged from the blending of such distinct cultures, traditions and histories.

**Indo-Trinidadian Women and Indentureship: 1845 to 1917**

It is difficult to piece together what life was like for Indian women during indentureship because there are no written accounts by Indian women and only a few descriptions written by outsiders (Shepherd 1999). Most Indian women arrived in Trinidad as single women and independent wage earners. Families were not permitted to indenture themselves until the end of 1916, less than a year before the Indian government outlawed indentureship. Because over two-thirds of the laborers were males between 20 to 30 years old, women were sought by colonial officials to provide the opportunity for domestic relationships among the laborers. Indentured females were mainly women who had been deserted by their husbands, unwed, pregnant women, prostitutes, and Brahmin widows (Reddock 1990). On average, ships going to Trinidad were composed of 68.2% males and 31.8% females (Vertovec 1992).

Indentureship provided very different opportunities for Indian women compared to life in India. Most significant was the ability for women to survive as independent wage earners. Moreover the male to female ratio of 3 to 1 allowed women greater sexual freedom and choice of partners (Vertovec 1992). Despite these gains, women were discriminated against by plantation managers and resented by their male counterparts. Women were usually assigned to the weeding gang and other low paying jobs. Furthermore, they were often paid less for the same work as men (Rodney 1990).
Indentured women usually earned less than 25 cents a day while most men’s daily income was at least 25 cents. Plantation owners justified the lower wages by arguing that because women were performing household chores, they worked fewer hours a day (Shepherd 1999).

Indian men were resentful of the women and blamed them for the miseries of plantation life. Others forced women into prostitution, exploiting them both economically and sexually. Murder with machetes or cutlasses was common on the plantation as Indian men retaliated against Indian women for leaving unhappy domestic situations and gained the Indian community a reputation for being prone to domestic violence and wife murder. Between 1859 and 1863 there were 27 wife murders, a ratio of 0.4 murders per 1,000 of the Indian population per year. There were an additional 35 cases of cutting and wounding of women between 1886 and 1890. From 1879 to 1898 there were a total of 109 murders by Indians; 63 were wives murdered by their husbands. Between 1872 and 1900, 87 Indian women killed; 65 were murdered by their husband or lover. Men charged with murdering their wife were only punished with prison time, while other murders were punishable with hanging (Shephard 1999).

In 1880, Indian males supported by the Presbyterian Church, petitioned the colonial government to place greater control over the movements of women, including penalizing men who enticed women away from their husbands, and the forced return of women to their original partner after their lover had been charged with adultery (Reddock 1990). Despite these efforts to control their lives, Indian women were not passive recipients of abuse. They were known to assault their abusers or leave their husbands if they were being mistreated. In addition they were actively involved in strikes and
demonstrations to improve working conditions (Shephard 1999). In fact, most historians define the women who came as indentured servants as fiercely independent, adventurous and strong.

**The Rise of the Indo-Trinidadian Agricultural Village: 1917 to 1946**

Once the required 5 years of indentureship were completed, Indians were allowed to leave the plantation (Vertovec 1992). By the turn of the century the British government began a policy of offering land near the plantations to ex-indentures in exchange for their passage home. The vast majority of Indians decided to remain in Trinidad trading their passage back to India for parcels of land and became agriculturists producing much of the island’s sugar crops (Clarke 1993).

Indo-Trinidadian women maintained their independence during the first years of village life in Trinidad (1885 to 1921) because the skewed gender ratio allowed women greater authority within the household. They were able to leave unhappy marriages without facing societal repercussions traditionally found in India. Common law marriages were the norm, and inter-caste marriage and cohabitation was acceptable (Nevadomsky 1982). The skewed gender ratio meant that daughters were highly prized. Even the dowry system was replaced with bridewealth during this period (Vertovec 1992).

By 1921, the births of children began to balance the gender ratio on the island and by 1931 young Indo-Trinidadian couples started having large families. In fact, as life in Trinidad began to stabilize for the Indo-Trinidadian community there was an increase in the birth rate. From 1926 to 1930 the natural increase among Indo-Trinidadians per 1,000 was 16.57 while for the rest of the population it was 8.54. From 1936 to 1940 it was 23.37 per 1,000 among Indo-Trinidadians as compared to 12.6 for the rest of the island.
Between 1940 and 1945 it was 29.66 per 1,000 within the Indo-Trinidadian community as compared to 16.59 per 1,000 for other Trinidadians (Haniff 1996). The ability to invest in land, the success of Indo-Trinidadian petty traders, and the eventual balanced ratio in gender all supported the emergence of an Indo-Trinidadian community marked by a patriarchal structure and a pattern of extended family households similar to North Indian social structures. The isolated rural settlement patterns and the cultural leeway given by the government allowed Indo-Trinidadians to follow customary marriage patterns facilitating the return of caste endogamy and exogamous marriages as well as the dowry system (Nevadomsky 1980). By 1946, an Indo-Trinidadian community was firmly established in Trinidad, characterized by a very young population, a balanced ratio of men to women, and a tightly knit household and village structure (Mohammed 1993b).

The entrenchment of an Indo-Trinidadian community meant that Indo-Trinidadians were able to turn their attention from survival to developing a community identity. Several key themes dominated the formation of an Indo-Trinidadian identity; (1) the Indo-Trinidadian community’s strong connection to India and the independence movement; (2) the desire to maintain a separate and distinct culture and community while still participating in Trinidad’s political and economic life, and (3) racial tension between Indo-Trinidadians and the other ethnic groups on the island (Vertovec 1992).

**The Indian Independence Movement and Indo-Trinidadians: 1930 to 1948**

As village life stabilized, Indo-Trinidadians turned their attention toward India and the events taking place as the movement for independence gained strength. Likewise, in India, leaders of the independence movement were looking for ways to connect migrant Indian communities around the world to their fight against Britain. What
resulted was the re-definition of what it meant to Indian and the emergence of the concept that a viable Indian community could exist beyond the borders of India.

Leaders of the Indian independence movement believed that the redefinition of Indian citizenship was critical for garnering national and international support for the Indian nationalist movement. Before the 1920s India was seen more as a loose collection of culturally, politically and socially distinct communities united under one government. Indians placed much greater importance on their caste and community as the primary source of their identity rather than a sense of national identity. Indian nationalists worked to redefine India as a single, unified country made up of a collection of individual citizens whose loyalty and primary identity was to India as a country.

Indian nationalists were anxious to incorporate western concepts of modernization and industrialization; however, before they could consider adopting western ideals, they needed to develop a unique identity separate from Europeans in order to stake a claim for independence. They realized that a national culture could not be created and supported through existing civil institutions because the British denied Indians access to any civil post. What resulted was the appropriation of the private sphere and a claim to a moral and spiritual superiority over the British (Narayan 1997; Sinha 1995, Chatterjee 1986). This moral superiority was claimed to be the result of thousands of years of religious and spiritual growth. The dominant nationalist ideology espoused by Nehru perceived the West as possessing knowledge about technology and economics which should be learned, however, it should never compromise the timeless spirituality and culture of India Gandhi also promoted the belief in an “Ancient India”, a “changeless and timeless India”. His critique of modern civilization was based on the original principles of this ancient India
which he took to be the “repository of civilizational values and a guide to a new future.” (Bhattacharjee 1992: 26).

The identity of Indo-Trinidadians became closely tied to this “idea of the nation— not the nation as a bounded geographical unit, but the nation as an ideological force” (Bhattacharjee 1992: 19). They no longer needed to live in India to be Indian because the tangible aspects of the country were now secondary to what India came to represent (culture, tradition, religion, God, and nationhood) (Bhattacharjee 1992; Chatterjee 1986). Trinidad provided the Western components expressed by Nehru as necessary to improve one’s quality of life, including material prosperity, legislative power, and economic advancement, but Indian culture, value, traditions and spirituality became something which all Indians possess(ed) by the “sheer magic of their being Indians” (Narayan 1997; Sinha 1995; Bhattacharjee 1992; Chatterjee 1986). These ideals were furthered reinforced through the introduction of Indian films and songs and the development of Indian newspapers in Trinidad, sparking a certain cultural awakening among Indo-Trinidadians. In addition, Indo-Trinidadians were able to follow social and political developments in India through visits from spokespersons for the Indian National Congress. Hearing first hand accounts of the positive developments in the independence movement inspired a new reverence and commitment to India among Indo-Trinidadians (Vertovec 1992). In fact, the national song for Indo-Trinidadians was “Bande Mataram” or Hail Motherland, a popular independence song in India (Jha 1974). Thus Indo-Trinidadian culture and life was seen more as an extension of India instead of a separate and autonomous community in the Caribbean.
Indian Nationalism and Gender

The development of narrowly defined gender roles was a critical element in the newly defined concept of Indian national identity espoused by the Indian nationalist movement. Concern about the nature of Indian masculinity grew during the nationalist movement in the late 19th century, primarily as a result of pervasive colonial stereotypes describing Indian men as “effeminate” and justifying perceptions of Indians and their civilization as corrupted and long in decline (Sinha 1995). The picture of the effeminate, degenerate Indian man was juxtaposed with the “manly” Englishman and justified the British colonizer’s denial of citizenship rights to Indians. Rather than negate British notions of Indian effeminacy, nationalist leaders used the British argument to justify their belief in a return to the glories of a distant, past civilization. They argued that Indian men had once been aggressive and “manly” but had lost that part of who they were. By recapturing past glories, through the fight for independence, they would re-instill those values in Indian men (Sinha 1995; Chatterjee 1986).

Nationalist leaders, most importantly Chatterjee and Vivekananda, argued that the androgynous themes in Hindu texts and iconography “had no manly feelings,” were “effeminate” and contributed to a submissive national character which kept India under British domination (Gilmore 1990: 183-185). Although the image of masculinity was tied to British concepts of masculinity, nationalist leaders did not draw from Western ideals of manhood nor did they invent new ideals. Instead, they chose selected concepts from ancient sacred Hindu texts, primarily the idea of kshatriya meaning the virility of the Hindu warrior. Vivekananda argued that aggressive masculinity was already a part of the Indian man’s psyche and was simply being reshaped to fit the current needs of
society. This definition of masculinity formed the basis of the construction of a national identity and struck a militant, aggressive chord among Indians that was a rallying point for the independence movement (Gilmore 1990).

The role of women in Indian society was equally important to nationalist thought, for they came to embody the emerging ideal of the Indian nation. Indian women symbolized the spiritual and traditional values incorporated within the “glory and essence” of Ancient India. She became a metaphor for the “purity, chastity and sanctity of the Ancient Spirit” that emerged as nationalist definition of India (Bhattacharjee 1992). As Chatterjee (1985) states “the national construct of the Indian woman attributes ‘the spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity, and so on’ to femininity, which then stands ‘as a sign for nation” (Bhattacharjee 1992: 31). Thus, women themselves came to symbolize India and became responsible for representing the sanctity of the Indian nation:

She sacrifices her history, identity and abilities in order to protect her ‘virtue,’ since any deviance from the model of Indian womanhood, reflects negatively not only upon herself. This deviance betrays all the greatness and spirituality that is considered within the “essence” of India (Bhattacharjee 1992: 30).

**Role of Gender in Developing an Indo-Trinidadian Identity**

In 1917, at the end of indentureship, Indo-Trinidadians attempted to develop a cohesive structure which would bind their community despite significant differences in language, religion, caste, and culture. In addition, Indo-Trinidadians were emerging from the low status associated with indentureship and attempting to gain social and economic power in a system that still placed the Indo-Trinidadian community at the bottom of the social and economic ladder. As Mohammed states:

The negotiations among Indian men and women, and between Indian men and women and the rest of the society, were carried out in the context of the
consolidation of a largely impoverished group of migrants in a setting which may
or may not have been hostile to them, but in which they felt and in fact were,
“different”. The construction of community was synonymous with the affirmation
of ethnic identity in the new setting (Mohammed 1995: 34).

In a time when ethnic identity and the continuation of a distinct Indian culture in
Trinidad was of paramount importance, the development of a patriarchal system similar
to what all Indians knew from India was viewed as critical to Indo-Trinidadians survival
(Mohammed 1995). What resulted was the emergence of the patriarchal or male
dominated family structure and the corresponding role of the subservient daughter–in-law
or “doolahin” as the two primary markers of Indo-Trinidadian identity. Indo-
Trinidadians de-emphasized their heritage and adopted European values and customs in
order to access wealth, technology and power they associated with white Trinidadians
and Afro-Trinidadians and strongly emphasized culture and traditional values when they
were inside their tightly knit, homogenous communities.

This separation was maintained by the strict division of the sexes between the
public and private spheres. The private sphere represented both the household as well as
the Indo-Trinidadian community. As the domain of women, it was where the Indo-
Trinidadian community preserved their tradition, culture, religion, and family.
Conversely, the Indo-Trinidadian men controlled the public sphere and retained control
over economic and political growth. Following the warrior tradition of the kshatriyas,
Indo-Trinidadian men were expected to reap the benefits of western technology and
material wealth by adopting European norms while always protecting the domestic
sphere from “infiltration and contamination” from the “morally and spiritually inferior”
western world (Sinha 1995; Bhattacharjee 1992; Gilmore 1990; Chatterjee 1986).
The Brahminization of Hindu religious and cultural practices supported the gender construct. The vast majority of Indians who came to Trinidad were Hindu. Although it was impossible to re-create a caste system with the concepts of purity/pollution that characterized the behavior and decisions of people in India, to this day Brahmins maintain a special status within Trinidad as religious authorities (Vertovec 1994). Van der Veer and Van der Burg (1986) point out that they retained the authority “to become pundits and they monopolized the sacred knowledge of rituals and Sanskrit texts, so that ritual knowledge replaced purity as the legitimization of the Brahman’s status” (Vertovec 1994: 135). Brahmins offered their services to anyone regardless of caste, which ultimately resulted in many rituals that were once considered caste exclusive becoming common practice. Now that low-caste Hindus were no longer prevented from practicing high caste rituals, they were eager to adopt the Hindu codes preached by Brahmins, since they considered it to be a superior form of Hinduism. This included many social customs that further undermined gender equality:

It seems that the rural East Indians conform to the Brahmanic ideals more closely than their ancestors did. Presumably the low castes and untouchables from Northern India, who comprised the great majority of indentured laborers, had not practiced the high-caste ideals of formal arranged child-marriages, patriarchal joint families and avoidance of births out of wedlock. However, by the process of sanskritization observed in the modern sectors of India and the parallel process of passing into higher castes observed among East Indians overseas, rural Trinidad’s East Indians have actually approximated to these ideals, at least in theory and generally in practice (Macdonald 1973: 189).

As village life stabilized, certain practices once determined by caste were now used to signify respectability and a higher economic class level. For example, most Indo-Trinidadian women originally came from villages that placed no restrictions on their working in the fields. However, as their family ascended in social class, women were allowed less freedom. Indo-Trinidadian women came to be viewed as someone who...
needed to be protected and were restricted from entering the public sphere, not even coming out to help entertain their husband’s guests. If she left the home, she was expected to have her face covered with an “orhini” or scarf (Stuart and Haniff 1989).

A female’s respectability was considered the responsibility of the father, often resulting in early marriages in order to assure a woman’s virginity. Parents removed their daughters from school after they reached menarche and soon after they were married into families outside of their village. An unwed daughter of seventeen years old was considered a liability (Klass 1961). As a daughter-in-law she was carefully watched by their in-laws and expected to bear children by age sixteen.

Indo-Trinidadian women, regardless of their religion, were defined primarily by their role as mother and wife. Commonly referred to as the “backbone of family life,” Indo-Trinidadian women were expected to place the needs of their husband and family over their own (Gopeesingh 1989). Indo-Trinidadian women in positions of leadership espoused that Indian culture did more to honor and protect women than did western culture and accused western women of being the antithesis of Indian women (materialistic, self-centered, immoral) (Narayan 1997). Mohammed’s (1993a) interview with Mrs. Naipaul shows how a woman entering marriage and motherhood in the 1930s, who supported notions of cultural purity, understood her role:

You see a woman has a place in this world and when she abuses that place, she has lost the thing they call womanhood…I must do everything that uplifts womanhood and not degrade it...My sisters all felt the same way about their role as wife and mother. It was an honor to me - everyday practice meant that I have a duty everyday and I must fulfill my duty everyday and that was a very important duty that people fail to do now (Mohammed 1993a: 216).

In fact, career choices for women were rejected by the Indo-Trinidadian community because they were believed to go against the perceived ideal of the Indo-
Trinidadian woman as a homemaker. This belief was so entrenched within Indo-Trinidadian society that a study conducted by Rubin and Zavalloni (1969) in the late 1950s found that young Indo-Trinidadian women often felt confronted with only two choices, “either to become a full time housewife or to have a career and avoid marriage entirely.” The combination of marriage - career was untenable (Senior 1991).

Gender relations based on a rigid patriarchy were at the core of an Indo-Trinidadian ethnic identity and women’s adherence to the gender structure was considered important and necessary to the reconstitution of an Indo-Trinidadian identity. The role women played in procreation made them especially important as the Indian community stabilized and rooted itself in Trinidad. To alter gender relations was perceived to have significant negative repercussions on the harmony and structure of the group. Patriarchy in and of itself was not important, instead what was so critical was the system of values and beliefs that developed to support and sustain a patriarchal system, which ultimately served as the basis of a unique Indo-Trinidadian identity (Mohammed 1993b).

**Influence of Ethnicity on the Indo-Trinidadian Community**

While the Indian Independence movement which ended in 1947 provided the symbolic and cultural codes of behavior for Indo-Trinidadian men and women, the patriarchal structure of Indo-Trinidadian village and cultural life provided the social mechanisms to strictly define women’s roles. However, how ethnicity defined and divided the social, political and economic resources in Trinidad was equally influential in maintaining strict gender roles for Indo-Trinidadian men and women. Trinidad maintains a historical legacy of competition for economic, political and social power and control between its major racial groups which effectively stifled the creation of any national
symbol or identification that may have united Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians (LaGuerre 1974).

The plantation structure Indians arrived into allowed for prejudice and stereotypes to foster between people of Indian and African descent. Afro-Trinidadians viewed Indo-Trinidadians as pagan and heathen newcomers to a land where they were the natives. Indo-Trinidadians considered the Afro-Trinidadians to be equally savage and hostile and a threat to their newfound freedoms.

Indo-Trinidadians created social clubs and political organizations to formulate a collective identity of Indo-Trinidadians by working to have their rights and cultural identity legally recognized. The successful repeal of a legal stipulation in 1923 which required Trinidadians to speak English in order to vote truly united the Indo-Trinidadian community and cemented the belief that other Trinidadians could not be trusted. Many Indo-Trinidadians still spoke only a creolized Bhojpuri and viewed the law as a direct act to weaken the strength of the Indo-Trinidadian community and marginalize them from political power. Poynting (1987) found that this single struggle along with the strong connection to the Indian Independence movement “did much to strengthen the position of those who were encouraging the community to think of themselves as Indians first and Trinidadians second” (Vertovec 1992: 84).

Two communities were thrown together to compete for resources that neither controlled, all under the shadow of white domination, ultimately resulting in an oppositional relationship. Although different ethnic groups throughout their history in Trinidad asserted their desire for independence, there was never a united effort to resist colonial authority. In fact, Samaroo (1974) notes that the only time Afro-Trinidadian and
Indo-Trinidadian solidarity existed on a public scale was after World War I and manifested in various labor uprisings which were vigorously squashed by the British government. Ironically, despite the government’s efforts to break up the strikes, the strikes of 1937 achieved the most significant changes of any protest movement before then and created Trinidad’s two major trade unions, the Oilfield Workers Trade Union and the All Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers Union.

By the time of Trinidad’s independence in 1962, Trinidad had “no historical narrative of a common struggle by all ethnic groups on the island against the ruling white elite” (Samaroo 1974). Thus, when Britain began a policy of decolonization in Trinidad at the end of World War II, there was no ethnically diverse coalition pushing for independence. Instead, the political parties which began to form as the country moved toward parliamentary elections were racially segregated and antagonistic. After independence, the emergence of racially separated political parties served to formalize divisions at both a local and national level as both parties competed for national resources including housing, schools, health care, financial support, etc. (Kanhai 1999).

**Ethnicity and the Struggle for Political Power: 1950s to 1970s**

The first national Indo-Trinidadian organization to be formed was the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha in 1952. The Maha Sabha, headed by Bhadase Sagan Maraj, focused its efforts on the promotion of Hinduism and worked to institutionalize Hinduism on the island through the creation of a network of Hindu schools, temples, prayer books, and religious classes. As structures were built and texts consolidated, Hinduism moved beyond the domain of local communities to occupy a “public” space that reached all Hindus on the island (Vertovec 1995). However, the Maha Sabha did little to change the
antagonistic patriarchal structure within the Indo-Trinidadian community. In fact, they advocated for doctrines of caste and gender hierarchy, promoted a revision of Hinduism that was monolithic, and fostered a sense of separateness from the rest of the Trinidadian society. Feminists also accuse the Maha Sabha of further promoting the perception of Hindu Indo-Trinidadian women as disconnected from the Caribbean and other Caribbean women in particular, and committed to maintaining separate, traditional Indian values and ideals (Haniff 1996).

During the 1950s, two major political organizations were formed in Trinidad. The Democratic Labour Party (DLP) initially known as the Peoples Democratic Party was also headed by Maraj, president of the Maha Sabha and not surprisingly, many of the party leaders were also members of the Maha Sabha (Malik 1971). The DLP was opposed by the predominantly Afro-Trinidadian, People’s National Movement (PNM) led by Dr. Eric Williams. Both parties used ethnicity as a means of increasing support. By the first independent elections in 1960, the island racial demographics were as follows — 2% white, 16% brown or mixed, 43% Afro-Trinidadian and 37% Indo-Trinidadian. Ethnic-based political parties combined with the PNM’s successful portrayal of the DLP as a racialist party that only looked out for the interests of Brahmin Hindus gained the PNM white, mixed and Afro-Trinidadian, as well as Muslim, Christian and liberal Hindu votes. Ultimately the DLP lost the first elections of independent Trinidad and the PNM swept into power with Dr. Williams becoming the first prime minister on August 31, 1962 (Clarke 1993).

Both the Maha Sabha and the DLP, the two major public institutions representing Indo-Trinidadian’s interests were on the verge of disintegration throughout much of the
1960s. Ineffective leadership, internal strife and corruption caused defections and ineffectual political campaigns. In addition, Christian evangelical missionaries were making inroads into the Indian community causing the strong sense of community that existed previously to decline. Conversely, the PNM’s political domination was having a positive effect on Afro-Trinidadian culture on the island. Afro-Trinidadians began to dominate the public sphere through their ascension into public offices and their dominance of the media, cultural traditions, and national symbols. Although their populations were about equal, Indians were viewed as minorities and a subset of national culture. As the country moved into the 1970s the majority of Indo-Trinidadians still worked in agriculture, occupied the lowest socio-economic ranks and felt marginalized from the political process. Wealthy Indo-Trinidadians remained equally outside the political realm, preferring to form their own social clubs and institutions rather than mix with the coloured or mixed race middle class (Niehoff 1960).

