

"You are NOT the Father!": Family, Blood, Race and Maury in America

Robyn Elizabeth Markarian

Las Vegas, Nevada

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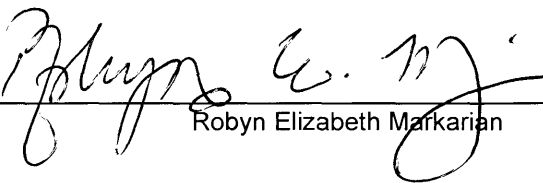
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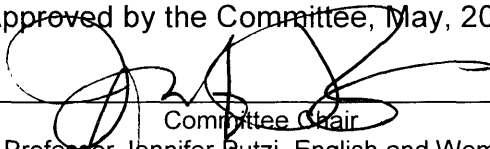
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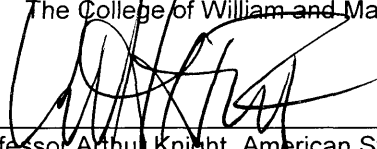
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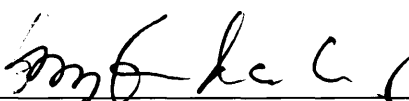
Master of Arts

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Robyn Elizabeth Markarian

Approved by the Committee, May, 2012

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Chair  
Associate Professor Jennifer Putzi, English and Women's Studies  
The College of William and Mary

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Associate Professor Arthur Knight, American Studies and English  
The College of William and Mary

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Professor Grey Gundaker, American Studies and Anthropology  
The College of William and Mary

## ABSTRACT

Despite the growing number of multi-racial families in America, families that are interracial are still seen as divergent from the mainstream ideal family. What exactly is it about these multi-racial families that make them the object of scrutiny (and scorn) especially in post-modern America? By using the medium of talk, through the daytime television show "Maury," I examine one way the difference of these families is emphasized in popular culture. Having watched and analyzed fifty episodes of Maury, as well as having gone to a live taping of four shows, I use the discourse of the show's participants (the host, the guests and the in-studio audience) to examine a facet of what seems to be a prevailing uneasiness around these interracial families. Focusing specifically on paternity testing episodes that have a white mother, and a black father, I examined their language and actions to see where the roots of this uneasiness lie. Their discourse pointed to issues that stem from the way daytime and reality TV shows are viewed as modern day freak shows, taken too lightly by both academics and the regular viewers of the shows, the over-reliance of science by Americans in general to help explain who a person is/can be by pre-determined factors such as genetic substance from parents, as well as ideas of race that take on dangerous connotations when people see race as a biological trait and not a social construction. The larger implications of my findings rest in the fact that America on the whole is becoming more accepting of multi-racial families, but roadblocks are still up for people who refuse to look past the skin-color of others. The talk surrounding the way science is presented on the show emphasizes how misguided attempts to pin-down biology as what makes men and women father's and mother's, as well as what race (and therefore what personality traits) a person can inherit from these people have caused more problems for families that are not considered the 'norm.'

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This Thesis is dedicated to Mum, for always being the consummate cheerleader,  
to Daddy, for always keeping me in line when I needed it, and to Broster, for  
always balancing me out...

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**“You are NOT the father!”:**  
**Family, Blood, Race and Maury in America**

This project was born out of chance. Having gotten up quite early to make an early bird flight to attend a family wedding, I found myself oddly awake on the six-hour transcontinental flight from JFK to LAX. Thanks to the modern convenience of technology, the seat I was in had its own television, and I used the opportunity to flick through the thirty channels offered on board flights, basking in the mind-numbing glow in my sleep-deprived state. As I realized the channels were all set to their daytime programming, I crossed my fingers and gave an internal cheer when I saw that *Maury* was on. I grew even more excited when I realized that it was one of *Maury*'s infamous (and numerous) paternity testing shows. I watched the show with glee, feeling very much like the twelve-year-old who used to watch the show over the summer when it was the only channel that came in clear through our bunny-ears antennae. But something strange happened as I watched the show that day—I began to see it through academic eyes. The name-calling, the yelling, the tears, and the accusations—they all took on new meaning as I began to study the show as an American Studies graduate student. It might have been due to chance, but that day, as I watched *Maury*, I realized how rich the show was for scholastic pickings.

