

**Main Point:**

In chapter 3 of Ruth Frankenberg's book *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters*, she discusses five different white women she interviewed and how their interviews reveal their racial social geography's effect upon their lives and current mentality towards their status as white females.

**Central Issues and Concepts:**

- Racial social geography, which is what Frankenberg was trying to determine in her interviews of these women, is defined as: “the racial and ethnic mapping of environments in physical and social terms and [it] enables the beginning of an understanding of the conceptual mappings of self and other operating in white women's lives” (44).
- When interviewing the women, Frankenberg had to “defamiliarize” the aspects of their lives that were taken for granted as the white experience, opening their eyes to the privilege and racial structuring of the white experience.
- Frankenberg characterized four modes of racial experience:
  - *An all white childhood*, in which the woman was separated from race. A woman who had this experience lived in an environment where her friendships and communities were racially structured. The woman may have questioned the existing racial relations when she was younger because she may have received mixed messages. However, she conceives that her life was racially neutral. In retrospect, she may overlook people of “minor importance” in her life who were people of color.
  - Someone who experienced *race conflict and segregation* views the racial experience as a complex system of boundaries. She and anyone in the above category possess a fear of other races, especially towards Black people for women in this category. The most important issue is to maintain the boundaries, never letting other races believe that they are of equal importance.
  - Someone who is in the category of *Race Difference as a Filter for Perception* may both notice and not notice people of color. She may not be involved in anything racially charged, but she is aware of the race of different people and of their culture. She sees individuals in her immediate community through a racial lens but does not consciously see race, cultural difference, or racism. She also experiences fear of people of color.
  - Some women's racial experiences are characterized by *quasi-integration*. These women have many experiences with several other races. Many times they live in close vicinity of people of color. The two women who were interviewed in this section admitted to having radical parents. They lack fear of other races, and when they realize their whiteness, there is no positive or negative change.

**Two Key Quotes:**

1. “White people’s fear of people of color is an inversion that can be contextualized in a number of ways. Post importantly, it must be understood as an element of racist discourse crucially linked to essentialist racism, or the idea that people of color are fundamentally Other than white people...” (61)
2. “as is often the case, white stands for the position of racial “neutrality”, or the racially unmarked category...”we never really talked about race, it was just too taboo a subject”” (55)

**Two Questions:**

1. What exactly would change for white women if they viewed race as less taboo? How do you think their behavior towards other races would change? Would it change at all?
2. Which of the four modes of racial experience do you think the majority of white women experience as they grow up (i.e. which is more prevalent)? How do these different experiences affect our society?