**Ethnicity and Economics in Trinidad: 1960s to 1970s**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Black Power movement became the first real challenge to institutional racism and the notion that assimilation was the only way to achieve social and economic power in Trinidad. For most Trinidadians, independence had not brought significant changes to the social and economic power structure of the island. A number of domestic and international events fueled the Black Power movement including rising unemployment among young people who had benefited from universal education, a feeling that the government was not responsive to the needs of poor Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians, worker demonstrations, and international liberation movements (Pasley 1997). Moreover, there was a growing interest in African and Indian
history and culture. The term “black” was borrowed from the British Black Power movement and used to identify both Trinidadians of African and Indian descent as one oppressed class with a common bond of slavery and indentureship pitted against white domination (Reddock 2001: 201). The Black Power movement became a place for members to grapple with what their racial and ethnic identity meant to Trinidad.

Ultimately, the Black Power movement had limited impact on the historically-rooted politics of separation which had defined Trinidad for so many years and the concept of a unified consciousness did not take firm root in Trinidad. LaGuerre (1974) postulates that the state of emergency imposed on the island combined with the re-emergence of traditional leadership among the Indo-Trinidadian community that favored isolationism as a means of accessing power over a shared consciousness, resulted in the end of the first real attempt to bring independent Trinidad’s two major ethnic groups together. Despite its failures, La Guerre does credit negritude and the Black Power movement for sparking the re-emergence of an Indo-Trinidadian racial consciousness that led to the revival of Hinduism and Islam. The increase in Indian dress, movies, songs and calls for the official recognition of Indian contributions to Trinidad were a direct result of the Black Power movement.

Angrosino (1977) also notes that the Black Power movement magnified the change occurring in the DLP between the older generation that focused on a paternalistic form of power based on patronage to rural constituents and the new generation that was open to incorporating themes raised in the Black Power movement. The DLP had traditionally seen itself to be an extension of the Indian kin group. Many of the older generation of DLP leaders had emerged from the sugar unions at a time when the union,
the pandits association and the family were considered “all one thing.” The new Indian
elite were influenced by the trade unions and the impact of the new oil industry that was
quickly reshaping Trinidad’s economy and creating a new source of wealth. They were
focused on more westernized contemporary ideas of progress, responsibility and the
nuclear family. At the center of the generation gap was a new understanding of women’s
roles in the Indo-Trinidadian community. In 1971 a young DLP worker shocked the
community by bringing his wife on his campaign to do speeches. Despite considerable
criticism for his decision, he responded:

…that woman is smart like hell and a good talker. We Indians is never going to
get ahead in this place if all these intelligent women is sitting around in their
dasheen patch pretending to be ignorant. I ain’t care what my father and them
say, I running my own house and Sarita is my wife, and maybe together we’ll get

Ethnicity, Economics and Political Power: 1980s to Present

The oil boom of the 1980s permanently changed the face of Trinidad, causing
Trinidad to move from a deficit to a surplus in a year. Much of the newfound wealth was
targeted toward programs for Afro-Trinidadians and to increase the PNM’s hold on the
middle class and upper class sectors. However, a rise in the price of sugar and its
positive impact on a number of Indo-Trinidadian-controlled industries related to
agriculture created a significant increase in the standard of living for rural Indo-
Trinidadians as well. The increased earning power brought all the trappings of
consumerism from television to large homes to cars to fast food. It also increased wealth
across ethnic groups causing racial tensions to relax, developed the secondary and higher
education system and provided more jobs for men and women alike (Saft 1996).

A major result was the integration of Indo-Trinidadians into the civil and political
life of the island. Until the oil boom, Afro-Trinidadians resided primarily in the urban
centers and used education as their main vehicle for upward mobility. Since the emergence of universal education through secondary school and the decline of the agricultural sector, Indo-Trinidadians have gradually moved to the urban centers and infiltrated economic sectors traditionally held by their Afro-Trinidadian counterparts, a phenomenon that continues to this day. Although the oil boom has subsided, it has become common for Indo-Trinidadians who once lived in rural villages to move to urban centers and take white collar jobs.

As both ethnic groups jostle to capture public space for their cultural identity, differences in their racial identity have become a source of tension. Afro-Trinidadians, whose roots in Trinidad extend for over 400 years, feel they are the host culture and resent that Indo-Trinidadians do not want to assimilate. Afro-Trinidadians have also remained ambivalent toward their own cultural identity primarily due to the nature of slavery and the long held belief that the means to success comes through the adoption of white cultural values and practices. This does not mean that a vibrant African-based culture does not exist in Trinidad, but rather that it is perceived by dominant Afro-Trinidadian culture with a sense of detachment. Conversely, Indo-Trinidadians are perceived to have maintained a strong sense of connection with their land of origin and consider their culture to be based on Indian traditions and values. The 1980s were associated with a revitalization of ethnic pride among the Indo-Trinidadian community. Watching Indian movies, listening to Indian music, following Indian cricket teams and wearing Indian clothes became ways for Indo-Trinidadians, particularly Hindus, to demonstrate their allegiance to the Indian subcontinent (Saft 1996).
Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians struggle to come to terms with each others’ search for identity. Afro-Trinidadians accuse Indo-Trinidadians of being disloyal to Trinidad and of not seeing that one can be Indian and Trinidadian. The Indo-Trinidadian community accuses Afro-Trinidadians of not allowing the Indo-Trinidadian community to question the dominant black hegemony. Indo-Trinidadians feel that they must choose between ostracism or creolization (Persram 1995).

Studies show that in some ways Independence seems to have further divided Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians from one another. Clarke notes that independence did not reverse spatial segregation but rather increased divisions between whites, Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians on a national level. Specifically, the greatest increase in housing and social segregation has occurred between Hindu Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians. This particular rift is critical to note because these 2 groups are the key populations in terms of demographics and it is their opinions that determine attitudes and define relations between Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians (Clarke 1993).

Ethnicity, Power and Masculinity in Trinidad

The distrust and separateness promoted on a political and economic level mirrors the attitudes and values of Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian men at the individual level. Social scientists write that constructions of masculinity have played a key role in defining the competition between Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian men and promote stereotypes regarding relationships between Afro-Trinidadian men and Indo-Trinidadian women. Indo-Trinidadian men are popularly considered to be less sexually attractive than Afro-Trinidadian men by both Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian
women and both Indo-Trinidian and Afro-Trinidian men commonly believe that Afro-Trinidian men lure Indo-Trinidian women away from Indo-Trinidian men (Birth 1997: 591).

Researchers theorize that this feeling of Indo-Trinidian inferiority can be traced to religious and historical developments in South Asia. Hindu cosmology, iconography and mythology contain numerous references to androgynous gods, hermaphrodites and stories of sexual transformation providing ambiguous notions of masculinity and an extraordinary forum for examining sexual identity issues normally fully repressed in most non-Indian cultures (Gilmore 1990). The ambiguous masculine and feminine representations have resulted in unresolved sexual identity conflicts in Indian men; particularly a strong maternal identification described as either an oedipal or preoedipal complex. In fact studies show that Indian men are extremely concerned about their virility. Indeed their fear is so widespread that psychoanalysts developed the term “virility anxiety” to explain this uniquely Indian and Sri Lankan condition (Gilmore 1990).

Virility anxiety has taken a uniquely Trinidadian twist among Indo-Trinidadian men. Johnson (1984) suggests that Indo-Trinidadian men possess a “psychic insecurity” which is based on a Trinidadian reading of the popular Hindu myth The Ramayana. The Ramayana is a critical component of Hindu life in Trinidad and is told countless times each year. The myth is re-enacted annually in schools and community spaces during the Ram-lila festivals in the weeks leading up to the Hindu holiday, Divali. A central part of the myth is that Lord Rama’s wife Sita, popularly portrayed as the ideal Indian woman, is abducted by the dark-skinned demon Ravana (or Rawan) who tries to seduce her. In the
**Ramayana**, Sita is eventually rescued by Rama and forced to prove her virtue, which she does by throwing herself into a burning pyre and remaining unscathed. In Trinidad Ravana has become associated with Afro-Trinidadian men. Niehoff (1960) found that followers of Ravana in Ram-lila festivals were painted black and that many illiterate Hindus believed that Afro-Trinidadians were of the same race as Ravana:

An illiterate Indian woman was leafing through the Indian picture magazine *Illustrated Weekly* at our house one day and found a picture of the Ram-lila celebration in India. Without being able to read the captions, she identified the large black papier-mache structure of Ravan as the king of the Negroes and Ram as king of the Hindus (Niehoff 1960: 71)

Researchers (Birth 1997; Johnson 1984) contend that Indo-Trinidadian men have developed a subconscious fear that Indo-Trinidadian women cannot resist sexual advances from Afro-Trinidadian men. In fact, Afro-Trinidadian men are very open about their belief that Indo-Trinidadian men are weaker and sexually impotent. Johnson (1984) notes that Indo-Trinidadian men appear to have internalized this stereotype and are quick to chide Indo-Trinidadian women who choose Afro-Trinidadian men for preferring their supposed superior sexual skills. Thus, stereotypes of masculinity continue to be perpetuated through historically rooted psychic insecurities regarding masculinity and virility and continue to pit Indo-Trinidadian men and Afro-Trinidadian men against each other using Indo-Trinidadian women as a symbol of access to power and control.

**Indo-Trinidadian Women Since World War II**

Despite efforts to develop and maintain a distinct Indo-Trinidadian community based on a rigid gender structure with specific roles for women, the role of women has

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Niehoff notes that although educated Indo-Trinidadians knew that this portrayal of Rawan and Rama were wholly inaccurate, it was common to hear them jokingly refer to Rawan as king of Africans.
continued to evolve and change over time. Initially, gender expectations severely limited Indo-Trinidadian girls’ chances to receive an education. In 1899, girls comprised only 28% of the total enrollment in the Canadian mission schools. The first secondary school for Indo-Trinidadian girls did not open until 1912, and it consisted primarily of domestic skills training and provided little education for work outside the home (Shepherd 1999). After World War II all ethnic discriminatory legislation was repealed. Universal suffrage was passed and in the 1950s free and compulsory primary education was introduced. In the 1960s free secondary education also became a reality. All of this contributed to the restructuring of the Indo-Trinidadian family and significantly altered women’s roles.

Until the 1960s women were often unable to work outside the home because they often lacked education or qualifications. Furthermore, as long as transactions were done in cane and rice, it was more profitable for Indo-Trinidadian women to stay at home. However, industrialization and the switch to a predominantly cash-based economy meant increased opportunities for everyone and Indo-Trinidadian women began filtering into factories and textile work (Mahabir 1994).

As women began to enter the workforce, they gained purchasing power, which dramatically changed their status in the family unit. In the 1970s child marriages became obsolete and caste considerations became much less significant as well. Arranged marriages rapidly declined as the common mode of marriage and the extended family unit and the role of the doolahin (daughter-in-law) began to disappear. Nuclear families with two working parents emerged as the most common form of family arrangement. Clarke found that between 1960 and 1980 the age of marriage for men and women shifted from the teen years to early to mid-twenties (Clarke 1993).
During the 1970s the beginnings of a women’s movement began to emerge. Despite the lack of gender awareness in the Black Power movement, the fact that women had increasing access to education since independence and were joining the male dominated workforce in increasing numbers led to the questioning of traditional gender roles (Pasley 1997). Articles in the press reflected the change in gender relations with issues such as a woman’s right to express her sexuality, birth control and gender discrimination. Increased sexual freedom resulted in more open relationships between young boys and girls (Pasley 1997). In addition, women’s organizations started to focus on issues that did not fall within the traditional purview of women. Of note, was the creation of the Housewives Association of Trinidad and Tobago (HATT) in 1971 whose significant accomplishment was the call for a minimum wage for domestic workers. In the mid-1970s other more radical organization were formed that began to challenge the dominant hegemonic order (Pasley 1997).

The shifting roles of Indo-Trinidadian women began to call into question many traditional norms and values that were previously taken for granted by the community. In 1976, Professor Rambachan called on Hindu leaders to re-evaluate and re-interpret what he felt was a static, superficial form of Hinduism which focused more on ceremonial rituals rather than spiritual depth, and to incorporate the changing spiritual needs of Indo-Trinidadian women. He noted that Indo-Trinidadian men in particular, were reticent in their willingness to practice a Hinduism which was no longer based on “values of fear, subservience and acceptance when they described the lives of great women” (Rambachan 1976: 46). He noted that Indo-Trinidadian women were finding it much easier to slip into their new role in society because they saw it as an improvement over the lives their
mothers’ had versus men who felt their status undermined by changes to the gender structure:

For the woman the problem is not as difficult as it is for the man. She does not have to give up anything because she is in fact, part of an entirely new system of values and thinking. For the male, the problem is that he now feels “lesser” than he has traditionally perceived himself to be. The manifestation of this conflict is the high rate of suicides, divorces, prostitution and broken homes within the Hindu community (Rambachan 1976: 46).

Not all community leaders considered the changes in women’s roles as a positive step. Opponents felt that women were sacrificing tradition, religion and morality in pursuit of material goods and were perceived as mimicking Afro-Trinidadian culture at the expense of their Indian identity and mental health:

Freedom to enter the market also meant exposure to all the temptations of the westernized market…Without the protections and immunities of the East Indian family, the East Indian woman – because she was insufficiently prepared – was now faced with a culture clash….In the enthusiasm of identification, she might adopt braids, curly or tinted hair, or re-examine her dating patterns. Sooner or later however the competing cultural pulls would lead to a poorly-integrated individual – the classic case of a marginal woman. (Mahabir 1994: 24)

**Indo-Trinidadian Women Today**

Indo-Trinidadian women are becoming active at all levels of social, economic and political life. As a result of modernization and westernization, agriculture is declining and white collar jobs are becoming the norm in Indo-Trinidadian society. Old social restrictions to education are being removed due to increasing awareness of the need for education for socio-economic advancement. Therefore, the percentage of educated women striving for social mobility and better economic conditions has grown considerably in the past years. Furthermore, the connection to India becomes increasingly tenuous with each passing generation. In fact, by 1960 less than 2% of the Indo-Trinidadian population was born in India. Instead, the vast majority are third, fourth
and fifth generation Indo-Trinidadians with few having first hand knowledge of India (Macdonald 1973).

Despite the influence of British and American culture and the importance placed on education, research shows that the image of the ideal Indo-Trinidadian woman is still entrenched in traditional values that were established before Trinidad’s independence. Although women work in the public sphere, their identity is still shaped by the traditional, nationalistic concept of Indian womanhood. Regardless of their outside abilities or personal desires, Indo-Trinidadian women come to be defined solely by their family (ie. mother, daughter, wife, daughter-in-law) (Bhattacharjee 1992: 32-39). They continue to be considered “an extension of their husband, not a person in their own right, regardless of their skills or abilities” (Gopeesingh 1989: 22).

Although Indo-Trinidadian girls and women are now regularly attending schools, jobs and social activities that are multi-racial and multi-religious, exposing them to different forms of womanhood, parents still expect them to return home and shed any behavior or perspectives that contradict traditional community values and beliefs (Kanhai 1999). Educated women are expected to be a more westernized or cultured version of the traditional Indian woman; community members do not expect them to reject or question their role in the community (Johnson 1984). The concept of a “real Indian” is held onto tightly and Indo-Trinidadian women are expected to function within certain prescribed actions and maintain a rigid set of values:

A real Indian is seen as someone outside the dominant culture, forever an outsider, asserting a “separate” life and identity. Where there is evidence of acculturation and accommodation, the prevailing perception seems to be that the baggage of Indianess has been jettisoned, and the person has become creolised. Such a person, by self and societal definition, is no longer an Indian (Espinet 1994: 24).
These conflicting codes and contradictory messages place young women in the difficult situation of having to either compromise their decisions in order to follow a narrowly defined path prescribed by traditional values, or sacrifice their role within the community to pursue decisions which fall outside acceptable norms of behavior (Senior 1991). Women who choose to act outside the boundaries of the collective are charged with being westernized or forgoing their identity in favor of more selfish pursuits, thereby publicly de-legitimizing their actions by “stripping” them of their identity (Puri 1997; Niranjana 1995, Reddock 1988a).

**Social Controls on Indo-Trinidadian Women**

Constructions of masculinity in the Indo-Trinidadian community are still tied to controlling Indo-Trinidadian women. Indo-Trinidadian women are expected to promote virtues such as duty, family, honor and commitment to their husband at almost any cost (Espin 1999). As Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians interact at a greater degree then ever, the dilution and potential disappearance of a separate Indo-Trinidadian race and culture has become a major concern for Indo-Trinidadian leaders. They fear that the clearly demarcated Indo-Trinidadian community, considered critical to the survival of an ethnically distinct political agenda, is disintegrating. Because political party affiliation has historically been largely race-based, maintaining a numerical majority among the voting population is considered a critical success factor. As my interviews with Trinidadian leaders showed, there was an assumption that Indo-Trinidadian women and their children would follow their husband’s voting patterns. Therefore, community leaders felt that interracial marriages would result in a shift toward more votes for Afro-
Trinidadian dominated parties, resulting in a curtailing of Indo-Trinidadian access to power and wealth:

We need to take a position on several levels. First, I am a unit in the Caribbean. Second, I am a part of a group of people who are a minority in the Caribbean. We Indians have been stigmatized that we still want to go back to India. In Guyana Burnham destroyed the country but there was no contestation by other Caribbean countries because he was black and the alternative was Indian. The Caribbean does not support the Indian community. It is a politics of numbers. My religion and my race cannot survive without numbers. Numbers are needed for our own survival. For the whole question of a Caribbean space, I must preserve and increase my numbers (Leader 1).

Several cited the attempt in Guyana to institute a national service policy in 1974 as an example of the Afro-Caribbean’s desire to eradicate Indo-Caribbean people. While the political and social reality of Guyana vastly differed from Trinidad, informants felt that the underlying racial tension could accurately be likened to Trinidad’s situation, particularly the belief that Afro-Trinidadians used interracial marriage as a political weapon to diminish Indo-Trinidadian political control:

The National Service Act had been passed in Guyana and Grenada. They then wanted to introduce it in Trinidad. Indians in Guyana were already complaining because the government was sending Indian women to camps deep in the forest and many were coming back pregnant with the children of black men. It was a means of extermination through douglarization. Attempts by the Trinidad government to force miscegenation had been tried in the past. We’ve always seen the CXE placement [secondary school system] as a way of forcing mixing by putting children along the East-West [Afro-Trinidadian dominated] corridor. County Caroni [a predominantly Indo-Trinidadian county] has the least amount of secondary school placements. (Leader 2)

While I did not find evidence to support this specific claim, there was a clear consensus among my informants that interracial marriages were believed to be an extension of Afro-Trinidadian policies to diminish Indo-Trinidadian political control. Therefore, maintaining a numerical majority through intra-racial marriage patterns was considered critical to the continued political and social power of the Indo-Trinidadian community. Intra-racial marriages are expected to reflect the image of the Indo-
That the woman may be controlling the man at home is conceivable, as long as it is kept out of the purview of the public. If a woman violates this structure and “degrades” her husband by publicly challenging his authority in public or leaving him, it is considered a violation of the man’s self in the eyes of the community (Haniff 1996).

In 1994, Women’s Weekly reported that Anne Marie Boodram, who in 1989 murdered her husband she previously caught in her own home committing adultery with her sister, was sentenced to death. Meanwhile, Christopher Sirju, who killed his wife Indra and attempted to drown his two children, was sentenced to five years for killing his wife and six years for attempting to kill his children (Haniff 1996). The belief that men are not to be blamed for the perceived transgressions of their wife is promoted by the top leaders of the Indo-Trinidadian community. In 1993, former Prime Minister Basdeo Panday who was then the leader of the Opposition Party, responded to a spate of wife killings against Indo-Trinidadian women who took out restraining orders against their abusive husband by stating that the restraining orders incited men to murder because the psyche of a Trinidad male was such that “he would lose his cool when forbidden to enter a house which he may have built, in which his wife and children lived, and in which other men may be welcomed (Haniff 1996).” Kanhai notes that Indo-Trinidadian women are aware of the social sanctions against transgressing the boundaries of the home and community:

To fulfill the role of reproducing the race in sanctioned structures—the nuclear or extended family—women are required to conceal personal pain in favor of family and community loyalty. Abused females may get sympathy from relatives and neighbors, but must keep their abuse secret lest it bring shame to the community and/or threaten the family unit (Kanhai 1999: 10).
Thus, a woman trapped in an abusive marriage is triply silenced, by her immediate family, her community and by her ideal of what it means to be Indian. To reject her spouse would mean the rejection of her family, her community and her identity under this gender construction. Haniff questions Indo-Trinidadian men’s allegiance to Indo-Trinidadian women:

Perhaps our allies are not East Indian men. Their chauvinism expresses itself in violence and in silence. They advocate for us only in the private sphere. Thus do East Indian men keep us invisible and perpetuate our perception as a stereotype (Haniff 1996: 8).

However, women are increasingly choosing to make their own decisions regarding their role and destiny as an Indo-Trinidadian. Indo-Trinidadian women continue to break into traditionally male-dominated arenas including politics, music, business and religious leadership, defying culturally prescriptive norms of behavior. Indo-Trinidadian women question why they should accept such a limited role and set of behaviors in order to maintain a status quo they do not believe in. Indeed Seejatan asks:

To how many worlds can we belong?…How rich our world would be when we can feel unhindered to express what we truly feel, when we are no longer haunted by the fear of being branded traitors for enjoying music and food and clothes and religions of those who are not East Indians (Seejatan 1994: 18).

This chapter analyzed the importance of gender in the construction of a unique Indo-Trinidadian identity that functions separately and in opposition to Afro-Trinidadians. Gender is constructed to maintain a concept of “Indianness” that is considered “pure” and disconnected from western constructions of identity. Indo-Trinidadians choosing to take part in activities considered beyond the purview of the Indo-Trinidadian domain are charged with being “creolized” or not Indian. Ironically, the very system that Indo-Trinidadians claim to be separate from is the very system which influences and defines what is or is not considered Indian. In other words, the
concept of a separate Indo-Trinidadian culture and community was created because of the need to create a distinct identity that appeared different from Afro-Trinidadians, their main economic, political and social competitor.

The major challenge for Indo-Trinidadian women today is to create a feminist network that reflects their unique cultural and ethnic identity. An organized feminist movement is critical in order to ensure that; (1) as Indo-Trinidadian women come into their own voice, they are not co-opted or exploited, (2) that all Indo-Trinidadian women’s experiences are taken into consideration, (3) that Indo-Trinidadian voices can be joined by Afro-Trinidadian and other Caribbean women, and (4), that the movement will be couched within the broader spectrum of women of color politics (Mehta 2004; Kanhai 1999). One thing is certain - the future of Indo-Trinidadian women cannot be defined by anyone but themselves.
Chapter 4 provided an overview of how gender and ethnic identity have adapted over time to the constantly changing socio-economic and political dynamics of Trinidad. The chapter highlighted how gender relations were central to the development of a distinct Indo-Trinidadian community and the importance of social pressure, patriarchal structures and family patterns to ensuring that Indo-Trinidadian women make choice within the rigidly defined boundaries of their ethnic community. And yet, the reality is that interracial marriages continue to rise (Reddock 1994b) and it is generally assumed that most marriages are between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men.

Community, religious, and academic leaders in Trinidad frequently discuss and debate the implications of a rise in interracial marriages. Newspapers, magazines and other public forums commonly quote Indo-Trinidadians condemning interracial marriages, particularly between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men. Few stop to ask Indo-Trinidadian women why they would choose an interracial marriage.