*Maury*, currently in its nineteenth season, is one of the last holdovers from the early nineteen-nineties boom of television talk shows. In fact, with the retirement of Oprah in May 2011, only *Maury* and *Jerry Springer* will be left on the air from this boom. *Maury* is aired on basic cable at least once a day on weekdays, though most cities show it twice a day. The majority of these shows, around sixty percent, focus on paternity

testing. *Maury* has become a pop phenomenon in its own right, especially due to the



Figure 1  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/kyrion/321364004/>

popularity of these paternity testing shows, showing up unexpectedly in different movies, television shows, in music and online. For instance, an episode of *South Park* makes fun of *Maury*. In it, the young boys on *South Park* emulate the ‘trashy’ people on *Maury* because they mistakenly believe

this will win them a prize on the show.

“I’ll do what I want!” Eric Cartman screams over and over again while on *Maury*, dressed as an out-of-control teenaged girl. *Maury* himself and the show also appear in the movie *Madea’s Big Happy Family* where the title character is testing the paternity of her daughter. Madea copies real guests on the show with her outrageous claims and actions, even running off stage crying when it is proven she was wrong in fingering her daughter’s father (a theme we will see is common). If you go on YouTube or Google and type in *Maury*, you are given hundreds of videos/results that deal with particularly interesting or dramatic paternity testing shows, especially ‘mash-ups’ of *Maury* reading “you are/are not the father.” There are websites and blogs dedicated to guest ‘fails’ (particularly ludicrous statements or moments from the show’s long run), as well as Internet memes that have found popularity online (Figure 1, 2). Kate Beaton, in her

popular web comic *Hark! A Vagrant!* Parodied *Maury* as a Victorian era “Masterpiece of Mystery and Suspense” (Figure 3). In the summer of 2010, a song by rapper Shawty Put featuring Lil’ Jon and Too Short, “Dat Baby Don’t Look Like Me,” became a radio hit, garnering attention for its lyrics, all based around being a guest on *Maury* who is trying to convince the host, the woman he is on the show with, and the audience that “Dat Baby Don’t Look Like Me!” With sounds clips from *Maury*, and lyrics such as “that baby ain’t mine/baby I’m sorry/ (Maury sound bite) *You are not the father!* / B\*tch you heard Maury,” the song further emphasizes the position Maury (and *Maury*) has found himself in as *the* person to go to for public paternity testing. All of these leave no question of the impact *Maury* has had in its nineteen-year run. He, and the show he hosts, have made themselves an accessible and more entertaining venue for those who are looking for the father of the children, and for those who want to watch them do so. What I’m interested in looking at, then, is just what the wider impact the show has had outside of the pop culture sphere, especially in relation to American ideas of blood, race, and family.

Because this thesis came out of my having watched a paternity testing episode of *Maury*, there was no question in my mind just what episodes to focus on as my primary text. Besides giving the biggest drama and most fights, these shows have taken on a life of their own. These paternity testing shows make up the majority of *Maury*’s week, with at least two, but sometimes up to four, of the new episodes focusing on paternity. I personally

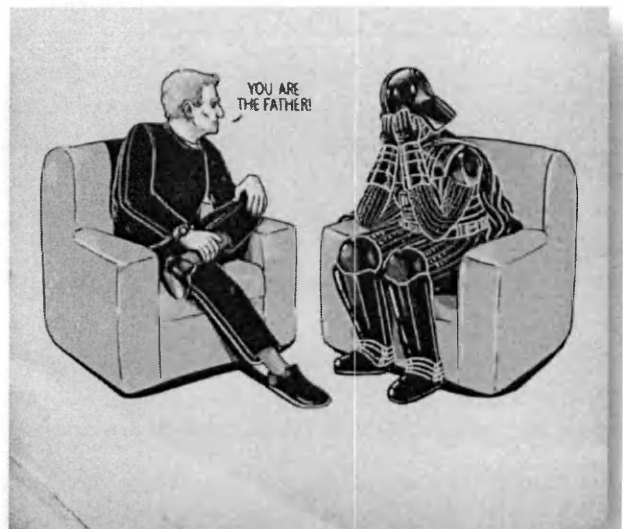


Figure 2- <http://pizzacomedy.com/tv-movies/the-results-of-darth-vaders-paternity-test-are-in/>

watched ten weeks of *Maury* (50 episodes), ranging from January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011-March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011. In that time there were thirty-ones episodes that had at least one paternity test, with twenty-nine of them having at least one interracial couple featured. *Maury* follows a simple pattern—a woman will come on the show, with a child whose father is unknown. There are two scenarios for why the woman is on the show. Either, she is there with a partner she has cheated on, and wants to let them know (on national television) that the progeny they believed was theirs might not actually be. Or, the more frequent scenario, a woman has brought a man who does not believe he is the father of the baby (usually he claims she has been promiscuous or that she is a liar) to prove that he is in fact the father. The audience is important here, as they cheer the women, and jeer the men—though this might all change if the paternity test backs up the man rather than the woman.