Feminist ethnography as both theory and methodology is best suited to create a space for women to speak on their own behalf, giving authority to their unique viewpoints by re-writing historical and contemporary stories that either erase or dismiss their voices (Fonow and Cook 1991; Gluck and Patai 1991). The use of in-depth interviews allows women in interracial marriages to talk about their decision without having their voices subsumed by dominant community leaders. As this chapter
demonstrates, the public dialogue led by Indo-Trinidadian community leaders and occurring in public spaces is vastly different from the more private dialogues which occur on a daily level among Indo-Trinidadian women choosing to marry Afro-Trinidadian men.

**Framing My Relationship to the Research**

I feel a deep sense of loyalty to the women who allowed me to interview them about their interracial marriage. I know they took a risk by sharing their story with me and I feel compelled to accurately portray their lives. Conversely, I feel guilty about the ethnocentrism displayed by so many of the Indo-Trinidadian leaders I interviewed. Those interviews felt awkward because I was embarrassed that opinions that I disagreed with were so common among Indo-Trinidadians. After years of working through my conflicted sense of responsibility to the research and the informants, I recognize that I am not putting the Indo-Trinidadian community on trial. Instead, what I hope comes through is a clearer understanding of how ethnicity is experienced in the Indo-Trinidadian community, particularly through the voices of the Indo-Trinidadian women.

The following 8 stories illustrate the complexity of interracial marriages and the unique set of circumstances each informant faced when making their decision to enter into an interracial marriage. The goal is to illustrate the complexity of interracial marriages and to highlight the unique insights Indo-Trinidadian women have gained by making such a controversial decision.
Stories of Indo-Trinidadian Women Married to Afro-Trinidadian Men

Shalini

I always thought maybe they would accept it if he keeps coming and they get to know him they might accept it. I was always hoping because nobody wants confrontation. Nobody wants to be thrown out. Nobody wants to get into a marriage and don’t have parental approval or good wishes.

Shalini was currently in the process of finalizing a divorce to her husband of twelve years when I met her. We met one morning at her home in San Fernando, a city located in the southern part of Trinidad. Shalini had a comfortable home with large windows that let in the morning sun as we talked. I felt immediately comfortable around Shalini. Because of her background in media, she was very comfortable with the tape recorder, making sure to talk directly into the microphone and switching cassettes as needed. We sat across from each other in large comfortable chairs in the living room. Clearly Shalini had been thinking about the interview since I had made the appointment to meet her because she immediately launched into her story even before I asked the first question.

Shalini grew up in a rural village located in central Trinidad. Her parents divorced when she was very young and she lived along with her mother, 2 sisters and 2 brothers, with her grandparents. The area she lived in was predominantly Indian, however, Afro-Trinidadian families did live in her neighborhood and she was allowed to play with Afro-Trinidadian children. Her grandparent’s friends were all Indo-Trinidadians and she was unaware of any interracial marriages in her community.

Shalini described her household and upbringing as strict and embedded in Indian values and culture. Religion was especially important. Her grandfather never allowed the girls to wear anything considered provocative such as shorts or to show their arms at
school. The girls were rarely let out of the house. In fact Shalini almost never left home until she was 21 and “could put her foot down” about the restrictions. Shalini’s family never directly discussed marriage with her. However, conversations, reactions to other marriages, and comments made in passing, all served to reinforce strict values regarding who was and who was not an acceptable marriage partner:

There was no sit down discussion about marriage. All of our values were instilled through conversations…something that they might say in passing and we listened. And I knew that if I did this she would be angry. There was no sitting down saying you cannot get married to an African. But you knew that you couldn’t because, you just knew…things they would say around the house. They might refer to an African as a nigger or they may talk of another [interracial] couple in terms that you knew they would never approve of it. They would say things like it’s a shame she got married to an African, to a nigger man…So you knew then that you should not do it because they would disapprove. They would never say you cannot get married to an African, but you knew through their words and their communication that you shouldn’t do it.

Ethnicity was not the only criteria defining who was acceptable to marry, but it certainly was one of the most important factors; “You knew that he certainly could not be an African, but he could be white. And he must be what they say is a good boy, meaning he’s not an alcoholic or a wife beater or he has a good job. I don’t think religion mattered as much as race.”

Like all the other informants, Shalini did not intentionally plan to marry an Afro-Trinidadian. In fact, her assumption growing up was that she would marry a person of Indian descent simply because she had only been exposed to intra-racial marriages. Her boyfriend previous to her husband was Indo-Trinidadian. She contemplated marrying him, but their relationship did not work out, “He was an only child and his mother was very possessive and the relationship broke up. My grandmother would have liked him but it just didn’t work out. His parents were trouble.”
Shalini met her husband at work. She was attracted to his good looks, his sense of humor and his willingness to talk. Her friends were aware of the relationship and supported her. Even though she did not tell her mother and grandparents about their relationship, she did not prevent him from coming to her home. He would often drop her off at home or visit her and she simply introduced him as a friend and coworker. However, she was unable to keep their relationship a secret for long. Her family was quick to notice that she and Sheldon acted closer than just friends. Shalini’s sense that marriage to an Afro-Trinidadian was unacceptable to her family proved correct. Despite his light skin and professional job, her family’s reaction was intense and negative:

I suppose my body language would have spoken that this is a relationship that’s going to be serious. So they read it without asking. They read it. So they knew to say at one point, if you like this man, then go. Without asking because it was understood that this was what was going on without him having to say – I’m interested in your daughter, and the usual…

Shalini was shocked to be thrown out of her home. She knew that her family would disapprove of her choice to marry an Afro-Trinidadian but she did not expect their disapproval to be so strong:

I never thought it would reach a point where I would be thrown out. I always thought maybe they would accept it if he keeps coming and they get to know him they might accept it. I was always hoping because nobody wants confrontation. Nobody wants to be thrown out. Nobody wants to get into a marriage and don’t have parental approval or good wishes.

Shalini chose to leave her home and moved in with her future husband’s family. A few months later they were married. Her mother and siblings attended the wedding, but her grandparents refused to attend or to speak to her. It took a few months of marriage before her grandparents allowed her back into their house. She continued to visit her mother and a year later her relationship with her family returned to normal;
“And it got to a point where every time I would go home they would ask for him. You know it was like “Where is Sheldon? Why didn’t you bring him? And he was welcome…It was like okay, we can’t fight it anymore, they are married so we might as well…and that was it.”

Despite her success in winning back her family’s acceptance, Shalini paid a high price:

My elder sister was married at the time. Her husband, he was an Indian. Her husband didn’t take too kindly to my marriage with this African. Her reacted. He abused her. To express his rage and his disapproval of this nigger man’s family he took out his anger on her… So he beat her. Even now when I think about it, I am almost in tears, twelve years later. Because she came to the office and her face was blue. I asked her what happened. I just could not believe it. And I think of everything that happened surrounding the whole issue, that was the most…it still stands out in my mind and it still depresses me. That he would do such a thing. You know, because my husband is an African.

Shalini was young when she got married, only 21 years old. Despite her love for her husband, Shalini never clearly understood what gave her the strength to defy her family and social expectations: of my family. So in the end it wasn’t so bad.

Shalini believed that her love for her husband justified her decision:

Well they say when you are young and in love you will do anything. And I guess that is what happened. I was in love because over the years it grew. It really grew. And that love was a kind of strength in making the decision. And it was, when you are young you are not thinking down the road. It’s an impulsive thing. You love the man and you want to be together. Nothing else matters. Not what they think or anything.

Although Shalini was able to resume her relationship with her family, she had to accept that she would always be considered different from her siblings who chose to marry Indo-Trinidadians. When her grandparents died, she discovered that she was the only grandchild left out of their will:
Somehow it never mattered...maybe because I was always independent. I started working at a very early age. I was very independent. It just didn’t matter. There was never a point in time when I had to go back and say I need so and so. It just didn’t matter. It doesn’t hurt me in any way. And they didn’t give me because of him, partly I think. But it doesn’t matter.

The unwillingness of her family and the Indo-Trinidadian community to understand her choice in marriage was a common theme throughout her relationship. In fact, she commonly has to negate assumptions regarding her husband’s respect for her and her culture and her own relationship with the Indo-Trinidadian community:

An Indian man called me up and he said you know I’m sure that if you cook Indian food your husband wouldn’t want it. I said “Are you crazy? I’ve been cooking Indian food before we got married and he had no problem with it. And I can’t remember his answer to it but he was saying you know your husband will never accept your culture and your food. But it’s because he accepted it that we were able to have a marriage in the first place. So I don’t know how he came to that point. In fact my husband’s favorite food was rice, dhal and bhaji.

Shalini never felt that she had to deny her cultural roots because of her marriage to an Afro-Trinidadian. She often missed social functions because her husband was not a very social person. Because she worked long hours, she often chose to stay at home with him rather than go out with her friends which resulted in her feeling like she was losing touch with “things Indian.” Had her husband possessed a social nature this would never have been an issue, “but he won’t go, not because he is African, but because he is just not interested in going out, period. It has nothing to do with his ethnicity.” In fact, Shalini not thought that ethnicity became an issue in her relationship. Whether they were quarrelling or getting along; “I never saw him in terms of being African you know. I see him in terms of the human race.”

Although Shalini’s relationship was never principally defined by ethnicity, she believes that ethnicity and culture impact both Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians’ decisions to choose an interracial relationship. Although she was unwilling to define
either ethnic group by stereotypes, she noted that certain cultural qualities related to Indo-
Trinidadian women appeared to attract Afro-Trinidadian men:

I think African men always say they like Indian women. Maybe it’s the Indian women’s nature. There must be qualities along that to be so attractive. Maybe it’s the woman’s ability to take care of them. You know the Indian women how they are. They’ll do everything for a man. I don’t know if that attracts them but in my husband’s case I did everything for him. I was like a mother. I think they probably find the Indian woman softer…I don’t know how African women are. I don’t know them intimately but they seem to like that the Indian woman knows how to save money, how to manage a house, how to sacrifice, how to not go after clothes and shoes and neglect other more pressing things like other races. That is one thing I can pinpoint that they say.

Likewise, Shalini felt certain cultural stereotypes made Afro-Trinidadian men appear more desirable than their Indo-Trinidadian counterparts:

Why are Indian women attracted to African men? Because Indian men in some instances do not treat Indian women as an equal. And they are still into this culture of abuse you know. So I suppose some Indian women are turned off. But that is not why I married an African. I did not set out to deliberately marry anyone. But I suppose some women do.

Shalini believed her husband respected her freedom and independence. She never felt that she had to ask permission from her husband, a quality about their relationship which she noted was lacking in many intra-racial relationships in the Indo-Trinidadian community. Shalini states:

I had freedom. And I’m not sure if a lot of Indian women have freedom when they are married to an Indian man. I think from what I have heard from other women is that they are very possessive. They’re always, if you go on the street they are always thinking you are going out to meet another man. I think African men are a little more liberal and a little more trusting. Indian men I think are suspicious. I have a babysitter, her husband is Indian and she is Indian. She said that if she goes down the street then he will ask her who did you go meet? You know. That is not an isolated case. That is very prevalent with Indian men. They don’t trust their women or wives. They always think that if we do something it has a connection to another man. They are very insecure. I think that is probably the main difference. On the other hand, they will have other women. They think its their right and don’t question them about it. And don’t even ask them or they’ll hit you with two blows or something. Women are supposed to be pure and “I can do it but you don’t do it…” And they are very jealous.. I find that the
Indian woman is not very free. Not free to go out. I could have gone out and spent the night with my friends and my husband would not have thought about it. He trusted me and I never broke the trust. I traveled a lot on my own, to work and to meet friends. And no problem. He trusted me and I was free to do what I wanted.

The perceived advantages to marrying an Afro-Trinidadian did not affect Shalini’s perception of Indo-Trinidadian men as potential partners or spouses for her.

She had not dated Indo-Trinidadian men since she and her husband separated because she had not met an Indo-Trinidadian that she found attractive. She felt that Indo-Trinidadians did not understand this and assumed that she did not want to be a part of the community:

I would love to be Indian, I mean to maintain my links to the Hindu and Indian community, but I think its other people’s perception of me. They always think of you as the traitor to the cause. I think my family sees me as a traitor to the cause. They see me as a Creole, they see me adopting a more African culture than them. That’s the perception they have of me. In my heart I will always be Indian. I have not renounced my links to anything Indian and I would gladly go to anything that’s Indian.

Yet, even after 12 years of marriage, her family continues to assume that her marriage to an Afro-Trinidadian man meant that she was no longer interested in Indo-Trinidadian culture, activities or values. Their assumption that she would not be interested in the same cultural activities as them has hurt her in the past:

They would all go out to their chutney shows 11 but they won’t call me to ask me to go because they think that I don’t like it. But that is something they assume. They assume I would not want to go because I am “Africanized” so to speak. So they won’t ask. They would go and I’ll say you all didn’t tell me. Then they say, you would want to go to that? You only want to go to some North American thing. And I would laugh because it’s the furthest thing from my mind. So you see, again it’s the perception. I am still me. I still like the things I liked when I was growing up. Its just at this time in my life I just don’t have the time to pursue everything. But nothing I can say will change that perception…I do know they look at me in a certain way and it happens to every Indian woman who does it.

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11 Chutney music is unique to Trinidad. The music and dance originates from Hindu matikore or wedding ceremonies. Recently the music and dance has become popularized as a form of entertainment and Chutney shows are regularly held throughout Trinidad drawing large Indo-Trinidadian audiences (Baksh-Sooddeen, 1999: 195-196).
You are looked at in a certain way by other Indian people. They say – she is Indian and she is married to an African. They think of you in a certain way. You are not one of them. You have left the camp. You’re not interested in what they do. So they think of you in not very good terms.

While Shalini’s grandparent’s decision to omit her from their will was a direct result of her marriage, she does not face ongoing pressure from her family regarding her marriage and was able to maintain a strong relationship with them. And despite Shalini’s frustrations regarding her friends’ perceptions of her interests, she does not feel rejected by her friends and community. This has allowed Shalini to stay connected to her family and community despite her marriage.

The following story also illustrates how hard the decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian man can be for an Indo-Trinidadian woman if her family strongly disapproves of her decision. Soraya was forced to make the difficult decision of choosing between her husband and her parents. Ultimately, she decided that the extreme measures she took to marry her husband and maintain her independence were worth the severing of her relationship with her family, religion, and community.

**Soraya**

“I decided within myself, I decided to move out. Not because of the relationship, but for my independence.”

Soraya was one of the first people I met in Trinidad and the last person to be interviewed. In fact I interviewed her the night before I left the country. Because we were close in age and had similar political views and sensibilities, I enjoyed spending time with her. Soraya was intense, introspective, beautiful and deeply spiritual. At the time I met her she was working as an independent contractor for a computer firm. Soraya had been divorced from her Afro-Trinidadian husband for 5 years and was currently in a relationship with another Afro-Trinidadian man who lived in Toronto. They were just
getting serious about their relationship and she was still unsure what that meant for her future. I was particularly grateful to Soraya for the interview because she was an extremely private person and was still trying to negotiate her relationship with her family due to her decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian. I knew that her decision to allow me to interview her had been made after much thought and I wanted to give her as much latitude as she needed during the interview. We started around 8pm and ended several hours later.

Soraya’s mother was a schoolteacher who later became a housewife. Her father is a lawyer and a prominent businessman. She also has a younger brother who is in school. Both her parents are devout Muslims who fast, attend mosques, participate in festivals and are active in Muslim life in Trinidad. Soraya spent part of her childhood in England while her father worked on his graduate degree. After that she returned to Trinidad and moved to the southeastern part of Trinidad. Soraya describes the town as very multicultural with Afro-Trinidadian, Indo-Trinidadian, Chinese and white residents.

Soraya was exposed to people of various racial backgrounds at an early age. She notes however, that most of her close friends in elementary school and high school were Indo-Trinidadian. This did not reflect a prejudice toward Afro-Trinidadians, instead Soraya felt that her friends reflected her personal interests. While her parents did not influence her choice of friends, she noticed a difference in her father’s attitude toward her Afro-Trinidadian classmates as opposed to his attitude toward her Indo-Trinidadian classmates:

I noticed that my father never really showed an interest in them. There was one girl that I was close with but I didn’t hang out with much that lived just up the road from me…I found that it seemed to make a difference to them... they did
express that African families brought up their children differently than East Indian families that, that they were more liberal and so on in terms of going out.

Although her parents had Afro-Trinidadian friends from time to time, their relationships existed at a social level and were connected to her father’s business career. Their good friends were all Indo-Trinidadian. Soraya knew of an interracial couple who was friends with her family during the few years her family lived in England. Her parents seemed to accept them and she remembers seeing them often and playing with their child. In Trinidad they were close to another interracial couple, the woman was Indo-Trinidadian and the man was Afro-Guyanese. Despite this, Soraya understood that an interracial marriage was not an option her parents considered for her:

Growing up my marriage wasn’t really discussed, but I knew what was expected of me…which was to marry a Muslim professional, wealthy…If he wasn’t Indian, it would have mean that he wasn’t from Trinidad, but not a non-Indian Trinidad Muslim…He could have been Arab, but not an Afro-Trinidadian Muslim… It was extremely important who I married because I was their only girl…because of their social standing.

Growing up Soraya did have a certain idea about the person she would like to marry. She always assumed he would be a professional, probably because of her own educational background. Despite her parent’s strong beliefs about ethnicity and religion, she did not have a particular bias toward Muslim men, nor did she ever feel limited to marrying a person of a particular ethnicity. Soraya left Trinidad at 17 to study in Canada:

In doing that, although I was physically away from them, I was still very much influenced by them. But it still helped me to broaden my perspective and a lot of those questions about how I felt about people and what I wanted for myself and my future and a possible future husband and that sort of thing. I realized that it might not fall in that pattern they [her parents] had wanted…I think the seeds of that thinking was already in me, but getting away from them helped clarify things for me.

In fact, it was in Canada that Soraya came to truly understand her parents’ opposition, especially her father’s opposition to her interaction with men of African
descent. Her closest male friend in Canada was an Afro-Jamaican youth. He was a very close friend of her aunt’s son. He was her only male friend in college so she asked him to attend the graduation “ball” with her. Her parents happened to be in Canada to attend her graduation, and when her friend came to pick her up, her father was very cold towards him. When she returned home her father refused to speak with her. In fact, he refused to talk with her until they returned to Trinidad a week later. When he did speak with her, “it was pretty awful” and he focused on her friend and his humiliation at seeing her with a person of African descent. From that point, their relationship steadily deteriorated.

Soraya stayed in Trinidad and began working in Port of Spain. It was at her first job that she fell in love with an Afro-Trinidadian coworker. This was her first major relationship. She was attracted to his personality: “I felt he had more experience in the world. He had interacted with more people than I. He was interesting from that point of view…He was good at what he did.” Her husband initiated the relationship. She had not really “noticed him” until he made a point to seek her out and speak with her.

Soraya was honest with him about her parents’ prejudice, but they both agreed to give the relationship a try. She decided not to tell her parents anything until it became serious; “I hardly told anyone including friends that first year because I felt that the less people knew, the less chance that my parents would find out…My friends, and my cousin, fully supported me.”

After a year of dating, she realized she had to tell her family something:

It was very tough when I knew that my parents sensed something. In order to see him, quite often I would have to work late because of the job I was doing, we would have assignments and I would make up reasons to stay and I would use that as an excuse. I would always have a change of clothes and I would call and say I have to work late and that is how I got to see him. Or I would say I had to come into town to do some shopping and I would spend a few hours with him. With my
parents we barely spoke at all. There was a lot of tension then and we weren’t talking at all. They obviously sensed something, but they would not really broach the subject.

Soraya knew that her parents would have a negative reaction to the relationship, but hoped that because her boyfriend was fair-skinned, a professional and well-educated, she could win their acceptance. Unfortunately, these attributes did not persuade her father to change his mind. Instead she received an ultimatum that either she end her relationship or move out of the house. Soraya believes that her father threatened her because he expected her to bow to his wishes and give up her relationship. Until then her father had a great deal of control over her life: even though she was working full time, she had to ask permission to leave the house and followed her parents’ rules. Soraya accepted his ultimatum and decided to leave; “I decided within myself, I decided to move out. Not because of the relationship but for my independence.”

Soraya began looking for apartments the following day. When she came home she told her mother she planned to leave. Her father overheard her conversation. Her decision to leave came as a surprise to her father whose authority was never challenged. He grew furious with her and began to threaten her and verbally and physically abuse her for hours. Later that night she tried to escape from the house, but her parents watched her very closely. The next day her father informed her that she no longer had any privileges. She was expected to go to work and return home immediately. The only social functions would be Muslim functions where she was expected to attend with the intention of finding a suitable Muslim husband. Luckily Soraya found support through a confidante who helped her as she clandestinely searched for apartments while at work. Finally, one weekend while her father was away from the house, she left her home permanently.
Because of her father’s high position, he was able to continue harassing her by having her movements monitored even after she left home by calling and threatening her at her job and even trying to have her declared mentally incompetent. However, because Soraya was 21 and legally an adult, she was able to avoid any attempts by her father to have the authorities force her to return home. Several years later she married her boyfriend in a civil wedding at the courthouse. No family members attended. After a few months she decided to try to restart her relationship with her parents by visiting them on an occasional basis. Ultimately her friends, aunt and grandmother supported her relationship.

Soraya had an additional concern that because of her father’s high profile position, the media would pick up on her relationship and the problems she was having with her family. However, her quiet ways paid off and she was able to keep herself and her family out of the media. The only negative comments would come from Indo-Trinidadian strangers who would see her on the street with her husband; “They would not really give directed comments but I got a lot of glaring looks from people of East Indian descent. I experienced that a lot but I never really took it that seriously.”

Soraya’s marriage ultimately lasted 3 years. Ethnicity was not a factor in the dissolution of the marriage; instead poor communication was the overriding issue. She is currently involved in another relationship with an Afro-Trinidadian. Once again, she does not consider ethnicity to be a factor in their relationship, but personality, values and interests. It is not that she does not want to date Indo-Trinidadian men, it is that she has never met one with whom she would consider entering into a relationship. Soraya does not express concern regarding the lack of potential Indo-Trinidadian partners. She sees
herself as Trinidadian. Her ethnicity and cultural history is Indian, but she is Trinidadian and her children will be Trinidadian, therefore her primary loyalty is to Trinidad. She does not agree with the divided loyalty between India and Trinidad that many of her Indo-Trinidadian counterparts hold.

Upon reflection, Soraya realized that her parents had very specific, if contradictory, criteria regarding her marriage. Growing up she believed that marrying a Muslim Indian man was her parent’s ideal man. Now she realizes that ethnicity was the overriding factor determining their acceptance of her marriage. As long as her husband was not of African descent her parents would have accepted him:

Being friends with someone and interacting with someone professionally is different than marrying someone and bearing their children. Its okay if other people do it [marry an Afro-Trinidadian] but not you. Some of the things her father said to me were so cruel its almost as if he viewed them as not human. Not part of the human race…My mother once said to me point blank- I don’t want no pickney children…But it would have been okay if I married a white person. I don’t really think there is much logic. I think it is more acceptable to marry a white person and introduce them to your Indian culture or whatever than to marry an African. Because one of his [her father] sisters is married to an Englishman, that was okay. And my grandparents accepted the fact their daughter married a Hindu because he was Indian you know.

Soraya’s story illustrates how deep notions of racial separation are felt by sectors of the Indo-Trinidadian community. Unfortunately, the opposition Soraya faced from her family was not uncommon in my interviews. However, because of her parent’s wealth and prestige, she faced the additional burden of having to stay out of the public’s eye.

The following informant faced strong disapproval from her parents as well. Because Mary’s decision to marry a man of Afro-Trinidadian descent resulted in rejection from her family and a separation from the Indo-Trinidadian community, she developed a new community through her conversion to Jehovah’s Witness. As a member
of a tight knit church community, Mary was able to interact with people who do not question her decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian. However, as she states in her interview, even within her church she maintains very little contact with Indo-Trinidadians. Mary’s story illustrates the strong connection between spirituality, personal values and one’s decision to marry outside of the Indo-Trinidadian family held by many of my informants.

Mary

The love we feel for each other. We feel happy, proud. We have been married 27 years, but it is like being married for 2 years. Look, I don’t think an Indian man would have made me this happy.

Mary was referred to me by a woman who worked at the University of the West Indies. We had tried to meet for an interview but Mary was not able to make the appointment. Later that week Mary called to discuss when we might be able to meet again, and we started to talk about her marriage. It quickly became apparent that the phone conversation was turning into an interview so I grabbed a pen and paper and started scribbling my notes. I am sorry that I did not get a chance to meet Mary personally. Her warmth and compassion came through over the phone and I felt as if I was talking to someone I had known for years. It was clear that her family’s reaction to her marriage still upset her, but her love for her husband and children and her faith in God were clearly where she drew her strength.

Mary, a schoolteacher, is in her early fifties. She has been married to an Afro-Trinidadian man for over 25 years. They are happily married and have 4 children. They both converted to Jehovah’s Witnesses when they were married at age 21 and have been active members of their congregation ever since. Mary grew up in southwest Trinidad. Her parents were both Hindu. Her mother was Indo-Trinidadian and her father was from
India. She and her sisters grew up in a very strict household that condemned associating with people who were not Indo-Trinidadian, especially Afro-Trinidadians: “Where we lived was in a Negro area. Our neighbors were Indian, but everyone else was Negro. We were not allowed to go out. Father locked us in the house.”

Mary had not dated before meeting her husband. She had always assumed she would marry a man of Indian descent even though she never really gave ethnicity much thought, but she “never met a real nice Indian.” She met her husband soon after completing her secondary education. Because she knew that her parents would disapprove of their relationship, she chose to keep it secret from them until she was sure she was going to marry him:

When I did fall in love I was 19. I didn’t get consent till 21. At first the person would just talk to you. After some months he kept talking and he was someone I could talk to. He was so gentlemanly. After 3 months I realized this person liked me. But I thought I don’t like him. My sister said you won’t find someone like him again. He was not a wild person fooling around. Do you know we still have that love? We do have a nice family. When I realized that I was really getting closer to him, then I decided. They [my parents] said, ‘No way. Not at all.’ Look if no way, I am going to wait till I am of age.

Mary waited until she was 21 to get married so that she did not require her parents’ approval. She believes her family intentionally tried to ruin her wedding as an act of their disapproval and much of her relationship with her extended family was severed due to her relative’s attitude toward her marriage.

No one accepted it. We had problems. They promised to do things like make food, but it was sabotaged. Then the family didn’t turn up except my younger brothers and sisters who were around 13 years old. There was no support.
Her father never accepted her decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian man:

The pressure comes from the Indian. I don’t understand why. They feel it is a disgrace. You know that story of Ram, Sita. My father used to tell us that when Hanuman burned the palace, that’s how Negro people got their curly hair. My father died 4 years after the marriage. He saw that the person treated me nice you know. He tolerated it. It was an embarrassment. He said, you give a nigger water with a rod. That’s how they look at them. They never have them close to you.

Her mother was equally biased against her marriage although Mary feels that their relationship has improved over the years. However, Mary is cautious about spending too much time with her mother because she knows that her children do not receive the same attention as her nieces and nephews who are Indo-Trinidadian:

My mother knows they are good kids. She has grown to love them a great deal. Having 4 and none of them disrespecting her. But my brother, who has Indian children, she loves more. You can see it. You can’t have everything. You have to adjust.

Although Mary’s relationship with her immediate and extended family was dramatically altered by her decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian, she does not regret her decision:

But people up to this day look down on you like you are a whore. We have 4 children, and we have a good life. I have given up everything, my extended family. I stay away. I have no family relationship at all. They refer to the children as “I don’t want to hold those nigger children…” At first you feel really alone. The love we feel for each other. We feel happy, proud. We have been married 27 years, but it is like being married for 2 years. Look, I don’t think an Indian man would have made me this happy.

Mary’s life revolves around her faith as a Jehovah’s Witness and her community at the Kingdom Hall. Her husband is an elder and she is very proud of her children’s faith in God:

Mary is referring to the Ramayana. The significance of this popular Hindu myth in Trinidad is discussed in Chapter 4.
[My children] have half and half. They have pretty long hair. They have spice color. They don’t have any culture. They look as Jehovah’s Witnesses one people trying to serve God. We don’t put in their mind Indian or African. They have a great love for God.”

Mary found a difference between the attitudes of Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadians toward her marriage. Primarily she has had to deal with stares, finger pointing and rude remarks from Indo-Trinidadians. Despite their strong affiliation with their faith, Mary has had to deal with prejudice from Indo-Trinidadians within the Kingdom Hall:

The Kingdom Hall is the only safe place you could say. But those [Jehovah’s Witnesses] from the country- Indians- they would be staring at you. They won’t say anything. They would be looking. You can’t say what’s in their heart. They look at it like Beauty and the Beast.

Encounters with Indo-Trinidadians outside the Kingdom Hall have been worse:

Indians on the whole believe that Negro men’s penises are larger. They make these gestures with their fists in the air. And recently I was up at the University of the West Indies to drop off food for my son. This day we went to the gas station at Curepe. You know an Indian man ran up and bounced on our car. My husband is an elder in the church. He tried to keep calm. He just said, “You don’t put your hand on my wife.” He had to raise his voice.

These experiences have distanced her from the Indo-Trinidadian community.

Mary and her children find it easier to relate to Afro-Trinidadians:

I agree better with Africans. Indians don’t really take me on too much. I have just about one Indian friend. I don’t know. Because we are happy, with a good family life, they are jealous. I find persons of African descent are more genuine. They see me for who I am, not who I marry. Marrying Negro that’s one of the affects – staying away from them. Marrying in those early days had that effect…What I find is that Indians are racial and Africans are not as racial. This sort of pressure comes from the Indian.

Despite the racism, Mary does not regret her decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian man:

Indian men tend to kind of boss you. I can leave here anytime during the day between 6 and 6. If my husband is not around I can leave a note. My husband
will believe me. Indian men especially will not believe. Indian men, I could not have done that. As we have 365 days a year for 21 years I have cooked on time. If for some reason I can’t, its all right. He doesn’t demand anything from me. If I was married to an Indian man I would have to do it, whether I am sick or anything. My husband will get up in the morning and help scrub the dishes. He is just here with me all the time. You won’t get an Indian man to help. When I was pregnant he would sit and play the guitar while I cooked. He came home and cleaned. I know I couldn’t find an Indian man like that.

Ultimately, Mary’s choice has brought her a great deal of happiness; “We are definitely not financially well off. It’s just that I have happiness. Deep in my heart I feel rich. Kindness to people, that is richness.” Mary believes that as long as she and her husband are truly committed and love one another, the objections and rejection created by the outside world are insignificant.

Like Mary, the following informant has drawn a great deal of strength from her religious and spiritual beliefs. However, Asha, a practicing Hindu, does not belong to an active religious community anymore but instead, chooses to practice in the privacy of her home. Her understanding of her religion has evolved over time and she admits that much of her belief system is far more radical than what is commonly practiced in Trinidad. However, her story illustrates how women are questioning commonly accepted, traditional notions of ethnicity and religious ideals and challenging their religion to satisfy their personal needs and value systems.

Asha

I don’t know if there is another one in the world, for me at least. I don’t know if I could find a person like Richard, that you’re one together and you’re one apart. You’re completely whole on your own. And you’re complete together, with the person. I don’t think there is another person for me. And it has nothing to do with his race.

I met Asha at her place of business in Port of Spain. She found a small room with nothing more than a desk, 2 chairs and a fan for us to meet. I pulled out my tape recorder
and notebook and realized that I was distracted because I felt intimidated by her. Asha is a small woman, not much taller than 5 feet with curly hair and a precise way about her. She has an efficiency and intensity about her that is unmistakable. There is a sense that her mind is always working and that she can do whatever she sets herself to do. Asha was the most well known of all my informants. She was known for her outspoken, independent and intellectual style. As an Indo-Trinidadian, she has gained notoriety for her controversial relationship with a well-known person who is Afro-Trinidadian. I never expected her to agree to the interview and was pleasantly surprised that she acquiesced to meet me.

Asha was born and raised in a rural village in the heart of Trinidad. Her parents received a few years of education and sustained the family on income derived from farming. They had a large family, Asha is the youngest of 9 children. They were a strict Hindu family and considered themselves to belong to the Brahmin caste. Asha followed Indian music, wore saris, ate Indo-Trinidadian food and regularly attended temple services. Her community was predominantly Indo-Trinidadian, with a small population of Afro-Trinidadians. Several interracial couples lived in her village but they were accepted as part of the Indo-Trinidadian community and from a cultural standpoint behaved very much within the Indo-Trinidadian traditions maintaining no noticeable ties to an African heritage.

Asha traces her openness to other cultures and ethnicities to a mindset she developed at a very early age:

I was recognized as an independent minded youngster. And I don’t know how it came to happen but I just was known, even inside my family, as not somebody who could get involved in casting racial slurs against people. So, if I’m at home my brothers are talking and they say this nigger so and so, I would object even as
a 12 year old. I would say, “you can’t say that” …I wouldn’t allow anybody to call somebody a coolie. So, I was known in the family as somebody who would set her face against racism.

Following Brahmin traditions was very important to Asha’s family. Her family placed a great deal of importance on marriage and many of her siblings had arranged marriages to other members of the Brahmin and kshatriya caste at early ages. Asha disagreed with the criteria that her family used to determine a suitable spouse. To her mother, a suitable spouse would share a common caste, class, and family background as well as a similar set of values. For Asha, the emphasis on similarity felt confining and repressive:

I am by nature a person who is interested in difference. For example, the kind of person my sister just before me, who was married to an arranged marriage, I would find that person to be like a brother. They have the same attitudes. A lot of the men who would make my family happy, I would find them to be like brothers. I find they have standard views on everything. They almost look the same way in a certain kind of sense. All my brothers have a certain relationship with all their wives. It’s not what I can conceive for myself. That’s not the kind of relationship I would want to have. So, I think I have always been, a person interested in not the same. The difference is the thing that turns. If I walk into a room, the person who is different is the one I’m interested in.

Asha credits her belief in individuality and non-conformity to her spirituality and the values she learned through her studies of Hinduism. As a child and teenager she regularly attended the temple, was part of a Ramayan group and spent many hours contemplating religion and spirituality. Through her spiritual practice, she developed a strong belief in the connection between the uniqueness of each individual and the importance of following one’s dreams:

I’m always prodding a person into following their dreams. I am the person who says go after it. I don’t know where its going, what its going to give up, but this safe thing is not going to get you anywhere. Its the person I am. And the interesting thing is that more than anything else, I have drawn on that at a very deep level. And I’ve drawn a great sense of a belief in God in trying to be, in
being “unconventional.” People think it’s unconventional. It’s not. It’s just trying to be who you think you were born to be. And what you have is this great superstructure to force you to conform. But you have to deny. You have to say no. I have to be true to God. I am sent here to be me, not be anything else that you feel I should be. And the paradox and the irony is people with the conventional mind, the orthodox mind, believe that you are being irreligious, unspiritual, whatever, whatever. And I don’t believe that at all.

Asha met her husband through her job. She first heard him speak at a conference and was immediately drawn to his intellectualism and world vision. They fell in love immediately; “It was just overwhelming. I always think its like two souls who found each other and made a plan to meet here…It just was magic and magical.” Again, her spirituality guided her decision to marry her husband:

…If your last name is Singh you’re a Brahmin in Trinidad. It bears no relationship to India, but it’s one of those things people hold onto. And I was saying that being a Brahmin has nothing to do with your name. Even my mother was telling me don’t be saying those things. And I said: the books are telling you. It has to do with the quality of the person. It’s nothing to do with name. We are now trying to cultivate a higher type of human being. And a higher type of human being is one who is closer to God in terms of all the attributes that the person has, one who can rise above the senses, one who has the quality of mercy. And when I read those things, I can tell you that I know no more a Brahmin person than my husband. This is a person of tremendous generosity of spirit, tremendous tolerance, who it doesn’t matter if he owns anything or didn’t own anything. And some of those people would say that I am a disgrace to Hinduism in Trinidad by being with him. I will say that none of them qualifies to the extent that he does, for me, as being truly Brahmin.

Despite the importance of marriage to her family, Asha never placed a great value on the institution fearing marriage would cause her to give up her independence and dreams. Therefore, an important aspect of her marriage is that she has not had to give up her individuality. Instead, Asha considers her husband to be her greatest supporter and friend:

I don’t know if there is another one in the world, for me at least. I don’t know if I could find a person like Richard, that you’re one together and you’re one apart. You’re completely whole on your own. And you’re complete together, with the person. I don’t think there is another person for me. And it has nothing to do
with his race. What he is to me has nothing to do with is race or his age or his professional interests or any other thing. And I don’t talk about the relationship with Richard with anybody, except maybe very close friends. But even then, it’s limited. Because I don’t think people would understand. And I don’t, and I have just said, this is something that defies explanation. I truly believe this only something that Richard and I and God understand.

Asha became pregnant with their first child while they were courting. She had not yet told her mother about her relationship, but her pregnancy forced her to confront her family. Asha described her world as compartmentalized. There was the world of her family and the world of her work and she never mixed them. She knew her family would not accept her relationship with her husband and she preferred to keep them separate rather than risk rejection from her family and mother in particular:

…but even though I felt I had lived very well, I had this compartmentalized world and so, and so in the final analysis the big confrontation was waiting for me at the end when I decided I’m going to go with Richard. You postpone it. I mean, in my case, I postponed it… I told somebody I discovered how you can be falling in love…But I still didn’t think I could go home and say anything because, oh, trauma. And when you’re in the middle of all your bliss, you really don’t want that. But being pregnant meant okay, I have to now take some decisions about my life. And the first day after I got my test, I went out and bought a baby book, one of the baby books and a photo album to put all the things in the world. It was a beautiful album. And then I said oops, you have to go home and tell Mother. But I knew she could never handle it. She just couldn’t handle it at all. And we were so close, you know.

Even though Asha and her mother shared a strong relationship before her pregnancy, her mother was never able to come to terms with her marriage to Richard.

Asha did her best to persuade her to accept her husband and child but her mother passed away before they were able to reconcile:

She just set her face against Richard totally and completely. And I have had to have great pain for it. Just a couple weeks before [she died], she had sent me a few pieces of jewelry that she had always kept in a box with my name for me. I spoke with a her a few months before. So, I felt in some way we had made our little final farewell. And so I tell you in the final analysis that I am extremely
Hindu because I do believe, I believe very strongly that maybe I have unfinished business, me and her.

Asha not only faced rejection by her mother and family, but because she came from a small village, the entire community took a stance on her marriage; “I didn’t just get cut out of my family, but out of my community. People had to take sides. And they would of course, take their side.” She stopped attending the temple and Ramayan group she grew up with and is still hesitant to join another religious center because of her reluctance to call attention to herself or her marriage. However, her exclusion from her village did not shake her faith:

When I close my eyes, I see God in the Hindu form. And I think that’s how you know what religion you are… and I will always see God in that form. So, my notion of Hinduism…it’s so radically different, perhaps too revolutionary, to even say to anybody else…Hinduism is all about the mind. A lot of it is about the mind. And the primary quest is the quest for knowledge. To me, that is the Hindu quest… So, the whole ritualistic aspect, I don’t have a jhandi in my house. I’ve never had a pooja. And if I had a pooja, it’s not, I mean, I like the music and so on and all the diyas and the lights and things. But what I did is when I came into my house; I said a prayer for my house. And I put the light and I would say a prayer. I don’t make any public statements. I don’t need to put a bunch of lights. But I am still Hindu. And I haven’t changed.

Asha is critical of the argument that interracial marriages are posing a danger to Hinduism:

…the loudest voices are those that have a vested interest in the status quo that is supported by a whole social-organizational structure, a whole ritualistic approach to Hinduism that has long past. And if you allow that to continue, if you allow that to dominate, then what we call Hinduism will really fall into the cave because this is a thing that is not relevant. But if we were to nurture in people an understanding of Hinduism, then you could understand how it is possible for me to not go to a mandir,13 to be in an inter-ethnic relationship and be more Hindu than when I started off. And then it would not matter if any of my children could be as Hindu as they come and would not even be Indian. So, you don’t tie race to religion. Or you don’t tie the spiritual part which as we are told over and over and over the pureness of the soul has no color, no class and no religion or nothing. The soul could be in an African tomorrow. And when it dies, it could travel and

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13 Mandir is a hindi word for a Hindu temple.
be an animal. And when it dies it can come back as a woman. You could be anything. So, how could you square that with saying you want to be Hindu and you have to be Indian? It’s illogical in the tenants of Hinduism to sustain an argument against inter-ethnic relationships. And if it is only coincidental in my thinking that the Hinduism being developed in India within a particular race of people, an ethnic group, that is only coincidental. But the values and the ideas and the teachings, if you are saying that they are universal in nature and can be applied to any people in any faith, then how can you sustain an argument that it can’t cross the race line?

Asha does not worry about the ethnic identity of her children. To her, ethnicity, class and religious identifications are not as relevant as the maintenance of core values such as compassion, respect, open-mindedness, honesty and self-awareness:

They are who they are. And I don’t know if they are Indians. Their mother was Indian. I don’t know what you will call them. I don’t know what they will call themselves. And I very deliberately in the beginning said I call myself Indo-Trinidadian because that to me describes me.

Despite the hardship she faced because of her family’s refusal to accept her husband, Asha was reluctant to discuss her marriage in terms of ethnicity. To Asha, her husband’s ethnicity was coincidental, it was who he was as a person that attracted her. For this reason, she never talked about her marriage or interracial marriages despite her access to the media and the public. For Asha, true happiness and a meaningful life had nothing to do with race, but rather with one’s connection to their spiritual truth:

To me, it’s spirit. There is no color. There is no class. There’s nothing. You get married because you are in love. You love someone. And you might possibly be lucky for everybody else’s case to fall in love with just the person they would like. But if you are not so lucky…well you stick with it still.

Like Asha, most of my informants retained strong personal and spiritual beliefs about the equality of people regardless of their ethnicity or skin color. Their decision to defy their family and/or community and marry a person of their choosing, prompted them to look internally and challenge their own personal values regarding ethnicity, and color. However, it would be a misstatement to assume that all Indo-Trinidadian women shared
the same set of values. The following story illustrates how marriage to a person of African descent does not necessarily result in a challenge to traditional Indo-Trinidadian views regarding interracial marriages with Afro-Trinidadians.

**Diane**

I still prefer being with my own kind. Even though I married mixed and have many non-Indian friends, I still maintain a certain racism.

I met Diane at her home in Port of Spain on a weekday morning. It was quite warm and she invited me to sit on her porch with her. Diane is tall for a Trinidadian woman, slim, with big eyes and curly black hair. When I arrived at her house, her husband was getting ready to leave for work. The 3 of us briefly conversed about interracial marriages and ethnic conflict in Trinidad. Interestingly, Diane’s husband accused Diane of being “racial” because she did not believe in interracial marriages with Afro-Trinidadians. At the time, her comment startled me because of her marriage, however, her construction of ethnic identity became clearer in the interview. After her husband left, Diane and I talked for several hours on her front porch.

Diane has been happily married for 10 years. Diane is married to a successful businessman of mixed heritage. She is a housewife in her mid-thirties and has 2 children. Diane grew up in a town in the northwest part of Trinidad a few miles from Port of Spain. She is the oldest of 4 children. Her mother was a housewife and seamstress and her father worked as a painter. Diane grew up surrounded by relatives who all lived in the neighborhood. Her extended family is almost evenly divided between Hindus, Muslims and Catholics. Her mother was raised Muslim and her father Catholic. After marriage they converted to Presbyterianism which is Diane’s religion. Diane graduated from
secondary school and has a degree from a secretarial school as well. Diane describes her upbringing as strict. Also, her father had a drinking problem and could be quite violent.

Diane’s neighborhood was dominated by Indo-Trinidadians and her parents had few Afro-Trinidadian acquaintances. Diane was not exposed to many interracial marriages growing up. It was only when her mother started attending a Pentecostal church 15 years ago that she began to have Afro-Trinidadian friends. Diane has had Afro-Trinidadian friends since childhood and her best friend since the 4th form was Afro-Trinidadian. However, she did not bring her Afro-Trinidadian friends home because her father would make racial slurs.

There was this couple who didn’t live in our neighborhood. People used to look at them as how could this Indian woman be sleeping with the Negro man? I used to wonder about them a lot. In my family they marry their own kind. To see this strange girl, this really good-looking girl with this Negro man was strange. People didn’t blatantly stare, they would open their curtain as they went by. They were like freaks.

Diane was a strong-minded woman who had a definite opinion about the type of person she wanted to marry. When asked what kind of traits she had looked for in a husband, she replied that she was primarily attracted to men who possessed strength and reliability. However, she never thought she would marry outside the Indo-Trinidadian community. But she never met an Indo-Trinidadian who possessed those qualities. Initially, Diane was very concerned about what her family and community would say about her dating someone who was not Indo-Trinidadian:

When I met my husband I did everything I could to get out of it. I met him when I was auditing his company. He offered me a position. I only saw him as a boss. After a few months he told me how he felt about me and I was shocked. I wasn’t going to be involved with someone not my kind. After a year of pressuring me, he had to be serious.
Diane feared that her family would have difficult time with the idea of her being with a man who was of African descent:

The first year I never told them about him. I even made up an imaginary name. If he dropped me home, we would stay behind the wall so they couldn’t see. The second year I had the courage to tell them. Oh boy, my mother started crying and carrying on saying ‘What would people say’. I even had my mother lock me out of the house one day. She thought I was coming home too late. She said those kind are not trustworthy at all. They will take what they want then dump you. Even my brother was against it. He said my husband had other relationships and what made me think I wouldn’t be a statistic. In my family you marry early and the only man you’re with is the one you marry. My mother would quarrel with me every single day. As soon as I got up she would start in on me. She was scared I’d end up with a big belly and she would have to take care of it. For Negroes they’re not bothered, but for Indian people there’s no greater shame.

Because of the stress and the unhappiness Diane felt that her relationship was causing, she and her husband decided to forgo a wedding and have a secret, legal wedding instead:

There was going to be problems so I decided it was the best thing to do so they can’t undo it. We took some friends out to dinner and later on went. I went by my parents and told them. It wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be. My sisters were annoyed they weren’t there. But otherwise it would have dragged on.

Diane and her husband have 2 children. Her parents have accepted the children and they experience no barriers in their relationship with either her or her husband’s family. This is in part, she believes, because her children look so Indian that it is hard to guess that they are mixed. Diane admits that she is glad they do not look mixed. The birth of their oldest child caused a stir in her neighborhood, “When my first son was a baby, people brought all kinds of gifts. They wanted to see how Negro he would look. I collected TT$2,000. It mattered how he looked. He had big curls but Mother cut them down so no one could see it.”