Each segment starts with Maury giving an introduction, with a woman listening on, either tearfully, or angrily, as Maury lays out the reason she is getting a paternity test. Whoever is out first is the sympathetic party (there have been only a handful of cases where a man is out first), and the audience is automatically on their side. After Maury's introduction, a pre-recorded segment of the woman is shown, which gives the woman's side of the story. Maury then asks the woman some questions, before we watch the other side of the story, the father-in-questions pre-recorded tape, where the man lays out why he believes he might not be the father of the baby. The man then comes out, generally to boos, and Maury questions the man, though this part of the segment usually has the most fighting, and no real questions are answered or asked. After the man has been introduced, and Maury has talked to him, we are told: "The results are in," before Maury opens the envelope that holds the DNA results. Before Maury opens it, he asks the man "If this is

your child, will you be there for it,” and after getting a satisfactory answer, he opens the envelope. Maury says, ritually, “In the case of (age) old (name), (male) you ARE/ARE NOT the father.” This is followed with a shot of the reactions, which generally follows both parties, usually the one that has been proven wrong as they run backstage in disbelief. We are then given a brief clip of the couple backstage after the results have been read, and watch as they argue/cry/hug over what they have been told.



Figure 3 from Kate Beaton's "Hark! A Vagrant!" Gorey Covers Part 4, #272

I have broken my thesis into three sections. The first chapter “The Spectacle of *Maury*: Daytime Television, the Modern Freak Show,” is a focus on daytime television show’s general formulae, and *Maury* in particular. I look at what I consider the three major parts of any daytime talk show: the guest, the host and the in-studio audience. My over arching aim here is to look at how *Maury* has successfully used the ‘freak show’ formula of the past to try and manipulate its viewers to feel certain ways when watching the show, working towards disambiguation of ideas pertaining to blood, race, and family. In my second chapter, “*Maury*-Brand Science and the American Family” I explore the over-reliance of science by the guests on the paternity shows, and American society in general. I also look at how *Maury* emphasizes the old-fashioned American ideal of

family, including the emphasis on blood relation, and the related implication that if the child does not know whom their ‘real’ father is they cannot know themselves. I look at what kind of family the show tries to idealize, finding roots in the way different couples/cases are presented. In my final chapter “The of Skin Color as Science and the Modern Acceptance of Interracial Couples,” I explore the interracial couple on *Maury*, as well as more broadly in American history. I continue to look at the over-reliance in science I discussed in chapter two, and take a look at how race and skin-color, which have no scientific basis, find footing in peoples minds, making them ‘factual.’ *Maury*, here, pushes having a monochromatically raced, blood-related family. This hits a snag when an interracial couple is doing the paternity testing, and as such, they are treated as an oddity. My final point is that these shows, however innocuous they seem, should never be viewed with a less-than-critical eye. For the people who watch *Maury* without understanding what values the show is selling them are the ones most susceptible to being conditioned by them.

This paper, while seemingly critical at times of *Maury* and reality television, should not be taken as such. Jennifer Pozner, in *Reality Bites Back: the Troubling Truth about Guilty Pleasure TV*, is deeply critical of reality television and daytime talk shows. She argues that, “viewers of all ages do ourselves a disservice by watching reality TV with [their] intellects on pause. We can enjoy the catharsis and fantasy these shows offer, but unless we keep our critical filters on high, we leave ourselves open to serious manipulation” (Pozner 32). While I do think people who watch talk shows without conscience thought of what they are absorbing are doing themselves a disservice by missing some of the more important messages that these shows are presenting, to say it is

leaving oneself open to a serious manipulation is a hyperbole. I am more likely to agree with Vicki Abt and Leonard Mustazza's ideas about how these shows affect their viewer. In their book *Coming After Oprah: Cultural Fallout in the Age of the TV Talk Show*, they discuss that these talk shows are "the quintessential illustration of the ways in which material culture (technology, the media) affects our cultural narratives and symbols and, through them, changes the *social construction of reality*" (Abt 10). The ideas presented on these shows are not sneakily trying to change the ways people think, as Pozner argues, but rather, they help define and redefine cultural narratives and symbols that affect how people view society. I believe *Maury* is not setting out to sneakily shove ideas down the viewers throats of what a family should be, or what race an interracial child is, but rather, I believe it has given a forum that lets marginalized groups and 'ordinary' (in the sense that they are not already celebrities or have appeared on television before) people, a public soap box unavailable to them elsewhere in their lives.