Diane has also faced criticism from the Afro-Trinidadian community for her marriage, particularly from women. Diane related an experience where she overheard
women stereotyping her and her marriage, “Well, yeah, Negro men usually get involved with Indian women when they wanted someone to make doubles for them. I couldn’t even cook when I got married.”

Diane had strong, if somewhat conflicting views on interracial marriages and ethnicity. Diane believes that it is very difficult to marry a good Indo-Trinidadian man:

I could have married the boy next door, but I’d have had to worry about where my next meal came from. And Indian men don’t feel like a man until they can beat their wives. They can’t take it out on each other; they go home and take it out on their wives. Indians are really big cowards you know. They have a problem, but they don’t know how to solve it. They go home and rave, saying what they should have done, but they never do it.

Diane describes her marriage as successful and she believes that most interracial marriages have a greater chance of succeeding than intra-racial marriages, “Mixed marriages are more stable. They have an extra appreciation of each other than those where it came too easy.” However, she does not endorse all interracial marriages and firmly believes that Indo-Trinidadian women should not be marrying pure Afro-Trinidadian men. The roots of her prejudice toward dark-skinned Afro-Trinidadian men was not something she could put into words. She simply felt that such liaisons were wrong and that it disturbed her to imagine an Indo-Trinidadian woman naked with a pure Afro-Trinidadian man. She also differentiates between males and females in determining who should choose an interracial marriage:

My husband says that I am too racial because I believe people should stick to their own race. He says the world won’t stay like that. I always tell my son he is Indian. My husband says I’ll make my children racist. I always want my son to marry Indian because they make better wives than other races. Gillian doesn’t have to marry an Indian man. They’re kinda scary. If my daughter brought a totally Negro person in the house I would be totally devastated. I can talk to one

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14 “Doubles” are a popular Indo-Trinidadian appetizer. They are made from fried pastry dough with garbanzo beans and Indian spices.
or two Negro people, but I get threatened in a crowd. I still prefer being with my own kind. Even though I married mixed and have many non-Indian friends, I still maintain a certain racism. When I see a pure Negro fellow with an Indian woman I wonder how she can take her clothes off in front of him. I wouldn’t touch a Negro with a 10-foot pole. I don’t see my husband as being Negro. I see him as mixed and that’s a big difference.

She is equally against marriages between Indians and whites and is aware of the social implications of marrying a white person within the Indo-Trinidadian community:

You know I had a white boyfriend growing up. I was embarrassed for people to see me with him. Indians see white people as better than Negro or Indian. I saw this woman whose daughter married a French Canadian. She said, we’re really moving up. When I see Indian people with whites I wonder why they couldn’t find someone of their own kind. I know this white guy with an Indian girl. His eyes are always looking around. White women don’t like Indian women at all. Indian women are seen as loose, because they are always looking for white men and they don’t care. White men although they have liberated ideas, they don’t want a woman who wants to be the boss. Majority of times when you see an Indian woman running after white men its because they think they have money. When you see white people saying that Indian women are cheap, it’s because of this reason. I could never become attracted to white men.

Despite this, Diane agrees that a greater number of interracial marriages are occurring in Trinidad:

I don’t mind interracial marriages as long as it’s not too drastic [meaning too physically different]. When you see Frederick Street it is really normal to see couples of different colors. It’s just normal. Maybe as my husband says, in a few years you won’t see pure Indian or pure Negro and maybe we can’t condemn anyone that way.

Diane does not feel that her marriage affected her relationship with the Indo-Trinidadian community. For reasons other than ethnicity, her marriage to a middle-class businessman has taken her away from her childhood community. Her rise in economic status is often questioned as much as her marriage to a man of another ethnicity; I’ve had people ask me if he was just an office clerk would you have married him. I couldn’t answer that. I respect my husband for the kind of man he is.” She does not keep up with
her childhood friends, but this has more to do with age and changing values than her marriage:

The people I grew up with I don’t associate with anymore because they feel uncomfortable with me. With growth comes change and I feel that I have grown further than them and they are exactly the same. For example, a typical lime to them is going to the river, cooking, and drinking full of liquor. I don’t drink. I could go if I want, but I couldn’t recapture that.

For Diane, her family’s opposition to her marriage did not result in rejection by her community. Instead, she was the one to sever ties with many of her old comrades from her neighborhood due to a rise in her economic and social position. Diane’s conflicting beliefs about ethnicity and skin color illustrate the depth of Indo-Trinidadian opposition to interracial marriages and the complex balancing act Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages go through to reconcile the values and beliefs of their parents and community with their personal decision to challenge community norms.

The following informant’s story is unique because she initially married an Indo-Trinidadian man. After several years in this abusive relationship, she left her husband, and later chose to marry an Afro-Trinidadian man. Like Mary, Janet’s decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian influenced her decision to convert to evangelical Christianity, a religion which actively promotes the idea that people are equal regardless of their ethnicity or skin color.

Janet

But you can see that he is interested in me. You could see it very, very much. I still have this love for him. I never had this love for my first husband.

I am not sure that Janet actually wanted to be interviewed, but my acquaintance who was her employer, told her she should talk to me. Janet was uncomfortable with the tape recorder and even more uncomfortable talking about herself. The problem was
compounded by the fact that she had a soft voice and strong accent that was difficult for me to understand. However, I had known Janet for several weeks and we had enjoyed each other’s company. Although we never completely got past her discomfort with the interview format, we both enjoyed spending time together talking about her marriage. Janet is quite short and sturdy with a round face and long black hair she wears in a braid down her back. She has a sweet disposition that belies her internal strength and capacity to creatively survive and raise a large family on very little money.

Janet works as a maid for a wealthy family in Diego Martin. She has 5 children, one from a previous marriage and 4 with her current husband, an Afro-Trinidadian man named Reggie. Although Janet admits that her marriage has been difficult at times, she considers herself to be happily married and does not regret her decision.

Janet is one of 7 children. Janet’s parents were both Indo-Trinidadian, her mother was Muslim and her father was Hindu. Her father worked for the bus company and her mother worked occasionally in the sugarcane fields. Janet describes her upbringing as “really Indian, Indian.” Her maternal grandmother was an indentured servant from India so she grew up hearing Hindi spoken in the house. Her upbringing was based on Indian traditions such as eating Indian food, listening to Indian music and following Indian holidays. Her neighborhood was mixed, with Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians living side by side: “Going to school they were there, coming by home, they were there. Next door we had one.” Her parents also had Afro-Trinidadian friends. However, there were no interracial marriages in her neighborhood.

Janet first got married when she was 15; “to tell the truth I really run away with a dougla fellow. I wouldn’t really say he was a pure Indian, because his hair wasn’t
straight, but his father was a Maharaj.” She met him while working in the sugarcane fields with her mother. This marriage produced one son. Her marriage to her first husband did not last very long due to his constant abuse. Janet was verbally abused, unable to leave the house without his permission, and beaten often:

Well he was a fellow…he’s too jealous. He don’t want me to speak to anyone else. Sometimes he go out and this is a curtain right? And he stuck a matchstick between the window. So if he come home and he see that matchstick moved, so he will beat me. I couldn’t really take that.

Her current husband was her first husband’s friend. Janet’s first husband cheated on her with other women in the village. Reggie (Janet’s current husband) would come by the house to carry messages from Janet’s first husband to his mistresses. She believes that Reggie was already interested in her and intentionally participated as a messenger in order to break up his friend’s marriage. Janet describes how they met:

And this fellow was trying to break up the marriage but I didn’t know. I really didn’t know. He was trying to break up my husband and I…Well he was interested in me…and my first husband used to give him message to carry out for other girl…He used to give him message and he used to carry out message. So he knew what was going on. He trying to break up my living!

After a year, Janet left her husband and returned to her parents’ house. Janet’s parents insisted that her second husband be an Indian. In fact they tried to convince Janet to have a “match marriage” (arranged marriage). Upon her return, to her parents’ home, Janet found a job working as a live-in maid. This position did not last long because her first husband found her and created “confusion.” After she was released from that position, Janet returned to her home. During this time, Reggie continued to visit with her and shared his feelings for her:

Yes…Well, I finally come back by my parents. Well I was working. I got work and I was working good. And the woman told me she don’t want anybody to come in and my first husband jumped through the gate and come in and make a
confusion and ting. Well I come back by my mother’s house. When I living there, well I really don’t know how I pick up with this fellow, Reggie. He used to come and trouble me, trouble me. And he knowing I have a child already. So he just come one day and he say, You like me? He just come and say he like me and I say that it can’t work because I have a child and I can’t left my child to go with you. He say he’ll take the child. He take the child and me…Well my mother didn’t accept me to, as I go with this Negro fella. She didn’t accept. She…well when she do understand that we were talking (we used to talk and he used to come by and ting), she got annoyed at all this. Really really, she didn’t like this.

Janet’s parents became very upset because Janet refused to accept an arranged marriage and continued to see Reggie. Eventually her parents threw her out of their home due to her relationship: “So then my mother put me out on the road. When she understand that this Negro fellow like me, she said no no, that does not happen. She put me on the road, on the road… I was very young.”

Janet lived with her husband for 8 years before getting married. After marriage, Janet became an evangelical Christian along with her husband. She has been married for over 30 years. She did not expect her marriage to have lasted as long as it has:

To tell you the truth I never had suspected that I woulda remained so long with him. But I had to say that’s because what God wills, that’s what God wills. Because a lot of people ask he still with you? He still with you? And not long ago we give a testimony at church and they say how they stay so long? At church eh? But what I say, “What God put together no man can asunder. So that’s that marriage is really really blessed. I believe that, up to now we still like each other, although we’ve had some kind of trouble.

When asked why she believed she was still interested in her husband, Janet replied:

I can’t say. I really can’t say. Because since I came to live with him. I really can’t say. Maybe his ways and that kinda thing. He used to treat me nice and all kinda things. He take care of his chirrun’. He treat the chirrun’ nice. So you know all these things make you feel interested in him. He works, he gives me his salary he paid. I remember one time he say look you will go and draw my salary every day and I used to go and draw his salary every day. So all that will make you become interested in a person who cares for you. Because some husbands won’t even give their wives the money. They won’t let their wives draw the salary you know. So maybe all these things keep me with him all this length of time you know. Until after time, awhile, you know when he get to see other
women and lime... So you know, men. Men, they’re are like that you know. I speaking the truth. I get to quarrel with him you know. Very, very bad problems. I don’t know why I didn’t left. Big big problems. My family keep saying, me chirrun, why you haven’t left? Why?... Now its no longer like that. Well, you could say that sometimes there are women. But you can see that he is interested in me. You could see it very very much. I still have this love for him. I never had this love for my first husband.

Janet does not regret her choice to marry her husband. She still harbors anger toward her first husband and does not believe that Indo-Trinidadian men make good partners; “Because Indian husbands are really, really terrible. They like to drink a lot. Here Indian men drink. Because my father used to beat my mother a lot.” She does believe that Afro-Trinidadian men do prefer to marry Indo-Trinidadian women. In fact, her sister has been living with an Afro-Trinidadian man ever since her husband passed away:

You know Negroes don’t really like Hindus, they don’t really like Indians. You know they’re racist, but I don’t know. He really liked me. He really liked me... A lot of them (Negroes) like to marry Indian women. A lot a lot of them. Cause my other sister with a Negro too... she hasn’t married, no. She just lives with him. My sister married a Maharaj fellow too but her husband died. Right now with a Negro fellow. He likes the children.

This does not mean that Janet thinks marriage to an Afro-Trinidadian is problem-free. Janet’s view of marriage is pragmatic:

Indian husband and Negro men are the same. An Indian man will go out with another woman and a Negro man will go out with another woman. I say that you won’t get a man in Trinidad who won’t go out with another woman.

Like many of the previous informants, Janet had to deal with the trauma of rejection by her parent’s and siblings. However, not every informant had to choose between their family and their husband. The following story highlights how easy interracial marriages can be for a woman when her family and community accept her decision. Carol faced no opposition from her family, friends or religious community to
her marriage to an Afro-Trinidadian man. She believes that her decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian and her family’s acceptance of her marriage, stems from their sense of connection to Trinidad rather than India. As her story shows, Carol sees herself as Trinidadian, her history and her future lie in Trinidad.

**Carol**

I don’t look at it as though I came from India. I look at it as I am a Trinidadian. Even my husband sees himself as Trinidadian, means being from here, from nowhere else.

Carol is a young woman in her mid-twenties who lives with her Afro-Trinidadian husband and young daughter in St. Augustine. She is slim, pretty, and soft spoken with a gentle way about her. Carol agreed to do the interview as a favor to her friend and my personal acquaintance. She was a little uncomfortable with the interview, mostly because she seemed uncomfortable talking about herself. She mentioned that she was surprised that I found her story to be worth an interview. The interview started out a little awkwardly. Carol would answer my questions with short answers, but gradually we found a rhythm and her story started to flow.

Carol grew up in a close-knit family in Maraval, a town on the East-West corridor of Trinidad. This area is heavily Afro-Trinidadian. Carol attended a Seventh Day Adventist church as a child, however. She is no longer active in the church. Carol’s mother was a housewife and her father was a taxi driver. They had 4 children, 3 girls and a boy. Both her parents received primary school educations, but Carol graduated from secondary school. Her parents were “strict Christians,” and she does not consider her family to resemble a staunch Indo-Trinidadian family:

My father knew nothing much about Indian culture. With mom, she knew a little of the language, she wanted to keep for herself. Mummy likes her Indian music. We used to go to prayers but it wasn’t something really practiced in our home.
This is because of where we were brought up. There were no Hindus or Muslims in the area.

Because of the population in Maraval, both Carol and her parents had many Afro-Trinidadian friends. In fact her mother’s best friend is Afro-Trinidadian. Interracial marriages are also common in her area and do not attract much attention; “I never really looked at it in any way. It was accepted by me, but I don’t know of others. It is so common you aren’t surprised. You expect to see something you’re used to.”

Marriage was often discussed in her family, but generally focused on deciding at what age she would marry. Arranging a marriage was never discussed. Her mother believed that a person’s ethnicity and income level was important, and Carol believes her mother would have liked it if she had married someone of Indian descent. However, her father was not concerned about who she would marry. Carol cared most about personality and her attraction to the person.

I was looking for personality, educational background, honesty, and a neat person. A Christian person who didn’t drink and smoke and who loved children. I wasn’t looking for an African but it was never to me to marry an Indian either.

At the time of the interview, Carol had been married for 3 years. She met her husband at a swimming pool where he worked as an instructor. She was attracted to his soft, quiet, helpful personality; “He was a very caring person. He possessed all the qualities I was looking for.” She and her husband courted for five years. There was never a period of secrecy and her family immediately accepted him. They married in an Adventist Church and over 250 people attended.

Carol is very close to her father’s side of the family. That side “did not grow up with Indian traditions” and immediately accepted her husband. Her mother’s side is more conservative. She knows her older uncle accepts her marriage, but she is unsure about
her younger uncle. However, this does not concern her. Her marriage has not affected her friendships or outside relationships. The only negative remarks she hears are from strangers when she and her husband are out in public but she never “pays much attention” to their comments.

Carol is confident that her marriage has no affect on her child’s relationship with the family. Carol’s parent’s and family treat her child the same as all the other grandchildren. Carol credits their openness to the community they live in. “The community was not so much Indian. Because Indian traditions were not so strong, it was easy to accept.”

Carol does not believe there is a great distinction between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians, particularly among Christians. She does know that Hindus and Muslims have unique traditions, but does not feel knowledgeable about their traditions; “I look at myself as a Trinidad Indian. I never looked at myself as an ancestor from India. We didn’t know much about the Indian culture. My father’s family knew nothing either of Muslims or Hindus.”

Carol is sure that interracial marriages will continue to occur in increasing numbers. She believes that there is a great deal of acceptance in Trinidad although she acknowledges that ethnic prejudice still exists despite claims that Trinidad is cosmopolitan. However, the trend toward mixing is likely to continue:

I believe there are going to be a lot more interracial marriages. Its going to be a big thing. I believe its going to get into the Hindus as well. When I go to the nursery, there are only 2 pure children. A lot of the younger generation doesn’t know much about it [Indian traditions]. I don’t know much. I have nothing that I could pass on to her. I know a lot of the younger generation don’t know anything about things Indian…I don’t look at it as though I came from India. I look at it as I am a Trinidadian. Even my husband sees himself as Trinidadian - means being from here, from nowhere else.
Contrary to popular perception, not all successful interracial marriages occur between Christians. The final story illustrates how Hindu Indo-Trinidadian women have successfully balanced family, community and religion with their marriage. Like Carol’s story Laskshmi’s interview highlights the difference family acceptance makes in a woman’s decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian.

Lakshmi

They now look at me as if I am not one of them. Then again, I tell myself to hell with them, it’s me.

Lakshmi is a tall, quiet Hindu woman in her mid-thirties who works as a secretary for a wholesale company and has been married to her husband who she describes as “mixed” or multi-racial for several years. Lakshmi and I met after work at the University of the West Indies. She had been referred to my by her boss, a person I had spoken to about her opposition to interracial marriages. I was uncomfortable meeting Lakshmi because I felt as if her boss had forced her to see me. I think Lakshmi was initially annoyed by the interview as well. We started by discussing what it was like to work for someone who publicly and quite vocally disagreed with her marriage. I quickly found that the quiet woman I met in the office was actually strong-willed and impervious to her boss’ opinions. She did her job and paid little attention to those around her. Once we cleared the air about that interview, we quickly established a good rapport and spent an hour together talking about her marriage.

Lakshmi grew up in the town of San Juan in the northwest part of the island where she completed secondary school. Her parents had 6 children including her. Her mother was a housewife and her father worked as a produce buyer. Her neighborhood was predominantly Indo-Trinidadian with a small Afro-Trinidadian population. She
describes her upbringing as very conservative. Her family followed many Indian
customs including practicing Hinduism, eating Indian food and listening to Indian music.

Lakshmi’s parents had both Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian friends and
allowed her to do the same. While there were no interracial marriages in her family, she
was aware of interracial couples in her neighborhood. According to Lakshmi, her family
did not question or critique their choice and these couples were not openly stigmatized in
her neighborhood, however, they were rarely invited to social functions or community
gatherings.

Marriage was a popular topic in Lakshmi’s home. Ethnicity and religion were the
most important factors for her parents and a Hindu Indo-Trinidadian man was considered
to be the ideal mate. Her siblings all married Indo-Trinidadians. When asked what
qualities she was looking for in a husband, Lakshmi replied:

Someone who will love me for what I am …who I could rely on, or who wouldn’t
listen to what family has to say. Who would say yes…this is my wife and I will
support her. Indian families, men leave their wives and go out and get drunk.
They take the wife for granted that they will stay home and take care of the
children. Both cheat on each other.

This does not mean that Lakshmi did not date Indo-Trinidadian men. In fact, she
had always wanted to marry a man of Indian descent; “I would have loved to do it...and
especially for my religion’s sake. I love my Hindu religion.” She seriously considered
marrying 2 men before meeting her husband: “I had a lot of Indian boyfriends. Two were
serious to marry. One listened too much to his mother. The other was from India, but his
mother didn’t want him to live in Trinidad or for me to move there.” After the failed
relationship with the man from India, a friend set her up with her future husband. This
was her first relationship with a man who was not Indian or Indo-Trinidadian; “I was first
attracted to his kindness and his ways. He knows how to treat a woman. He’s not
someone who will talk harsh to you. The smallest little thing you don’t expect someone to do for you, he does it.”

Lakshmi waited 6 months before announcing her relationship to her family. She was not concerned about family’s disapproval, but she wanted to be sure that her husband was an honest person before introducing him to her father. She states that her family first responded with skepticism, but once they “came to know what kind of person he was,” they supported the relationship. She decided to have a Christian wedding because she had always dreamed of having a “church wedding,” not because her husband resisted Hindu traditions. Both her family and her husband’s family attended the wedding.

Lakshmi believes that her marriage has not affected her lifestyle. She still follows the same values and “ways of doing things” as before her marriage. Her main concern was her ability to practice her religion, however, her marriage has not impacted her religion at all; “I made it clear to my husband and he accepts it. He had thought the Hindu religion was used for black magic. Now he’s getting a new understanding and getting to like it.” She believes there is a good balance of cultures in her home.

Despite her happy home life, Lakshmi recognizes that the Indo-Trinidadian community does not see her marriage in the same context. Because of her marriage she believes that she is treated differently. For example, she is rarely invited to attend a pooja or to go to an Indo-Trinidadian event:

The majority of the Indian community didn’t accept it a such. They now look at me as if I am not one of them. Then again, I tell myself to hell with them, it’s me. If I am with them [Indians] I let them know it. I am still an Indian.

When asked if there were differences between marrying an Indo-Trinidadian or an Afro-Trinidadian, she replied:
Things that I like that I don’t think that an Indian husband would let me do alone. If I want to work or go out for a lime with my friends or to the cinema by myself, I can. Or if I don’t want to cook, I don’t have to. An Indian husband makes you cook 3 times a day…Letting you do what you want to do. Your independence…I love my independence. In fact, I was so independent I did not want to get married. I told him from the beginning that I am an independent person. I will not do anything to make you shame, but I want my independence.

Lakshmi’s decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian man did not significantly alter her relationship with her family. Because she received support from her parents and siblings, actions taken by the Indo-Trinidadian community to show their discomfort with her marriage had little impact on her lifestyle and identity. She has successfully retained her religious beliefs and her ability to attend Indo-Trinidadian functions. For Lakshmi, her ability to retain the elements of her life that she valued most, her independence, her family and her religion only enhanced her marriage.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

As shown through the voices of these 8 women, the insights that Indo-Trinidadian women provide when they speak on their own terms reveals a far more complex and interesting perspective on their decisions. Unlike common perceptions regarding Indo-Trinidadian women who choose to marry Afro-Trinidadian men. Their voices are rich and varied, reflecting the diversity of families, religious beliefs and personal values that have influenced and shaped their decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian man.

The goal of my study is to understand why Indo-Trinidadian women choose to marry Afro-Trinidadian men despite vocal opposition from the Indo-Trinidadian community. Marrying an Afro-Trinidadian was a controversial decision for most of my informants. Their decision affected their relationship with their parents, siblings, extended family, and community. A common set of trends and decisions also emerged over the course of my interviews.
This section contrasts trends in my informant’s stories with the opinions of Indo-Trinidadian community leaders regarding Afro-Trinidadians and interracial marriages. I will show that Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages utilize a set of criteria for making marriage choices that is different from Indo-Trinidadian leaders. By highlighting the dissonance between Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages and Indo-Trinidadian community leaders, a clearer understanding of why Indo-Trinidadian women defy community norms to marry Afro-Trinidadian men emerges.

The following analysis is divided into 2 sections. First, Breaking From Proper Behavior: Choosing an Interracial Marriage, focuses on the reasons behind the women’s choice to marry an Afro-Trinidadian man, the process they went through to marry their husband and their perceptions of their marriage. The following section, Now What? Implications of Interracial Marriages for the Indo-Trinidadian Community, analyzes the impact of their marriage on their children, their connection to the Indo-Trinidadian community and their perception of interracial marriages in Trinidad.

**Breaking From “Proper” Behavior: Choosing an Interracial Marriage**

In their preliminary study of women in interracial marriages (Breger and Hill 1998: 19) found that women in interracial marriages shared a particularly “unconventional, adventurous and experimenting” personality. My informants share a particular set of traits that appear to increase their receptiveness to interracial marriages; an independent personality, a belief that personality was more important than ethnicity and cultural similarities in a husband, religious or spiritual convictions that reject ethnic bias and an association to Trinidad that supersedes their Indian ethnicity.
Trait 1: Willingness to Question Authority

Seven of my 8 informants place a high value on independence. They consider themselves to be strong-willed and independent women who were willing to defy authority if needed. Three of my informants refused to marry a person of their parent’s choice; “If my parents were able to find someone to marry me off to, they would have done that. I was too rebellious (Diane).” Soraya believes her father’s intense reaction to her decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian man had as much to do with his anger at his daughter questioning his authority as it did with his prejudice toward Afro-Trinidadians.

Six of my 8 informants married their husband despite clear and vocal opposition from their family. Asha described the importance of being an independent thinker as part of her spiritual philosophy:

…I’ve drawn a great sense of a belief in God in trying to be, in being “unconventional.” People think it’s unconventional. It’s not. It’s just trying to be who you think you were born to be…I have to be true to God. I am sent here to be me, not be anything else that you feel I should be.

Trait 2: Independent Criteria for a Suitable Partner

Seven of my 8 informants did not share their parent’s criteria for a suitable marriage partner. None ranked ethnicity as the most important criteria for a suitable spouse even though 7 of the 8 women stated that ethnicity was the most important criteria for their parents. Instead, as the following table illustrates, informants emphasized personality and shared values.

Table 2: Criteria for choosing an appropriate spouse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Parents’ Criteria for a Spouse</th>
<th>Informants’ criteria for a spouse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lakshmi</td>
<td>They would have preferred if I had married an Indian, but then again they say what makes me happy. They would have kicked against it more being a Muslim.</td>
<td>Someone who will love me for what I am. Who I could rely on, or who wouldn’t listen to what family has to say who would say yes…this is my wife and I will support her.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diane</th>
<th>He [her father] said you ‘give a nigger water with a rod’. They felt it [her marriage] was a disgrace.</th>
<th>I always like tall handsome, dougla fellow… I never thought about marrying Indian or Negro.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>We talked about marriage in terms of my age, but an arranged marriage was never discussed. I know my mum would have liked if I married an Indian but my father didn’t care much.</td>
<td>I was looking for personality, educational background, honesty and a neat person. A Christian person who didn’t drink and smoke and who loved children. I wasn’t looking for an African but it was never to me to marry Indian either.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shalini</td>
<td>You knew that he certainly should not be African, but he could be white. And he must be what they say is a good boy, meaning he’s not an alcoholic or a wife beater, or he has a good job…I don’t think religion mattered as much as race.</td>
<td>My vision was always this Indian man you know, that this Indian man and I would get married. But he’s Indian in my picture but I am not thinking of his race because that is the only association I know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>She [my mother] didn’t like the Negro for me. She wanted an Indian for me because she had Negro friends. She talk and laugh with them, but she didn’t want me to be with them.</td>
<td>Well I really like it [my marriage] because I can go in and out and come home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soraya</td>
<td>I knew what was expected of me, which was to marry a Muslim professional, wealthy…If he wasn’t Indian, it would have meant that he wasn’t from Trinidad, but not a non-Indian Trinidadian Muslim…he could have been Arab, but not an Afro-Trinidadian Muslim.</td>
<td>I think I did foresee a professional. I never really thought about race. It didn’t really seem an issue…As for the religion thing, I knew it was important, but growing up I couldn’t have envisioned whether I would have upheld that or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>She said [of Diane’s husband] those kind are not trustworthy at all. They will take what they want and then dump you.</td>
<td>I have always found strength and reliability attractive qualities in a man. I never came across an Indian man with those qualities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asha</td>
<td>It was always standard for all the daughters, it would have to be Brahmin or Kshatriya…certain kinds of families of certain backgrounds.</td>
<td>A lot of the men who would make my family happy, I would find that person to be like a brother. I find they have standard views on everything. If everybody else is like me, it is a very dull session for me…It is the person who is different and can tell me something I don’t know.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trait 3: Spiritual/Religious Convictions Preclude Ethnic Prejudice

Spirituality and/or religious values were interwoven throughout my interviews with my informants and influenced their decision to marry a person of Afro-Trinidadian descent. Six of the 8 informants actively practice their religion or follow spiritual practices. For these 6 women, their faith solidified their decision to defy societal norms in favor of what they believed are more important spiritual beliefs and practices:

It’s because I thought about what they were telling me in the mandir [Hindu temple]. From the minute I heard that we were all created equal and God is a supreme God, regardless of what color you are, then you couldn’t tell me anything about racism. The minute you told me there is a supreme God, I do not believe that anybody is less or more than anybody. And I never cease to be amazed at how people don’t understand that (Asha).

Janet, Carol, Diane and Mary believe that Christian teachings support their decision to marry a person of African descent. As Janet said; “There was a time when I was ashamed to be with Reggie, but after time, becoming Christian – you know better when you are with the Lord.”

Trait 4: Emphasis on National Identity over Ethnic Identity

All 8 informants were born and raised in Trinidad and identify their country of origin as Trinidad. My informants acknowledge that Trinidad is still trying to develop a sense of identity that was not divided by ethnicity and none of my informants separate their Indian heritage from their sense of identity. As one informant said; “I very deliberately in the beginning said I call myself Indo-Trinidian because that to me describes me. That describes me. I’m not Indian. And I’m not Trinidadian because there is not just such a thing as a Trinidadian yet (Asha).”
However, all 8 women consider Trinidad their home. None spoke Bhojpuri or any other Indian language, none are involved in activities related to current Indian affairs and no one spent time in India. As Soraya stated; “I am Trinadian. My ancestry is Indian, but I am Trinadian.” They believe their future is connected to the future of Trinidad:

I’ve never felt any need or urge to maintain a link to India. I’ve never had a passion to go and visit India. I mean if I had an opportunity, I’d go, but it doesn’t call me. There is no calling. I knew my grandmother. I remember her as an open, regal woman with these bangles they wore on their feet and hands. And she would talk Hindi. She never spoke English…My grandparents used to talk about India but in this abstract way. My grandfather used to say that ‘before I die, I must go to India.’ But he never went, so he didn’t have a passion either. When you have a passion for something and the resources to do it, you would do it. But he never did. And I suppose the children, it just doesn’t matter. There is no relation to India. I see myself as Indian only because I was born to Indian parents. We see things in a certain way, things Indian, practices and religion and all that. But beyond that, no. You were born here and grew up here and that’s it (Shalini).

My informants share a set of personality, emotional and spiritual traits that predisposed them to marry an Afro-Trinidadian. Despite their parent’s wishes that they marry someone of Indian descent, a different set of criteria for what constitutes a suitable spouse combined with an independent personality led to my informant’s decision to consider marriage to an Afro-Trinidadian.

**Community Leaders Response**

The following is a list of reasons why Indo-Trinidadian community leaders believe that Indo-Trinidadian women should not marry Afro-Trinidadian men. Of the 14 Indo-Trinidadian leaders interviewed, only 1 informant was not opposed to interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men. Two stated that they were not opposed to interracial marriages to Afro-Trinidadians but believed that interracial marriages were difficult and prone to failure. The remaining 10 adamantly opposed interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian
men and believed such marriages were a detriment to the stability and future of the Indo-Trinidadian community.

The majority of my informants believed that marrying within the Indo-Trinidadian community was the responsibility of every Indo-Trinidadian and the single most important way to maintain Indo-Trinidadian life on the island. Resistance to interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men stem from a belief that interracial marriages not only disrupt the structure of gender relations which shape the Indo-Trinidadian community, but subvert concepts of class and ethnicity which form the basis of Indo-Trinidadian identity. For Indo-Trinidadian leadership, interracial marriages are dangerous, subversive and hold potentially disastrous consequences for Indo-Trinidadian culture, unity and power on the island.

What is most interesting about their reasons is that they do not discuss the personality or values of Indo-Trinidadian women. Instead, they appear to put the blame for interracial marriages on Indo-Trinidadian men and their inability to compete against Afro-Trinidadian men for Indo-Trinidadian women. Thus, Indo-Trinidadian leaders structure their reasons for Indo-Trinidadian women’s decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian man around stereotypes of Afro-Trinidadian men’s greater virility and aggressiveness compared to Indo-Trinidadian men. Women appear to be reactive to the actions and behaviors of men rather than proactively making decisions to fit their own values and beliefs.

**Reason 1: Indo-Trinidadian Men are Less Attractive than Afro-Trinidadian Men**

Several community leaders believed that Indo-Trinidadian men were considered less sexually attractive than their Afro-Trinidadian counterparts. My informants claimed
that strong cultural roots made Indo-Trinidadian men appear old fashioned and unwilling to allow their wives to be independent; “Indian men are more dominating... African men is not so possessive (Leader 5).” Informants believed that such stereotypes about Indo-Trinidadian men made them appear less appealing to Indo-Trinidadian women, particularly educated, upwardly mobile women; “African men are more streetwise than Indian men. The more mature Indian girl is attracted to the African man because of his greater sexuality (Leader 5).”

**Reason 2: Indian Men are Abusive**

Leaders stated that Indo-Trinidadian men were commonly perceived to be controlling and abusive toward their wives. One informant said, “Indian women are rejecting the patriarchy, abuse, and alcohol which is the image of the Indian community (Leader 5).” My informants agreed that spousal abuse was a concern in the Indo-Trinidadian community however, they felt that negative stereotypes perpetuated by other Trinidadians toward the Indo-Trinidadian community exaggerated the problem; “There is a lot of propaganda that Indians are oppressive and treat their wives badly. Indian men are aggressive and Indian women are treated as subservient. Indian men use a lot of domestic violence” (Leader 7). Leaders felt that Indo-Trinidadian women should not believe this stereotype and should work to end domestic violence within the community structures.

**Reason 3: Indo-Trinidadian Men Cannot Compete Against Afro-Trinidadian Men**

Leaders agreed that Afro-Trinidadian men actively pursued Indo-Trinidadian women because Indo-Trinidadians’ Caucasian features carried positive social and economic benefits for Afro-Trinidadian men. As one informant said, “African men don’t
want African women. They want a white woman first, then Indian and then African (Leader 2).” Another informant stated “Indian women are more respected than African women are. African men see it as an achievement to get an Indian woman (Leader 3).” Several of my informants placed responsibility for interracial marriages on Indo-Trinidadian men. They felt that Indo-Trinidadian men needed to become more sophisticated in order to attract Indo-Trinidadian women and counter the “maturity and aggressiveness” of Afro-Trinidadian men (Leader 5).

**From Courtship to Wedding Bells**

During the course of my interviews, it became apparent that I could not discuss the impact of an interracial marriage on an Indo-Trinidadian woman’s life without talking about her family. Indeed, her immediate family’s reaction to her relationship with an Afro-Trinidadian man was a significant hurdle women faced and directly impacted subsequent decisions related to her marriage, including her relationship to her extended family, friends and community, her children’s relationship to Indo-Trinidadians, and her religion and spirituality. Therefore, much of the interview focused on the informant’s immediate family.

This section is divided into 4 key moments; (1) the initial courtship, (2) announcement of their relationship to their family, (3) the aftermath of their announcement, and (4) the wedding day. For 2 informants, gaining parental approval was easy and caused little or no emotional hardship. For them, these time periods were relatively seamless and less significant. However, for the majority of my informants, marrying an Afro-Trinidadian permanently altered their relationship with their immediate family. Parents accused their daughters of shaming the family, betraying their religion,
and thwarting their authority. For these 6, their relationship with their spouse was heavily influenced by their attempts to navigate their family’s disapproval of their marriage.

**The Initial Courtship**

My informants met their husband through a variety of circumstances. Four women met their husband at their workplace. Three informants worked with their future husband and 1 met her husband at a job-related event. Two women met their husband in their neighborhood and 1 woman met her husband through a blind date set up by her friend. One informant’s husband was a friend of her first husband who pursued her after she divorced her first husband. Seven women stated that their husband had pursued them. Only Asha made the initial effort to meet her husband.

Seven of the 8 informants kept their relationship with their husband secret from their family during the initial courtship. Carol was the only informant who was wholly unconcerned about her family’s reaction to her Afro-Trinidadian husband and therefore maintained no period of secrecy during her courtship. Seven of my 8 informants were living with their parents during their initial courtship. Maintaining a secret relationship required planning and special preparations such as being dropped off a block from home, pretending to work late, lying about meeting a girlfriend, and keeping silent about significant parts of their life.

Work and the ability to be outside the purview of their household contributed to my informant’s ability to meet Afro-Trinidadian men and sustain a relationship. Six of the women interviewed were able to pursue their relationship with their husbands because their job allowed them to schedule time to stay out of their home without explaining to
their family where they were. For example, Asha lived on her own in Port of Spain while her family remained in her home village. Soraya used work assignments as an excuse to stay late and be with her boyfriend. Because Diane’s husband was her former boss, they were able to schedule time to be together. Diane made up a fictitious friend to explain who she was with for the first year of her relationship. Only Shalini and Janet saw their future husband at their home but under the pretence that they were solely friends and coworkers.

**Announcing the Relationship to their Family**

For 7 out of 8 informants, announcing their relationship to their family was considered a pivotal moment in their relationship with their parents. Seven of the 8 informants expected to face criticism and anger from their family and wanted to be sure they loved the person and wanted to marry them before announcing their relationship to their parents:

> I think what I did is compartmentalize my world. I had the world of my family and my village. And I had the world of my work. And I just didn’t let them… I didn’t bring anybody home and vice versa… It wasn’t something I was willing to risk because I knew I would be risking the relationship with my family. And I was not going to risk that…I think it’s a great source of unhappiness for people who are trying to retain the things they love the most, and being told you have to choose one or the other. You want your family. There is not a child who doesn’t want to retain their family in their life, intact as it always is, and make room for the new love of their life (Asha).

On average, my informants waited at least 6 months to announce their relationship to their parents. Lakshmi, Mary and Diane told their parents about the relationship once they were sure that they were seriously considering marriage. Lakshmi decided to wait 6 months before telling her family about her relationship because she
wanted to make sure that he was sincere in his intentions and worthy of marriage. Mary waited 3 months to tell her parents about her relationship and Diane waited a year.

Four of my informants (Shalini, Soraya, Janet and Asha) admitted their relationship to their parents when it was clear that they could not keep the relationship secret any longer. Both Janet and Shalini’s families became suspicious of their boyfriend’s constant visits to their house. Soraya’s relationship with her parents was steadily deteriorating and they were becoming increasingly suspicious of the time she was spending away from the house. Asha, was forced her to tell her family of her relationship when she became pregnant and decided to keep the baby.

Aftermath of the Announcement

Of the 8 women interviewed, only one person (Carol) did not face any opposition to her decision from her immediate family. Of the remaining 7, only Lakshmi’s family supported her decision to marry her husband “once they came to know what kind of person he was.” The remaining 6 were correct in their fears regarding their family’s disapproval – three women (Janet, Soraya, Shalini) were forced to leave their home as a result of their relationship. One (Mary) was locked inside the house and rarely allowed to leave. Asha’s relationship with her mother was permanently severed due to her relationship and she still feels uncomfortable when she visits her village.

Several informants tried to find ways to soften their family’s disapproval of their relationship. Three women who were married to men of mixed descent (Shalini, Soraya and Diane) stated that they hoped that their husband’s light skin color, economic status or education level would have positively impacted their parent’s opinion their relationship, however none reported that any of those criteria altered their opinion.
The Wedding Day

Weddings were one of the most significant ways that families could demonstrate their approval or disapproval of their daughter’s choice in marriage. Two informants reported that their family refused to attend their wedding; Mary’s parents and Shalini’s grandparents refused to attend. Two informants (Soraya and Diane) chose to forgo a wedding and have a civil ceremony due to their family’s intense and negative reaction to their relationship. Both Carol and Lakshmi suffered no repercussions from their parents, friends or relatives for their decision and had the wedding they wanted.

All 7 women who faced disapproval from their parents tried to mitigate their parent’s reaction. Ultimately, for 6 of the 8 informants, choosing to marry an Afro-Trinidadian corresponded with a decision to sever to some degree their relationship with their family. The degree of separation ranged from a few months to a permanent separation from their family.

There was unanimous agreement among the leaders that Indo-Trinidadian women who choose to marry Afro-Trinidadian men faced disapproval and even rejection from either their family; “Once an Indian girl dates an African guy she becomes a liability (Leader 5).” There was also unanimous agreement that Indo-Trinidadian women who grew up in traditional families face the greatest disapproval:

Dating African men is still stigmatized. They are called names and are rejected by Indian men. Especially if the parents are very protective. If a girl is known to go out and date, it is more acceptable. However, it seems more wrong if the girl is considered more conservative. Then it is looked down on (Leader 6).

However, not all Indo-Trinidadian women face disapproval: 2 women in this study, 1 Hindu and 1 Christian, were supported by their parents. Community leaders considered parental approval to be a strong reason to avoid interracial marriages whereas the women
interviewed consider their parent’s opinion a complicated problem, but one that should be negotiated. In these cases, disapproval and even rejection did not deter the women from choosing their marriage, signifying the high value they placed on their individual decision.

Perceptions of Marriage to an Afro-Trinidadian

The following criteria examine the perceived benefits of interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men. All 8 informants were adamant that they did not deliberately choose to marry their husband because of his ethnicity and that ethnicity was never an issue in their relationship. However, 6 of the 8 women interviewed believed that their marriage had certain advantages over their Indo-Trinidadian peers in intra-racial marriages. Only Carol did not believe she had seen significant differences between marriages in either community and Asha did not believe that differences were related to ethnicity, rather she attributed them to the quality of the person.

Freedom and Flexibility

Six women (Lakshmi, Janet, Soraya, Diane, Shalini, and Mary) reported that they enjoyed greater freedom and flexibility in an interracial marriage. Their personal experiences growing up in an Indo-Trinidadian family, as well as the experiences of their friends and neighbors in intra-racial marriages reinforced their belief that Indo-Trinidadian men are more controlling, possessive, and jealous than Afro-Trinidadian men. For these 6 women, the freedom to make personal choices was very important. They listed their ability to go out with friends, to choose not to cook three meals a day, and to not request their husband’s permission for small things, as major advantages to
marrying an Afro-Trinidadian. Lakshmi made her expectations regarding her need for independence very clear to her husband; “I love my independence. In fact I was so independent I didn’t want to get married. I told him from the beginning that I am independent. I will not do anything to make you shame, but I want my independence.”

**Freedom from Violence**

Four of the 6 (Shalini, Mary, Lakshmi and Diane) specifically mentioned that their husbands were not physically and emotionally abusive, a trait they found common in Indo-Trinidadian men. They each felt that Indo-Trinidadian men were “overly jealous,” “emotionally weak” and “prone to taking out their frustration on their wives”:

I don’t have to worry about running in the kitchen and getting his food when he comes home. In an Indian home you have to leave what you’re doing and go and see about the man. You are a doormat for the man. If you go out somewhere, you have to worry about him making a fool of himself. You have to worry about doing something wrong because you know you’ll get it [beaten] if you do. Indian men are always worried about something or other. Indian men, not only are they short, they are weak (Diane).

**Positive Relationship with Afro-Trinidadian In-Laws**

The 3 women (Shalini, Soraya and Asha) who had to leave their family because of their relationship found their husband’s parent(s) supportive when their family would no longer support them. As Soraya stated:

I appreciated their [Afro-Trinidadian in-laws] openness. They were more receptive to other cultures and beliefs and ways of seeing and doing things. His family is more receptive. They don’t see things in terms of race. I felt more welcomed. I also felt they had a broader range of activities and interests…The problem is more in the Indian community. African people don’t fuss about things like that. They are quite open and receptive. They are quite proud and happy to be part of this thing.

One informant (Carol) lives in the same house as her in-laws and reported no problems regarding her marriage to her husband. Two informants (Mary and Lakshmi) reported cordial relations with their in-laws and the final 2 (Janet and Diane) had limited
contact with their in-laws due to their husband’s strained relationship with his parents but their limited relationship had to do with issues unrelated to their marriage.

**Advantages to Marriage to an Indo-Trinidadian Woman**

Likewise informants believed that Afro-Trinidadian men felt there were advantages to marrying Indo-Trinidadian women: they were thriftier, more patient and supportive, and more focused on their home-life than Afro-Trinidadian women.

**Indo-Trinidadian Leaders’ Perception of Interracial Marriages**

Indo-Trinidadian leaders believed that marriage to an Afro-Trinidadian was unworkable due to their less cultivated values and commitment to marriage and family. Because they saw no personal advantage to marriage to an Afro-Trinidadian man, they assumed that Indo-Trinidadian women who chose interracial marriages were doing so for social and economic reasons.

According 14 leaders, 3 decades of rule by the PNM, the Afro-Trinidadian dominated political party had resulted in Afro-Trinidadian men having greater access to social mobility and wealth than Indo-Trinidadians. Therefore, they maintained that Indo-Trinidadian women, particularly educated, professional women married Afro-Trinidadians because they were more westernized and maintained prestigious positions. Thus, Indo-Trinidadian leaders saw Indo-Trinidadian women who chose an interracial marriage as putting their own desires and ambitions above the needs of their ethnic community. Thirteen leaders also believed that Indo-Trinidadian women were considered more attractive than Afro-Trinidadian women because their physical features more closely mirrored European features. They claimed that Afro-Trinidadian men married Indo-Trinancean women for their physical look.
Afro-Trinidadians Women are Unfaithful

All 14 informants (community leaders) agreed that Afro-Trinidadian values regarding marriage and family were not as strong as Indo-Trinidadian values. All 14 agreed that Indo-Trinidadians possessed a stronger family and community structure than Afro-Trinidadians. Seven of the informants juxtaposed positive Indo-Trinidadian stereotypes such as the belief that Indo-Trinidadians are hard working, focus on family life, and are both thrifty and modest with negative stereotypes about Afro-Trinidadians including generalizations that Afro-Trinidadians are not faithful in a marriage, are lazy, spend too much time partying and do not manage money. As one person said:

We have different work ethic and values…Once a Negro marries an Indian woman it is without doubt that he will be unfaithful. It is really cultural. Negroes want to spend all the money in the world. African women have no respect for their husband. In school African women want to marry Indian men because the perception is that they have all the money (Leader 3).

Seven informants believed that Indo-Trinidadian women could not expect their Afro-Trinidadian husband to be faithful. They believed that Afro-Trinidadian men did not value commitment and could not be trusted to respect Indo-Trinidadian women:

We [Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadians] can work together, but that is it. We have different philosophies towards life. Negroes do not have the same attitude towards the family. For example it is getting close to lunchtime. If you were talking with an African, they would invite you to lunch and they would find some way to touch your hand or something. That is not acceptable in an Indian household. Africans are perceived to have no commitment to their home (Leader 2).

Not every marriage to an Afro-Trinidadian worked out as my informants had hoped. Two of the 8 informants (Soraya and Shalini) were no longer married to their husbands. However, both women felt that ethnic and cultural differences were not
related to their reasons for divorce. Soraya considered a lack of communication to be the primary cause for the demise of the marriage and Shalini cited conflicting beliefs regarding children as the primary reason for her divorce:

It had nothing to do with race, this relationship. I never saw him in terms of being African you know. If we quarreled, I would never say, you know (something about his race). It just never occurred to me. I saw him in terms of the human race (Shalini).