It is by hearing these people stories, and seeing how both *Maury* and the audience react to them that the viewers at home can understand what society finds both accepting and unacceptable, publicly at least. The pleasure behind watching these television shows should not be taken away because of how the shows themselves are presented and viewed on a wide scale (as either low-class or judgmental). Even if the host of the show or the way it is presented is more 'conservative' and demanding of its non-monoracial couples and their children, it is still presenting a forum for them to tell their story. It is still giving them a chance to be seen by a public that might not get the chance to otherwise. The viewers of these shows, even those who go on the shows, are not dupes, who blindly absorb any manipulation *Maury* may want to throw at them—they are people who are

watching other people who have been given the chance to speak. It is this speaking that allows viewers at home, or for academics in schools, to listen to their stories, to use them to understand American cultural acceptance of ideas and norms. Talk shows, as Andrew Tolson speaks about in his book *Television Talk Shows: Discourse, Performance, Spectacle*, matter: “They matter because they are a focus for considerable public debate and because they are crucial to the landscape of popular television. But also... their significance has crucially to do with the fact that talk shows revolve around the *performance of talk*” (Tolson 3). Because of this, one could very easily say that this thesis is focused on talking in public about their private lives, blending the two spheres. This thesis is essentially about talk, about hearing how people talk through a medium such as daytime television, and how this reflects/affects society around it. “Programs in this genre provide one of few forums onto which ‘ordinary’ people—rather than solely the stars and experts who vie to promote their latest ventures—can step to center stage and discuss their lives. Many participants are members of stigmatized groups” (Priest 6), and as such, find themselves talking in public with an audience for perhaps the first time. They take what is private and bring it into the public sphere, allowing others to examine those who are presenting their private lives in the public and giving them the opportunity to compare them to their own lives. It is through this examination of what is being presented (and how it is being accepted by those in the audience, and even the host), that as an academic viewer, I can understand how the show is trying to present certain ideas. Speaking, and hearing others speak, is fundamental to who we are as human beings. Because of this, and the way this talk is being presented on these shows, “Some critics point to talk shows as an example of what’s wrong with society. Perhaps they are right, but not in the way they

think. Perhaps, what's wrong is that we deny ourselves access to a sociality that is fundamental to our being human" (Manga 204). It is through looking at those on the show, how they talk when given the chance to be on the 'electronic soap box' that I understand just what all this talking is about and how it relates to the disambiguation of such topics as blood, family, race and, most of all, American society.

What I hope to prove with this thesis is that *Maury* provides us with a rich cultural text of an often-overlooked segment in American society. If one is willing to look beyond that which makes others argue is 'trashy,' or 'dangerous,' (Pozner argues that "reality TV isn't simply *reflecting* anachronistic social biases, it's resurrecting them" (Pozner 25)) we can find that these episodes provide an amazing snapshot of American ideas of race, blood, family, and interracial relationships at the point and time of the show being taped, all through the discourse of speaking. *Maury*'s popularity goes beyond the number of viewers who watch the show, as I tried to show by the pop-culture references I mentioned above—and those are just the tip of the iceberg. *Maury* has a real impact on its viewers, whether they are those who watch everyday, or those who casually tune in for a good time every now and then, and it is up to these viewers to discern what they are being presented and why.

**The Spectacle of Maury: Daytime Television—The Modern Freak Show**

“Everyone, this is Kathy, welcome Kathy [cheers]. Everyone, this is Tammy, welcome Tammy to the stage [cheers]. They really don’t have much to do with each other... except on one particular subject, which is why they are united today. They are united against this man Derrick [boos and cheers]. You see, Cathy and Tammy say that Derrick has a twisted sexual fetish. First they say that he preys on heavyset women with low self-esteem [Cathy and Tammy point to themselves, each other]. They say this is what, ah, Derrick’s M.O. is: he gets these women with low self-esteem pregnant and then abandons them. Derrick denies Cathy’s 4-year-old son Terrill, and he denies Tammy’s five-month-old Tristan. Now Derrick admits that he has other children. Derrick says that he has *twenty-seven children*—but not these two.”