**Maintenance of Cultural Traditions**

Perhaps most striking is the dissonance between perceptions of cultural continuity and tradition. Not only did my informants in interracial marriages state that they did not practice Indian traditions in their home, none placed a high value on maintaining them. Conversely, the maintenance of Indian traditions was of the utmost importance to Indo-Trinidadian community leaders.

None of my informants in interracial marriages report a sense of personal or cultural loss because of their choice to marry an Afro-Trinidadian. In fact, as Christians, Diane, Mary, Carol and Janet did not think they practiced any uniquely Indian traditions:

I look at myself as a Trinidad Indian. I never looked at myself as an ancestor from India. We didn’t know much about the Indian culture. My father’s family knew nothing either of Hindus or Muslims…I don’t know much, nothing that I could pass on (Carol).

Both Janet and Mary’s religious values emphasize the practice of their religion over all other traditions. Mary has not tried to preserve any particular Indian traditions with her children; “They don’t have any culture. They look as Jehovah’s Witnesses, one people trying to serve God. We don’t put in mind Indian or African.” Likewise, because she is an evangelical Christian, Janet stated that her religious identity superseded the need to maintain what she considered to be Indian culture or traditions in her home.
Four of the 8 women interviewed (Asha, Soraya, Mary and Janet) currently follow different religious and spiritual practices from their parents and family. Asha’s family practices an orthodox form of Hinduism while she describes her understanding of Hinduism as much more “radical.” Soraya broke away from her family’s Islamic faith and is constructing her own spiritual identity based on meditation, Vedic scriptures and new age philosophy. Both Mary and Janet converted from Hinduism to Christianity upon their marriage (Mary and her husband became Jehovah’s Witnesses and Janet and her husband converted to evangelical Christianity). Their decision to convert to Christianity is a significant departure from the traditions and practices of their family and community.

As a Hindu, Asha places importance on sharing Hindu religious and cultural traditions with her children. However, her high visibility within Trinidad and her desire to protect her children from the stares and curiosity of other Indo-Trinidadians has made it difficult to attend religious functions. Moreover, she is pragmatic about the fact that her family’s refusal to accept her marriage means that her children will be denied the opportunity to share in many aspects of her background and childhood:

Their life is not mine. I cannot replicate the circumstances of my upbringing to make them believe that their life is just like what mine used to be. What is normal for them? They are in a home where the parents are people who have been in different cultures. And the reality is that I had to leave mine. Mine was taken from me. That is the reality. I can’t rewrite that to make it look to them like they are like everybody else. They’re not like everybody else (Asha).

Soraya, Lakshmi and Shalini do not have children, however, they have thought about the impact of an interracial marriage on their children. All 3 hope their children will have a broad view of race and religion; “I would expose my children to both religions and let them choose when they are older. I think it’s the things they teach that are more important than the religion itself, the values and the morals (Shalini).” Soraya
also acknowledges that having children that look Indian and practice Islam is not important to her:

Indian identity isn’t only relegated to physical features. Eventually that notion of Indian identity will be replaced by practices and beliefs…it doesn’t matter what they look like. It’s a matter of giving them a sense of who they are so no one can instill any doubt in them.

For a number of reasons, all 8 of my informants do not feel that are practicing distinctly Indian traditions as defined by Indo-Trinidadian leaders. First, 4 of the 8 no longer practice their family’s religion. Second my informants’ placed a greater emphasis on their religious or spiritual identity over their ethnic identity. Third, they emphasized the importance of their children having a broader perspective of identity that encompassed both their ethnic backgrounds rather than emphasizing their Indian ethnicity.

**Indo-Trinidadian Leaders and the Maintenance of Culture**

Overwhelmingly, Indo-Trinidadian leaders feared that interracial marriages to Afro-Trinidadian men would cause Indo-Trinidadian culture to become diluted and eventually subsumed within western culture. Indo-Trinidadian leaders took great pride in their belief that Indian culture and traditions had been retained after 150 years in Trinidad. Informants felt that Indo-Trinidadian values, customs and traditions could only be maintained within a racially pure Indo-Trinidadian community. They feared that the continuation of Hinduism as well as many other aspects of Indian culture including customs, beliefs and family patterns relied on intra-racial marriages:

We must pay our debt to our ancestors and rishis. Puja prithi is the continuation of the race. My shastras declare that maintenance of my race is needed. I must marry and connect my children to their ancestors…. It is almost impossible for a person in an interracial marriage to maintain their culture (Leader 1).
Eleven leaders believed that Afro-Trinidadians did not respect Indo-Trinidadian culture and values. Informants believed that interracial homes would not allow for the practice of family-based and community-based traditions therefore causing women to give up their Indo-Trinidadian identity in favor of a creolized, Afro-Trinidadian lifestyle; "In Trinidad, Indians maintain a strong sense of self. This is lost when you marry out. You no longer practice what your forefathers did. There are enough problems in non-interracial marriages without adding this factor (Leader 3).

Indo-Trinidadian leaders’ perceptions that women in interracial marriages do not maintain traditional Indian practices in the home appears accurate. However, the reasons for this were vastly different from what the informants reported. Although none of my informants were actively involved in Indo-Trinidadian cultural practices; religion, family dynamics and changing lifestyles were given as reasons, not the negative influence of their husbands. In fact, none of my informants mentioned cultural conflicts with their husband as a factor in their separation from Indo-Trinidadian culture and traditions.

Now What? Implications of Interracial Marriages for the Indo-Trinidadian Community

Reshaping Family Relationships

For the majority of the women interviewed, their choice to marry an Afro-Trinidadian significantly altered their relationship with their family. For the 6 women whose family did not accept their decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian, only 2 (Shalini and Diane) feel that they were able to fully resume their relationship with their parents and siblings and believe that their husband was ultimately accepted. However, they recognize that they do not always receive the same treatment as their siblings. Shalini was the only grandchild left out of her grandparent’s will and Diane’s mother will
occasionally express racist feelings toward Diane’s husband and children, such as a concern that her grandchildren would have African features.

The other 4 informants (Soraya, Asha, Janet, and Mary) report very strained relations with their family. Soraya and Mary maintain a limited relationship with their immediate family and even less with their other relatives. Because Mary lives so close to her mother she sees her regularly, however, she does not consider their relationship close, and she is aware that her mother does not treat her children as well as her sibling’s children. Soraya rarely sees her family, especially her father, and has had to recreate a life for herself. She lives alone and tries to remain financially and emotionally independent of her family. Janet found the first years to be the hardest; “The first few years they were waiting to see if I would leave and then come back home.” Her parents have since passed away and although she regularly sees her siblings, she knows they continue to disapprove of her decision. Asha and her mother never regained the close relationship they had before her marriage. Since her mother’s death she has chosen to maintain very limited contact with her father and siblings because of their attitudes and behavior toward her and her husband.

Both Carol and Lakshmi did not experience any changes in their relationship to their family. Carol’s family remains close with her and her child. Lakshmi’s family was initially skeptical but now believes she made the right choice in marrying her husband. She and her husband maintain a happy, open relationship with her parents and siblings.

**Impact of their Marriage on their Children**

Of the 8 women interviewed, 5 women (Mary, Diane, Carol, Janet and Asha) have children with their husband. Mary’s mother does not fully accept her children
because they are mixed; “My mother knows they are good kids. She has grown to love
them a great deal. Having 4 and none of them disrespecting her. But my brother who has
Indian children, she loves more. You can see it.” Mary notes that her children find the
prejudice within her family mirrored in the larger Indo-Trinidadian community and
therefore relate better with Afro-Trinidadians.

Like Mary, Janet’s family does not fully accept her children because they are
mixed. Janet’s 5 children perceive Indo-Trinidadians to be more “racial” than Afro-
Trinidadians. However, Janet notes that her sons like to date Indo-Trinidadians whereas
her daughters prefer Afro-Trinidadians. One daughter recently married a man of mixed
Indian and African heritage.

Asha, Diane and Carol’s children are too young to notice differences in their
relationship with Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians. Diane does not believe that
her children’s racial background has impacted their relationship with her family,
however, she admits that her parents had an easier time accepting her children because
they have strong Indian features and do not look mixed. Carol feels that her daughter is
equally loved by both sets of grandparents without prejudice.

Because of Asha’s relationship with her family is strained, she is reluctant to have
her children spend much time with her family. However, she has worked hard to explain
to her children why:

I’ve told my children about the problems of my family and the problems people
have about race in Trinidad. And they had to be at a certain level of maturity to
understand that …[but so] that they understand why they don’t visit my father.
And that’s their grandfather.

Indo-Trinidadian leaders feel that interracial marriages are unnecessarily difficult
on the children. It is commonly believed that children of interracial marriages prefer
their Afro-Trinidadian heritage to their Indo-Trinidadian heritage and therefore adopted Afro-Trinidadian cultural patterns. Several informants expressed dismay at the disdain they believe biracial children feel toward their Indo-Trinidadian heritage. Others express a belief that biracial children suffer from isolation an “identity crisis,” and are unable to feel like they belong to either community:

Children often have identity problems. They don’t know who they are. They are not Indian and not African. They may lose the extended family tradition found in “pure” families because grandparents disapprove of their marriage. Often they feel isolation (Leader 6).

As one informant stated, “Too many barriers must be crossed in interracial marriages – caste, exogamous relationships are not accepted, particularly among older people, common traditions and backgrounds are given up” (Leader 5).

The community leaders’ perspectives illustrates why the women were having trouble integrating their children into the Indo-Trinidadian community. Mixed children were not viewed as a welcome part of the Indo-Trinidadian community. The children, caught in the middle of their family and community’s prejudice are marginalized. The women suffer the impact of seeing their children treated differently because of their dougla status.

**Maintaining a Connection to the Indo-Trinidadian Community**

The positive or negative reaction of their family to their marriage appears to correlate with my informants’ relationship to the Indo-Trinidadian community as a whole. Carol experienced the least change in her relationship with the Indo-Trinidadian community. Carol felt that Hindus and Muslims would have the hardest time with her marriage. However, as a Seventh Day Adventist who grew up in a very mixed, urbanized neighborhood, she feels disconnected from their values and beliefs. She chooses to
ignore hurtful comments from strangers; “I know what I have…a loving husband. My friends in East Indian relationships, their marriage isn’t going well. I consider myself lucky.”

Like Carol, Diane associates most of the opposition to interracial marriages with Hindu Indo-Trinidadians. As a Christian, she feels that Hindus’ attitudes and beliefs do not impact her. However, she does believe her marriage to a person of a higher socio-economic class has cemented a separation between herself and the Indo-Trinidadian community where she was raised:

The people I grew up with, I don’t associate with anymore because they feel uncomfortable with me. With growth comes change and I feel I have grown further than them and they are exactly the same. A typical “lime” to them is going to the river, cooking, and drinking full of liquor. I don’t drink. I could go if I want, but I couldn’t recapture that.

Shalini and Lakshmi both found that because they married an Afro-Trinidadian, their friends and family assume that they no longer have an interest in Indo-Trinidadian cultural or religious activities. They feel that other Indo-Trinidadians assume they prefer western or creolized activities and both express a sense that they are considered “traitors to the cause.” Both women consider those views narrow-minded and judgmental. As Lakshmi states, “then again, I tell myself to hell with them, it’s me.” Likewise, Shalini has accepted that she cannot change other people’s opinion of her. She finds the Indo-Trinidadian community to be clinging to beliefs and values that she feels are no longer relevant:

I still think the Indian community has not progressed and if they have, it is very little. They have not yet come to terms with it. But it’s something that in the end they can’t stop. And it’s happening and the evidence is in the mixed children. But they are not yet broad-minded enough to welcome it with open arms. And you see the Indian community is provincial. They are so rural and culture gets into it. It will be a hard cycle to break (Shalini).
Both Mary and Janet feel that they are not able to relate to Indo-Trinidadians anymore. They both find their attitudes to be too racial and prefer to be around Afro-Trinidadians:

I agree better with Africans. Indians don’t really take me on too much. I have just about one Indian friend. I don’t know. Because we are happy, we are a good family. They are jealous. I find persons of African descent are more genuine. They see me for who I am, not who I marry. Marrying Negro, that’s one of the effects – staying away from them [Indo-Trinidadians] (Mary).

As devout Christians, they were particularly bothered by the Indo-Trinidadian Christian community’s prejudiced reactions because it went against their interpretation of their religion; “These Indians at church are still racial. If you become a Christian you’re supposed to love everyone as one (Janet).”

Soraya felt that she simply doesn’t meet Indo-Trinidadians she can relate to because her approach to life is so different:

My marriage sort of cemented a greater separation for me because my parent’s attitudes were representative of the Indian community and I wasn’t accepted. I didn’t want to maintain those ties. What I am now discovering is that my heritage is coming back to me through philosophy… How come I feel so different? It’s innate.

**Impact of their Marriage on Interracial Marriages within the Indo-Trinidadian Community**

For some informants, their decision to marry a person of African descent seems to have increased the rate of interracial marriages within their family. Three of my 8 informants mentioned another family member who was either living with or married to a person of Afro-Trinidadian descent. One informant noticed that her younger siblings were dating men of various racial backgrounds, not just Indo-Trinidadians. Several informants did feel that their decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian man may have
impacted their relatives’ decisions, and one informant stated that her family blamed her for her sister’s decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian.

Because none of my informants felt that their decision to marry their husband was related to his ethnicity, but rather had to do with his personality, they were adamant that their marriage could not be used as an example of what did or did not work in interracial marriages:

If they want to make me a statement of all that is wrong with interracial marriages, they can do that. But my life isn’t a statement for anybody. My life is mine. And I’m not going to be made into a statement or provide the context for that…my life is real. And I can’t extrapolate any lesson from my life for anybody else’s. It is not fodder for an argument, it’s never about race or interracial. It’s not about heterosexual relationships against homosexual relationships. It’s not about out of wedlock or in. It’s just happens we have found ourselves in that situation…There is only one thing it can offer. I think that you should have the courage to follow your heart and your instinct. That is the only thing, and to believe that this could be, you could survive it. Because I can tell you, given how small is this society, you could become very scared at the possibility of the fall out and the terrible things that are going to happen. And you could give up in the process on the [one] thing that’s most important to have in your life…If you are sure, if there are things that you know you stand for, don’t compromise. Just go…. (Asha)

Interviews with Indo-Trinidadian leadership reveal their beliefs that interracial marriages are dangerous, subversive and held potentially disastrous consequences for Indo-Trinidadian culture and unity. As one leader said, “Pundits [Hindu priests] attitudes to interracial marriage is that when they see that, they feel as if their whole world is falling apart (Leader 5).”

Several informants believe that Afro-Trinidadians are purposely trying to diminish Indian cultural life on the island out of jealousy and fear because Afro-Trinidadians are perceived as not having a unique culture. They uniformly agreed that Afro-Trinidadians are willing to enter into interracial marriages because they do not have to give up culturally sensitive practices the way Indo-Trinidadians do:
Indians feel that they come from very culturally strong roots, cultural patterns and norms. They feel that we know who we are. Afro-Trinidadians have a different religious and cultural identity. They don’t feel as threatened by mixing. They don’t feel that they have as much at stake in the first place. (Leader 5)

**Will Interracial Marriages Continue to Increase?**

All 8 informants report that they expected to see a rise in interracial marriages. They agree with the general perception that the younger generations of Trinidadians are more open to interracial relationships; “I think now it is more accepted than before. The younger generation is more open to whatever is going on. They are getting more freedom. The older parents are getting to understand they need more freedom (Lakshmi).” Carol feels that she already lives in a community where interracial marriages are the norm rather than the exception; “I believe there are going to be a lot more interracial marriages. It’s going to be a big thing. I believe it’s going to get into the Hindus as well. When I go the nursery, there are only 2 pure children (Carol).”

**The Future of the Indo-Trinidadian Community in Trinidad**

My informants agree that the antagonism between Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians is harmful to Trinidad society as a whole and Indo-Trinidadians in particular. Seven of the 8 informants feel that the Indo-Trinidadian community is too close-minded. They worry that inflexibility and intolerance will alienate people rather than enhance Indo-Trinidadian life and culture on the island. My Hindu informants are particularly concerned about the ability of Hinduism to remain relevant to Hindu Indo-Trinidadians:

I think you have to get real about Hinduism. And lot of what we are passed in life as Hinduism is really some management and control techniques embedded in some of these things….And I think that what we lack in Trinidad is the intellectual class to return Hinduism to it’s morays, to distill the essence…But the loudest voices are those that have a vested interest in the status quo that is supported by a whole social-organizational structure, a whole ritualistic approach
to Hinduism that has long past. And if you allow that to continue, if you allow that to dominate, then what we call Hinduism will really fall into the cave because this is a thing that is not relevant. But if we were to nurture in people an understanding of Hinduism, then you could understand how it is possible for me to not go to a mandir, to be in an inter-ethnic relationship and be more Hindu than when I started off. . . . Are you saying that Hindus are always reborn Hindus? That they must always be reborn Indian. That is not what its-- that’s not how I understand the teaching. It is convenient that somebody can be born rich now and poor the next time. But how come people don’t think that they could be born African the next time. And in fact, it would be very interesting if all those who are carrying on this way are reborn Africans. All the Africans reborn Indians. That would teach them. They might be a part of us (Asha).

**Conclusions**

This study shows that Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages to Afro-Trinidadian men operate from a different set of assumptions about their gender role and ethnic identity as compared to the expectations outlined by Indo-Trinidadian community leaders. By comparing my informants’ explanations for why they chose an interracial marriage against the arguments made by Indo-Trinidadian leadership against interracial marriages, a clearer picture emerges of how gender and ethnic roles are changing within the Indo-Trinidadian community. What surfaced from the research were competing ideologies and value systems within the Indo-Trinidadian community; one that favored isolation and strictly defined racial boundaries and one that supported integration and a heterogeneous national identity.

Based on the community leaders’ opinions of interracial marriages, Indo-Trinidadian women who married Afro-Trinidadian men were supporting Afro-Trinidadian political power and the disintegration of Indo-Trinidadian culture and values. As chapter 4 outlined, the Indo-Trinidadian community has defined itself in opposition to the Afro-Trinidadian community. Where Afro-Trinidadians represent creolization, a lack of culture and identity, poor family structure and values, irresponsible spending habits
and laziness, Indo-Trinidadians represent strong family and community values, culture, spirituality, economic prudence, and strong work ethics. These values are supposedly perpetuated through specific gender roles and responsibilities. Indo-Trinidadian men are responsible for representing the Indo-Trinidadian community to the outside world and Indo-Trinidadian women are responsible for supporting Indo-Trinidadian men through the maintenance of the family unit. For women, their Indo-Trinidadian identity, as defined by the community leaders, requires full participation in all aspects of Indo-Trinidadian family and community life and marriage to an Indo-Trinidadian man is considered essential. Therefore, when Indo-Trinidadian women marry outside the community, particularly to Afro-Trinidadian men, they subvert fundamental components of Indo-Trinidadian identity including gender roles, ethnic purity, and social and political separatism. Marriage to Afro-Trinidadians is particularly problematic because the phenotypic features of Indo-Trinidadian women (lighter skin and caucasian features) are considered advantageous to Afro-Trinidadian men. Therefore, the Indo-Trinidadian woman who marries an Afro-Trinidadian man not only rejects her family and community duties but provides a social advantage to the opposing ethnic group. For Indo-Trinidadian community leaders to approve of interracial marriages and the mixed race children, they would have to accept a change in discourse about what it means to be Indo-Trinidadian. This is considered the first step to dismantling and the social, political, religious, economic and educational institutions that support long held values and perspectives about Indo-Trinidadians and their relationship to the other ethnic groups in Trinidad.

Yet, as this study shows, strong disapproval from community leaders is not enough to prevent interracial marriages. Education and economic independence allowed
my informants to formulate an alternate understanding of their identity and make decisions that thwarted traditional gender roles and defied family and community expectations. The ability to work outside the home and earn their own money provided my informants with the opportunity for contact with potential mates outside their community as well as the economic resources to function independent of their parents and family. Exposure to the broader Trinidadian society also provided my informants with the ability to re-create community structures and networks lost through their decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian. My Christian informants privileged their religious affiliation and community over their ethnic identity and built a network of friends and support through their church. Other informants built a racially diverse group of friends and associates who were connected to their work, personal interests or spiritual beliefs. Thus, my informants had the education, mobility and economic means to create religious, familial and community structures that supported their decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian, thereby allowing them to resist parental obligations and community expectations.

Indo-Trinidadian women married to Afro-Trinidadian men reject traditional definitions of Indo-Trinidadian womanhood and the gender roles promoted by the Indo-Trinidadian leadership. However, as the interviews show, they are not rejecting their ethnic identity. Instead, they question the notion that Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian are oppositional identities and choose to privilege their national Trinidadian identity over their Indian ethnicity. Being of Indian descent defines their cultural background; however, they do not accept the set of responsibilities traditionally associated with their gender as outlined by Indo-Trinidadian leadership. Instead, they
feel a greater commitment to their personal goals. Marrying an Indo-Trinidadian who would have been acceptable to their family was equated with a loss of independence and personal freedom, cultural constrictions and potential violence. By rejecting community expectations to marry an Indo-Trinidadian and marrying an Afro-Trinidadian, my informants reported certain advantages including personal independence, greater trust, fewer expectations regarding their behavior and freedom from physical violence. These advantages were considered more important than family and community approval.

What the analysis shows is that traditional constructions of Indo-Trinidadian womanhood are not compelling to all Indo-Trinidadian women. Indo-Trinidadian women who are exposed to opportunities to marry outside of their community, have the economic and educational means to do so, and a greater commitment to their national identity versus their ethnic identity, perceive interracial marriages to Afro-Trinidadian men as a viable option. Reasons presented by Indo-Trinidadian leaders against interracial marriages do not resonate with my informants’ perceptions of the advantages of their marriage to an Afro-Trinidadian. Therefore, calls for the maintenance of traditional gender roles and responsibilities do not supersede my informants’ reasons for choosing an interracial marriage.

As Indo-Trinidadians migrate to Trinidad's urban centers and Indo-Trinidadian women continue to gain greater access to primary and secondary education as well as work outside the home, it is likely that interracial marriages will continue to occur. My interviews demonstrate that Indo-Trinidadian women are well aware that interracial marriages to Afro-Trinidadian men are viewed negatively by their community, yet seem willing to risk separation from family, friends, and communities in exchange for the
material and social advantages that include greater personal freedom and marital support. For these reasons, calls to stop interracial marriages will likely have little impact on the growing rate of these relationships. Indeed, the younger generation shows a greater acceptance of the douglarization of Indo-Trinidadian culture. Young Indo-Trinidadians are increasingly participating in cultural, religious and social activities once considered the purview of Afro-Trinidadians. Likewise, Trinidadian youth are experimenting with Indo-Trinidadian art, music and cultural forms and blending them with Afro-Trinidadian elements. The growing number of mixed-raced Trinidadians as well as an increased acceptance of interracial relationships by the youth suggests that as Indo-Trinidadians grapple with concepts of identity, nationality and ethnicity in the future, the dominant Indo-Trinidadian discourse will have to incorporate the views of Indo-Trinidadians who favor integration and reject social and political structures that promote separatism. In doing so, Indo-Trinidadians may find that cultural retention has less to do with the strict adherence to social and cultural codes that limit women’s choices and more to do with an appreciation of the diversity and complexity of the Indian diaspora.
My daughter was born this January with all the pomp and splendor accorded to the first grandchild. Sri Ashwini’s magic touched all of us from the moment of her arrival, healing old wounds and calling us all to fill her life with positive energy through a loving family. Her birth did what 8 years of marriage never quite accomplished; it sealed my husband’s place in my family. She is now the focal point around which my mother, father, husband and I can revolve, giving us a way to meet and talk to each other over class and cultural barriers that sometimes felt frustratingly insurmountable.