--*Maury*, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011 “The DNA test will Prove I do not have 29 kids!”

Sitting under the hot stage lights on *Maury*’s stage, Kathy and Tammy are introduced to the audience. These two white women have nothing in common other than their shared belief that Derrick, a black man, is the father of their children. Still Kathy and Tammy choose to sit united as they test Derrick for paternity of their children, belittling themselves (continuously saying they are fat women with low-self esteem), belittling this man, Derrick, all for the sake of finding out who the father of their children is on a national stage. Derrick, on the other hand, tries to appear disinterested, acting as if he is friends with Maury and the in-studio audience. He is adamant in his denial of being the father to Kathy and Tammy’s children, saying that he has plenty of children he has no problem acknowledging. At the same time, Maury casually seems to be non-partisan about all of this, until he asks Derrick, “Most of us know the names of our children—do you know yours?” Derrick’s smile falters, as he admits (to the delighted boos of the audience), “Most of them—yes.” Derrick’s laid-back attitude disappears and his theatrics really come out, though, when paired with Kathy, who seems genuinely angry to be on

*Maury*, testing the paternity of her son. When the two are arguing, Derrick tells her, “I came here with twenty-seven children, and I’m leaving with twenty-seven children!” This proclamation is met with stunned silence from the audience, and then another mixture of boos and cheers. When it turns out that Derrick is the father of Tammy’s son Tristan, Tammy, who has been decidedly more contained than Kathy, becomes animated and runs to Derrick, screaming, “I told you! I told you!” Derrick ignores her, acting slightly subdued. This only lasts until he finds out that he is not the father of Kathy’s son; he follows her as she runs off stage, calling her a “ho”—the irony lost on the man who has fathered twenty-eight acknowledged children. Derrick, Katy and Tammy’s segment might seem outlandish to any person who has never watched *Maury* before. *This can’t be real*, one might think, *there’s no way these people aren’t acting*. But they are not. These people are presenting their case on television (albeit in a dramatic way) but this is not scripted—it is daytime reality television.

Daytime talk shows found their audience in the 1990s. Though they were popular before that (most notably *The Phil Donahue Show*, which ran from 1970-1996) a veritable boom of talk shows arrived in the early 1990s with hosts such as Sally Jesse Raphael, Ricki Lake, Montel Williams, and, a former primetime show host, Maury Povich. These shows, named *The Sally Jesse Raphael Show*, *Ricki!*, *The Montel Williams Show*, and *Maury Povich* stemmed from the success of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. *Oprah* began in 1986 and found a large audience with its formula of having the host, Oprah Winfrey, interview ordinary people who had extraordinary quirks, talents, secrets and stories. Copycats began to spring up on every network appealing to studios as they had proven to be a viable, low cost daytime programming form that could draw in a large

audience, which translated to big advertising payout (Manga 56).

Daytime talk shows have a very standard format: a host interviews guests on a sensational topic that has its roots in the everyday and ordinary that viewers relate to, while an in-studio audience reacts to what is being presented to them. These daytime shows are purposefully constructed to retain an at home audience during commercial breaks, through extensive editing and dramatic strategies that have similarities to forms of nighttime dramas (Harman 63). The cost of the shows is low, in that the guests (unless they are ‘experts’) are not paid to appear, and only the cost of their transportation and board is covered by the show.<sup>1</sup> In television culture these cheaply produced shows are good for networks that are looking for a way to save money during the less viewed daytime television block. But we cannot ignore how important these ‘cheaply’ produced shows are. They not only provide daily snapshots of American values and culture in an entertaining fashion, but they also aim to shape the ideas of those who watch the show by how they present certain people and ideas. Despite presenting all kinds of families on the show, *Maury* still pushes the belief that the nuclear family is (and will always be) best. When it comes to race, *Maury* upholds interracial couples and their offspring as oddities, which seems to mirror some of societies still upheld ideas about these non-monoracial couples. These talk shows should not be ignored because they are considered fluff, either by those who judge, or those who watch them, but instead viewed as holding up a mirror to the society it is using as entertainment, instead. Talk matters, and so is the way it is presented.

Daytime shows found their success with studios because they were cheap, with

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<sup>1</sup> Many guests for talk shows say visiting cities where these shows are filmed was at least one enticement for coming on these shows (Priest 45)

audiences because they pandered to the voyeur in them, and with guests because it gave them a chance to talk about their most private details in public. Talk shows are “a microcosm of American popular culture and the commercial interests that manufacture and sustain it” (Abt 9). People became interested in talk shows because they give ‘ordinary’ people a chance to speak to the public at large. In the early nineties, which also saw the rise of self-help books, people saw speaking on national television as therapeutic, and so these talk shows became a modern confessional. Daytime talk shows tend to be more therapeutic than cognitive. As Laura Grindstaff says in her book *The Money Shot: Trash, Class, and the Making of TV Talk Shows*, these shows are “less a balance of viewpoints than a serial association of testimonies in which issues are rarely resolved” (Grindstaff 240). Shows like *Maury* are seen as confessional and explicitly therapeutic, where the most personal of experiences are proudly trumpeted to an audience that boos or cheers what the guests are saying. Though there are manipulations and performances, there exists a reality behind all of the people on the show, a reality that must be harnessed onstage so that the best moments are saved for the cameras (Grindstaff 78). It is a fine line between realistic entertainment and becoming too outlandish, too much like a fictional drama these shows mirror. A reality of anxieties and hostilities exist that producers must draw on just enough to produce real conflict, while at the same time making it clear that “these are humans, of all kinds, strange and boring, whip smart and dumb as doorknobs, from all kinds of places, who talk about what it has been like to live the lives they have been living” (Gamson 105). People tune into daytime television because they want to see real people telling their real stories—but even more so they want to see an emotional outburst, a physical altercation, that establishes that while the

person is like them, they are all so incredibly different at the same time. Guests, like the shows they are on, have to walk a fine line between being real yet dramatic, because if they appear fake or disingenuous it “undermines the very qualities of authenticity and spontaneity that distinguish ordinary guests from experts and celebrities in the first place” (Grindstaff 39). Daytime talk shows must maintain this difficult balance between drama and reality—something that depends upon the producers, the guests, the hosts, and even the in-studio audience.

Thinking of talk shows in relation to other social phenomena from the past, the first things that come to mind are freak shows and carnivals. Like *Maury*, freak shows are often associated with the lower classes, women, or other marginalized groups in society. They were often rowdy, boisterous, and otherwise hyper-expressive and collective, often involving the body, sex, or sexuality. This carnivalesque attitude is what draws people into these shows, the sensibility that it embodies giving access to a particular dimension of being human for which people across history have yearned and which is accessed through a wide range of methods and rituals (Manga 195). To put it a little more bluntly, “in this 20<sup>th</sup> century version of the freak show, audience members, the hawker, and the freaks jostle each other for space in the spotlight” (Priest 119). Talk shows, and freak shows alike, are often looked down upon by the middle/dominant class, who see these shows as repugnant, disgusting, or morally outrageous, while they were enjoyed, even lauded, by the marginalized and the lower class (Manga 6).

A successful daytime talk show needs audience members, the host, and the ‘freaks’ to be considered a real success. For instance, Derrick not only argues with Kathy (and even Maury to a lesser extent), but the audience as well. He does not like them, and,

like a character that should have its own incarnation on the stage, the audience makes its dislike of Derrick clear. This, in turn, causes him to become the villain they are projecting onto him, and he grows more and more antagonistic as the segment continues. Because of this, we, the audience at home, are supposed to root for Derrick to be wrong—we want him to be proven as the father, and we feel victory when he is proven to be the father of Tammy's child; similarly we cannot help but feel slightly dismayed when he is not the father of Kathy's child. Here we see how all three components of the show are needed to not only tell Derrick, Tammy and Kathy's story, but to also help the show's messages about which family they think is normative try and reach their at home audience. All three parts are necessary to making the shows entertaining, and *Maury* has found a good balance of the three that keeps drawing viewers in year after year.