My parents have taken on the role of providing her with a strong Hindu foundation. At 11 days she had a crib ceremony followed several months later with her namakaranam or naming ceremony. Next month is her anaprasna, or first feeding ceremony. My husband’s family has enthusiastically joined in on all the festivities. For them it’s been a chance to wear salwar kameezes, eat Indian food, and get to know my family better. For my parents it has been a learning experience, the business of building family is universal. Perhaps my mother has more in common with my mother-in-law than she thought. For me it has been a chance to reconnect with my community and religion. Raised in the United States in the 1970s, I learned to be Indian without the accoutrements of temples, grocery stores, dance classes, and sari shops that my community now takes for granted. Now I have a reason to get involved that extends beyond my own personal desire to make up for what I did not have, I have a daughter to
raise. My husband, a Christian only by birth, has carved a place for himself in all of this. He loves to dress her in her bangles and has become expert in painting a black bindhi on her forehead. My mother-in-law (Granny) enjoys being a part of the rituals. Sri Ashwini is her 13th grandchild but she remembers how special the first one is and lets my mother take the lead and patiently awaits the day when Sri Ashwini will demand her sweet potatoes, the favorite food of all her grandchildren.

I took a chance 8 years ago to go against the norms of my community and marry the person that I truly believed from the first time I saw him was my soulmate. That belief has not made things easy as we have negotiated, compromised, and pushed back when necessary to carve out a space in our home for both our lives, communities, value systems and perspectives. I still wonder if I have done right by Sri Ashwini by forcing her take on the baggage of racism and sexism in a body that will be alternately contested, marginalized and glorified. Everyone is at the edge of their seat waiting to see what she will look like. It seems only appropriate that at 6 months she is still bald.

Interracial marriages present a unique set of challenges for the couple, their family and their community, but the rewards are profound. Interracial marriages require those impacted by the relationship to accept difference, release biases and create unique solutions to issues that often go unquestioned in intra-racial marriages. I believe that interracial marriages do upset traditional family and community structures. However, they are a part of contemporary reality and will likely increase over time. By welcoming difference and accepting change, a new set of possibilities and ways of relating will develop that will surely bring communities closer.
Research Conclusions

I based this study on the premise that gender relations and sexual behavior are socially constructed to support a particular set of social and political relations between ethnic groups. Because sexual behavior is so deeply enmeshed in social and political structures, changes in sexual behavior create changes in community norms and structures. I began by examining the connection between gender, ethnicity and identity in the Indo-Trinidadian community in order to unearth the reasons for intense opposition to interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men. This was followed by in-depth interviews with Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages. I outlined the factors that influenced their decision to marry an Afro-Trinidadian man and the impact of their decision on their relationship with the Indo-Trinidadian community. Finally, I compared the interviews of Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages with the reasons Indo-Trinidadian community leaders object to interracial marriages. Here a significant fact was uncovered, community and parental rejection does not deter Indo-Trinidadian women from marrying Afro-Trinidadian men. The perceived advantages of their interracial marriage, such as greater independence and social mobility, outweigh the benefits (including family support, access to community activities and community acceptance of their children) that come from adhering to prescribed definitions of Indo-Trinidadian womanhood and intra-racial marriage patterns.

Rather than having their sexual behavior conform to the dominant community discourse that requires strict delineations between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians on all social, political and economic matters, Indo-Trinidadian women challenge the foundation of Indo-Trinidadian identity by marrying Afro-Trinidadian men.
Not only do women blur the lines between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians, they undermine the Indo-Trinidadian patriarchal structure which was specifically designed to promote a particular socio-political identity. Thus, Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial marriages to Afro-Trinidadian men are simultaneously reshaping gender roles and relationships within the Indo-Trinidadian community while consciously and unconsciously dismantling constructed protocols that shape interactions with people outside the community.

**Future of Interracial Marriages in Trinidad**

Several studies have been important to understanding of the trends in interracial relationships and marriages in Trinidad. Clarke’s (1993) study of interracial marriages in San Fernando and Débé, found that rates of interracial marriages increased between 1960 and 1980 due to the increased age of marriage for the bride and groom and from parents choosing a woman’s spouse to women selecting their own partners for romantic and/or religious reasons. Clarke also found that interracial marriages increased among Christian Indo-Trinidadians at a faster rate than among Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians. Finally, interracial marriages occurred more frequently in San Fernando an urban center, as opposed to Débé, a small agricultural village.

My informants match Clarke’s profile of those women who participated in interracial marriages. Most of my informants were older, some in their twenties and in their early thirties, when they married, whereas Clarke found that the average age for women in arranged marriages was under 20, generally their late teens. The women in my research were economically independent at the time of their marriages and interacted on a regular basis with Afro-Trinidadians in their workplace and/or in their communities.
Furthermore, the majority of my informants were Christians (2 were raised as Christians and 2 converted to Christianity after marriage). Finally, all my informants identified their spouse without the assistance or even approval of their family. The majority went as far as to plan their own wedding despite family protestations. My research, though using a much smaller sample, supports Clarke’s conclusion that age, independent spouse selection, and religion are strong factors contributing to interracial marriages.

From a slightly different perspective, Birth’s (1997) study of interracial unions in Anamat found that interracial unions occurred primarily between non-Hindu Indo-Trinidadians and lighter skinned or mixed Trinidadians. Regardless of the spouse’s skin color, Birth found that interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadian women and Afro-Trinidadian men created friction between the couple and their parents and other family members. According to my study, 4 of my informants married men they considered to be mixed or lighter skinned. Of the 8 women interviewed, only 3 were Hindu even though Hindus compromise the majority of all Indo-Trinidadians. Similar to Birth’s research population, my informants all experienced negative reactions toward their marriage from members of their kin group. My study, completed 8 years after the publication of Birth’s study, continues to support his findings.

Birth (1997: 591) also argues that researchers tendency to portray Indo-Trinidadians as a tightly bounded group that conforms to community restrictions and expectations regarding marriage norms and gender roles is inaccurate. In fact, despite numerous assertions by participants in his study that interracial relationships rarely occurred in the small village of Anamat, Birth documented 15 interracial unions. Like Birth’s research, my study demonstrates that interracial marriages occur regularly and in
all sectors of Indo-Trinidadian society, particularly among educated, upwardly mobile women. Because the social mechanisms (such as access to education, employment, and rapid urbanization) that support Indo-Trinidadian women’s decision to intermarry are well established, it appears that interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians will continue to grow.

Another pattern found in the earlier 2 studies and my own is the prevalence of strong public opinion against interracial marriages in newspapers, public events, and religious and political forums. Both Clarke and Birth discuss the importance Indo-Trinidadian community leaders and parents place on indoctrinating Indo-Trinidadian youth against unions with Afro-Trinidadians. Clarke (1993: 128) writes that “socialization of Indian youth of all religions into hostility to intermarriage (or any other interaction of lesser significance) with Creoles” was the norm. As stated earlier, none of the 14 community leaders I interviewed found interracial marriages acceptable to the Indo-Trinidadian community. Their reasons ranged from the perception that interracial marriages created numerous interpersonal problems including family instability, loss of tradition and culture, the inability to practice one’s religion, and marginalized children, to accusations of political and cultural dominance by Afro-Trinidadians through miscegenation. Several Indo-Trinidadian community leaders believed that all interactions with Afro-Trinidadians should be restricted regardless of the circumstance. Others felt that interactions with Afro-Trinidadians should be regulated and never extend beyond public spaces such as work, certain religious functions, public events and daily economic exchanges. Afro-Trinidadians should never enter the private space of family
and community. Though one informant supported interacting with Afro-Trinidadians, she felt interracial marriages were personally difficult and would not recommend them.

At the core of all the community leaders’ arguments against interracial marriages was the belief that the Indo-Trinidadian identity and community would be contaminated and diluted by integration with Afro-Trinidadians. Greater contact with Afro-Trinidadians meant a greater loss in Indian culture, values and traditions. My study shows that social conditioning through verbal warnings and social ostracism do not fully deter interracial marriages. Like the other studies, my work indicates that interracial marriages between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians have become a part of the social fabric of Trinidad. The question is no longer whether or not interracial marriages will occur, but rather, how will the Indo-Trinidadian community change to accommodate these marriages and their children?

My study indicates that objections to interracial marriages are based on a set of social expectations and institutions that are gradually losing their relevance to Indo-Trinidadian women. It is my analysis that community leaders maintain an essentialist view of what it means to be an Indo-Trinidadian woman, one which did not necessarily reflect the reality of my informants’ lives. For example, all of my informants live and work in urban settings, although Indo-Trinidadian leaders regard Indo-Trinidadian culture to be rooted in rural, agricultural traditions as well as in extended kinship networks, political and economic marginalization and a strong cultural connection to India. The leaders do not consider urbanization, higher education, economic and political integration and social mixing to be synonymous with Indo-Trinidadian ethnic identity. Yet the very
characteristics that the community leaders reject as un-Indian are the ones that shape and define my informants’ lives.

Indo-Trinidadian women who choose to marry Afro-Trinidadian men do more than just challenge current Indo-Trinidadian leadership. They challenge the very construction of Indo-Trinidadian identity and force Indo-Trinidadians to re-examine their relationship to both Trinidad and India. Interracial marriages force Indo-Trinidadians to rethink their supposed “unbroken” cultural connection to India and to reconstruct their relationship with Afro-Trinidadians as well as their role within the colonial structure they inherited at independence (Niranjana, 1995).

Aisha Khan (2005: 13) writes that how interracial relationships and “mixing” are understood by Indo-Trinidadians “underlay[s] the ways the past is interpreted, the present assessed and the future imagined” (Khan, 2005:13). It is my assertion that Indo-Trinidadian women who choose to use their economic independence to make choices contrary to the dominant Indo-Trinidadian expectations of Indo-Trinidadian women are re-assessing their gender and ethnic identity and reshaping perspectives on the future of Indo-Trinidadian life in Trinidad. I would argue that rather than trying to understand why Indo-Trinidadian women choose marriage to Afro-Trinidadian men, Indo-Trinidadian community leaders prefer to hold onto a gender and ethnic ideology that maintains the current patriarchal structure.

Yet the future imagined by Indo-Trinidadian community leaders is based on nostalgia for an imagined past and does not reflect the reality of Trinidad in today’s world. Niranjana (1995) writes that Indo-Trinidadian identity politics are a double edged sword – that is, Indo-Trinidadians use the claim of a distinct culture as a way of
separating themselves from the other ethnic groups on the island and the Caribbean, but simultaneously must continuously prove to other Trinidadians their “authenticity” and connection to India. This results in a prevailing discourse among Indians from India that anything produced in Trinidad is false and inauthentic. Niranjana (1995: page) notes that any cultural items such as music, dance, religious traditions, and ceremonies are seen as nothing more than derivatives of the “original” located in India. Thus, the construction of the “ideal” Indo-Trinidadian woman promoted by Indo-Trinidadian leadership rejects the originality and uniqueness of the very culture it claims to protect. Ultimately, this construction undermines the struggles of the men, and especially the women, who hoped to change and improve their lives by making the dangerous and difficult trip to Trinidad.

**Implications for Anthropology**

Interracial marriages have been a part of Indo-Trinidadian culture from the time Indians first set foot in Trinidad (Birth 1997; Reddock 1994). However, anthropologists have rarely gone beyond acknowledging their presence with one or two sentences before returning to other aspects of Indo-Trinidadian community life. Unfortunately, the lack of attention paid to interracial marriages has resulted in the perception that such unions are somehow irrelevant or deviant. Interestingly, while studies barely mention interracial marriages and do not examine the reasons for their existence, many researchers do recognize the importance of intra-racial marriages to Indo-Trinidadians (Khan 2005; Reddock 1999; Birth 1997; Puri 1996, Johnson 1994; Clarke 1993). And yet, as Clarke’s longitudinal analysis shows and this study confirms, Indo-Trinidadian women are increasingly choosing to marry Afro-Trinidadian men. What was considered a marginal activity is gradually becoming a larger segment of the Indo-Trinidadian population.
Ignoring the perspectives of Indo-Trinidadian women in interracial unions resulted in the loss of valuable information about the growth and development of gender roles and ethnic identity in Trinidad. By adhering to traditional anthropological notions of marriage as a seamless activity that maintains community cohesion and social networks, anthropologists lose a valuable opportunity to understand the inflections and nuances of community life. My study begins to challenge research that privilege dominant voices as the authority of what it means to be Indo-Trinidadian and calls for further investigation into non-traditional or deviant behavior as a way of understanding community, ethnicity and identity.

Anthropology can play a critical role in expanding the definition of what it means to be Indo-Trinidadian by more accurately reflecting the diversity and vibrancy of Indo-Trinidadian culture today. Studies such as this one can be used to foster discussions and create new spaces for Indo-Trinidadians to explore issues of ethnicity, identity, gender, power and colonialism. Opportunities for public discussion and debate should be explored.

Research must continue to be encouraged. Several important and yet unanswered questions emerged from this study that merit further examination. My study looked exclusively at Indo-Trinidadian women and their decision to marry Afro-Trinidadian men. However, valuable information could be gleaned from examining the reasons why Afro-Trinidadian men choose to marry Indo-Trinidadian women. What advantages do Afro-Trinidadian men feel they gain through marriage to an Indo-Trinidadian woman? Also, given the importance of ethnic identity in Trinidad, how can we incorporate the
voices of children of interracial relationships, a group strikingly absent from current
literature on Trinidad?

Finally, how can researchers and feminist activists build upon this study and further
examine the role of sexuality, identity, and gender in Trinidad? I would like to suggest
that feminists look for opportunities to bring women in interracial marriages together to
share their experiences with each other and to identify challenges and potential solutions.
And last, Trinidad’s history provides an excellent opportunity to examine how ethnicity
and gender influence the emergence of a national identity. How do Trinidadian women
perceive the next stage in Trinidad’s move toward a national identity? What comes after
Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian? What cannot be disputed is the fact that researchers must
incorporate the voices of these women in any discussion on Trinidad. While they do not
necessarily represent voices of dissention, they do contribute to our gaining a broader,
fuller, and more holistic understanding of what it means to be Trinidadian.
APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Code___________________

1. Sex
   a. Male
   b. Female

2. Age
   a. under 18
   b. 18-25
   c. 25-32
   d. 32-44
   e. 45-59
   f. 60+

3. How do you define your ethnicity
   a. Indian
   b. African
   c. Creole
   d. Mixed (East Indian and African)
   e. Other

4. Which religion do you follow?
   a. Hinduism
   b. Islam
   c. Presbyterian
   d. Anglican
   e. Catholic
   f. Pentecostal
   g. Other

   4a. If Christian, who converted to Christianity?
   4b. When?

5. What is your current occupation?
6. How would you define your income level?
   a. Working class
   b. Middle class
   c. Upper Middle class
   d. Upper class

7. What is your highest level of education?
   a. Primary
   b. Secondary
   c. Tertiary
   d. Trade/Secretarial School
   e. Business School
   f. University
   g. Masters
   h. Doctorate
   i. Law
   j. Medical School

8. Who composes your household?

9. What was your mother’s level of education?
   a. Primary
   b. Secondary
   c. Tertiary
   d. Trade/Secretarial School
   e. Business School
   f. University
   g. Masters
   h. Doctorate
   i. Law
   j. Medical School

10. What was your father’s level of education?
   a. Primary
   b. Secondary
   c. Tertiary
   d. Trade/Secretarial School
   e. Business School
   f. University
   g. Masters
   h. Doctorate
   i. Law
   j. Medical School

11. What was your mother’s occupation?
12. What was your father’s occupation?

13. List the gender and order by age of your siblings.

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Oldest       Youngest

S=Sister  B=Brother

14. Where did you grow up?

15. What part of Trinidad is this?
   a. Northwest
   b. Northeast
   c. Central
   d. South

16. What type of community was it?
   a. Urban
   b. Suburban
   c. Town
   d. Small town
   e. Agricultural village

17. If you moved, where did you move to?

18. What part of Trinidad is this?
   a. Northwest
   b. Northeast
   c. Central
   d. South

19. What type of community was it?
   a. Urban
   b. Suburban
   c. Town
   d. Small town
   e. Agricultural village

20. Did you consider yourself to brought up in a staunch Indian family?
   a. Yes
   b. No

21. What elements of Indian culture were most important to your parents?
   a. Religion
22. Where are any Indians living in your area?
   a. Yes
   b. No

23. Where are any Africans living in your area?
   a. Yes
   b. No

24. If yes how would you describe the racial makeup of the people in your community?
   a. Predominantly African?
   b. Predominantly Indian
   c. Majority African
   d. Majority Indian
   e. Evenly Mixed
   f. Other

25. Did you have any Indian friends as a child?
   a. Yes
   b. No

26. Did you have African friends as a child?
   a. Yes
   b. No

27. Did you parents mind which race your friends belonged to?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. It depends

28. Did your parents have Indian friends?
   a. Yes
   b. No

29. Did your parents have African friends?
   a. Yes
   b. No
30. Was this common?
   a. Yes
   b. No

31. Did you know of any interracial unions when you were growing up?
   a. In your family? Yes  No
   b. If yes, who?______________

32. If yes, how were they accepted by your family?
   a. Not accepted and not approved
   b. Accepted but the couple were not welcome at certain events and the relationship was not approved
   c. Accepted and not particularly questioned
   d. Accepted and considered a positive step for Trinidad

33. In your community?
   a. Yes
   b. No

34. If yes, how were they accepted by the Indians?
   a. Not accepted and not approved
   b. Accepted but the couple were not welcome at certain events and the relationship was not approved
   c. Accepted and not particularly questioned
   d. Accepted and considered a positive step for Trinidad

35. How were they accepted by the Africans?
   a. Not accepted and not approved
   b. Accepted but the couple were not welcome at certain events and the relationship was not approved
   c. Accepted and not particularly questioned
   d. Accepted and considered a positive step for Trinidad

36. Was your marriage discussed when you were growing up?
   a. Never
   b. Occasionally
   c. Fairly often
   d. Often

37. How important was your spouse selection to your parents and relatives?
   a. Unimportant
   b. Somewhat important
   c. Important
   d. Very important
38. What criteria were they most interested in?
   a. Race
   b. Religion
   c. Income
   d. Skin color/features
   e. Educational level
   f. Family

39. What qualities were you interested for your future husband (wife)?

40. Did you think that an Indian would possess those qualities?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. It depends

41. Did you think that an African would possess those qualities?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. It depends

42. Was it important to you to marry within your ethnic group?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Didn’t know

43. How long have you been together?
   a. Less than 7 years
   b. 7-14 years
   c. 15-24 years
   d. Over 25 years together

44. Are you legally married?
   a. Yes
   b. No

45. Do you have children?
   a. Yes
   b. No

46. Where did you meet?

47. Was this your first interracial relationship?
   a. Yes
   b. No
48. What first attracted you to this person?

49. Were you concerned that there would be problems with dating?
   a. Yes
   b. No

50. Was there any period of secrecy because it was an interracial relationship?
   a. Yes
   b. No

51. How long did you wait to tell people you were a couple?
   a. Told immediately
   b. Told within the first few weeks
   c. Waited several months
   d. Waited until it was very serious
   e. Other

52. If you did wait to tell, what were you concerned about?

53. Whose family did you tell first?
   a. Woman’s family
   b. Man’s family

52a. Why?

54. What were their reactions?
   a. Negative
   b. Accepted the relationship, but were not happy
   c. Accepted the relationship with little opinions about it
   d. Were very happy for you

55. Whose family was more accepting?
   a. Woman’s family
   b. Man’s family

56. What were the types of things said about your relationship by:
   56a. Strangers:
   56b. Extended Family:
   56c. Immediate Family:
57. Who in your family supported your relationship?
   a. Mother
   b. Father
   c. Brother
   d. Sister
   e. Other

58. Who did not, and why?
   a. Mother
   b. Father
   c. Brother
   d. Sister
   e. Other

59. What type of wedding did you have?
   a. Registered
   b. Non-denominational ceremony
   c. Religious ceremony – HIS religion
   d. Religious ceremony – HER religion
   e. Other

60. How did you decide what type of wedding to have?

61. Did your family attend the ceremony?
   a. Yes
   b. No

62. Did his family attend the wedding?
   a. Yes
   b. No

63. Did you see your family often in the first few years of marriage?
   a. Yes
   b. No

64. Did you see his family during the first years of your marriage?
   a. Yes
   b. No

HOW DID YOUR MARRIAGE AFFECT CERTAIN LIFE CHOICES
65. Do you have more Indian or African friends?
   a. More Indian
   b. More African
   c. Evenly mixed

66. Do you think this is related to your marriage?
   a. Yes
   b. No

67. How would you describe your friends?

68. Did your marriage affect the choice of the neighborhood you chose to live in?
   a. Yes
   b. No

69. How would you describe the racial makeup of your neighborhood?
   a. Mostly Indian
   b. Mostly African
   c. Mixed
   d. Other

70. Are there places in Trinidad where you may not choose to live because of your marriage?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. If yes, where

71. Has your children’s relationship with their relatives been affected by the fact that they are mixed?
   a. Yes
   b. No

72. Whose family is closer to your children?
   a. Mother’s
   b. Father’s

73. Was religion ever a problem between you both?
   a. Yes
   b. No

74. Do you feel that you can maintain a good balance between both cultures?
   a. Yes
   b. No

75. What parts of your Indian heritage do you try to maintain in your home?
76. What aspects of his/her African heritage do you try to maintain in your home?

77. What do you feel are the major differences between marrying and Indian and marrying an African?

78. What do you feel have been the uniquely positive aspects of marrying an Afro-Trinidadian?

79. How has your marriage impacted your relationship with the Indian community?

80. How has it impacted your relationship with the African community?

81. How do you think it has influenced or affected your identity as an Indian?

82. Based on your experience, how would you describe the Trinidadian view of interracial marriages?

83. How do you think the Indian community sees you and your marriage?
LIST OF REFERENCES


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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sangita Chari graduated in 1991 with a B.A. in anthropology and international relations from the American University in Washington, D.C. Upon graduation, she served as the Ralph J. Bunche Fellow for the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office of Amnesty International USA. She later worked as a Research Assistant for the Registry of Holocaust Survivors at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Upon completion of her graduate coursework in 1996, Ms. Chari moved to Atlanta, Georgia. She worked as a Community Building Liaison and Investment Manager at the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta where she designed and managed various technical assistance and community-based projects, led a youth leadership initiative and helped coordinate their grant process. She later joined the Atlanta Women’s Foundation as Director of Programs managing their special projects and annual grant programs. In 2003, Ms. Chari returned to Washington, D.C. and served as Project Director for the Metro DC Alliance to Combat Trafficking and Slavery (METRO DC ACTS), a joint initiative between Ayuda, Inc. and Boat People SOS to combat trafficking and slavery in the metropolitan Washington area. Ms. Chari resides in Maryland with her husband and is currently focusing her time on raising her newborn daughter.