Talk show guests are crucial to the success of daytime television. One way of thinking of these shows is that the participants are usually members of stigmatized groups who put themselves on display much like at carnival freak shows mentioned above. According to Patricia Priest, in her book *Public Intimacies: Talk Show Participants and Tell-All TV*: “Increasingly, scholars are theorizing about the degradation of the public sphere and the blurring of public and private arenas of behavior. Talk show guests are essentially cashing in on a marginalizing element of their lives for the chance to participate in these high profile forums” (Priest 13). The role of television here is a way for different groups to be induced to step up to these electronic soap boxes and share their story with the public at large, giving them a feeling of normalcy (Priest 6, 195). People go on shows for many different reasons, including the desire to ‘explain themselves,’ or to get even with other guests they have brought on the show, or, most commonly, to give

them someone to villainize in their life stories, to give them someone to point their finger at for making them turn out wrong (Abt 17). Priest argues many guests find it a positive experience:

Participants reported that being chosen to present one's life story on the show was very gratifying. The aggregate impact of affirmation from the public, expressions of gratitude from people who share a stigmatizing feature, being treated like a celebrity the day of the taping, and private feelings of mastery and specialness resulted in a surge in self-esteem for most informants (Priest 159).

What this comes back to is the idea that "*my experience is valid, of inherent interest, indeed inherent truth*. There is no church...but the church of the self" (Brenton 30).

Guests play the role of 'freak' perfectly, in that they put themselves out there for all to see, making the audience point to them as different. But at the same time that people point to those on television as 'others,' those doing the pointing also find something they must relate to, to entice them to listen to these freaks stories. Once again it comes down to the human experience of talking and having someone who wants to listen to your story.

People have had a growing need to find validation on television in front of an audience, since talk shows found their audience in the nineteen-nineties. My own research with *Maury* proves this need for validation, as well as most of the reasons specific guests give for going on the show itself support the academic research of my sources. In the episode "Teen DNA Drama...I'll Prove You got me Pregnant at 15," the headliner, Chyna has brought her old high-school boyfriend, Keith, to test as the father of her two-month-old baby, even though Keith strongly believes his best friend, Jose, is the

father. After being introduced Chyna tells Maury, “I came to the Maury show to end these vicious rumors and lies that are ruining my life!” Chyna’s motivation for coming onto *Maury* is her reputation, wanting to use the public sphere as a way to save her reputation in her private life. In the episode “I’ll Prove my High School Boyfriend is my Baby’s Dad,” Mal, also the headliner of her episode, tests her ex-boyfriend, Dumas for her daughter Demiah. When it turns out Dumas is the father, he runs off stage, and Mal follows him, demanding, “I want my child support now! No more excuses! Everyone knows now!” Mal’s reason for coming on is largely because of her child support—or more broadly, her child—a not an uncommon thread among guests. For instance, Pancake, another guest, tests an ex-boyfriend Chris, for her daughter, Zahaya. Chris originally signed the birth certificate, but once he started dating Shanda, he denied both Zahaya and ever having a relationship with Pancake. Shanda and Chris say that Pancake is only jealous of their relationship, trying to pin a baby on Chris, but Pancake is defiant, proclaiming that her child is her reason for going on the show: “I could care less about your relationship, but my daughter needs to be taken care of! Now everyone will know I’m not a liar” (“Who’s My Baby’s Father...My Husband or His Son?”)! For Chyna, the main reason for going on was for pride and validation, while for Mal it was for money. For Pancake, it was for the sake of her child as well as trying to save face. We can assume since they are all on television, they are self-aware that they are going to be broadcast, and so we can assume guests sometimes go on *Maury* just to be on television, but I think it is more complicated than that. People need to talk, and they need to know that someone will listen to them, and believe in what they are saying. Pride is on the line with these tests, but the motivations for guests to go on *Maury* are more complex than

wounded pride.

While the guests of the show are the main reason people watch these shows, the host also plays a special role on daytime talk shows as the brand of the show itself. Not only that, but the host must be the mediator between the marginalized people on stage and the “normal” people in the audience, knowing just what questions to ask to get the reactions the show needs from the ‘freaks’ on stage. The host is, and cannot be forgotten as, the agent of the broadcast network who must walk the line between the sensational and the realistic (Wood 87). The host of any daytime talk show is the figurehead of the whole show, the only person who appears on the stage daily, and so must have a clear persona that can be marketable and relatable enough to attract viewers. When the original talk show boom came along, it was important for each host to find their own niche that would draw viewers in an excessively competitive field. In the case of Maury Povich, he found his forte as the sympathetic host. People look upon him as the older, white, educated father figure to his guests. Julie Manga, in her book *Talking Trash: The Cultural Politics of Daytime TV Talk*, interviewed viewers of daytime talk shows to get their perspective on everything from the host, to the guests, to the way the topics were presented. One of her informants compared *Maury Povich* and *Ricki Lake*:

“*Maury Povich* [sic] to me he’s more sensitive. No he’s not a fake, thank you! [Said in response to a negative comment by a fellow student listening to our conversation.] There, now you have a lot of people are fake. But to me, Maury is more sensitive, whether it’s on certain issues—when it comes to *Ricki* [sic]—he has a sense of caring about his—[guests] on his shows. And he really does” (Manga 107).

Another participant in Manga's study agreed with this, saying that *Maury* tries "to have topics on that could really, genuinely help people. [*Maury*] seem to treat their guests with more respect than Jerry Springer or Ricki Lake, where you sometimes get the sense that they're just inviting them on so they can rip on them" (Manga 118). Maury found his success as a host as being a sympathetic father figure.

Maury's role, as a sympathetic host can be seen in a segment featuring the long-time couple Brian and Tiffany. When Brian doubts that he is the father of any of Tiffany's children, Maury is the one who sits next to Tiffany, an arm around her as she talks, patting her back as she cries. When it is proven that Brian is in fact the father of all three of Tiffany's children, she breaks down in tears, and when Brian runs off the stage, Maury goes after him, brings him back and makes him apologize to Tiffany for ever doubting her in front of the audience. Here, Maury fills the role of the father figure to Tiffany, giving her strength, and forcing the young man who doubted her to apologize, warming the audience's heart with the tender way he treats the fragile Tiffany ("6 Mothers...8 Babies...We'll Prove He's the Dad"). Here we see the sensitive Maury that Manga's informant spoke of, a caring man who will stand up for those other's will not.

Though Maury often presents himself as sympathetic, we have to remember that first and foremost Maury is doing his job. Maury is responsible for not only presenting ordinary people in an entertaining way, but for also making sure that there are certain moral issues that become apparent in certain cases. For instance, in opposition to how he acts with Tiffany, Maury is neither sympathetic nor caring with Nicole, a woman who is unsure of whether her husband, David, is the father of her baby, or James, a man with whom she had a one-night stand, is. In the beginning of the segment, Nicole is treated

with respect as she tells her story to Maury. Maury's attitude changes, however, when he asks Nicole, "Did you learn your lesson?" Nicole tearfully nods, "Yes." Maury prompts her on, "What is it?" Nicole looks up, her tears stopped, as she stares at Maury, open-mouthed, caught off-guard. Maury's next statement is hardly paternalistic, and is in fact rather sarcastic as he says, "Don't sleep with two men at the same time, how about that"<sup>2</sup> ("I'll Prove My High School Boyfriend is My Baby's Dad"). Here, we see Maury using his carefully crafted image as a father figure to trick Nicole into revealing how immoral she is in sleeping with two men at the same time, creating drama on the show, while helping highlight the more conservative values that the show lean towards (which I discuss in the next chapter).

Both Maury and the guests on his paternity testing shows realize how important it is to have the audience on your side, as the booing and cheering of the audience signals who is the 'bad guy' and who is the 'good guy' in these cases. So the guests play it up, trying to gain the audiences' favor through theatrics. For example, Megan, who has been on *Maury* five times testing her two children, is known as the woman who does the splits whenever her results are being read. When it was proven to Deshaun that he is not the father of one of Megan's babies, to top Megan's splits, he does a black flip ("I'm Only 16...I'll Prove Your Boyfriends my Baby's Dad"). When Anthony is vindicated in his belief that he is not the father of Vanessa's son, he begins to sing, and dance, before running up and down the aisles, high-fiving the studio audience with glee ("6 Mothers...8 Babies... We'll Prove He's the Dad"). After it became known that Tavarius is not the

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<sup>2</sup> This sarcastic attitude is nothing new, as even when he was a host on *A Current Affair*, Maury frequently made fun of the shows disreputable content by shaking his head and scowling on air, his whole attitude making him seem cavalier towards the less serious news stories (Glynn 100, 119).

father of Raychael's baby, Tavarius jumps up and down, before jumping into the audience itself like a rock star at a concert ("I Will Prove That Your Teen Son Got My Daughter Pregnant"). When Debbie is justified in stating that her husband Terry is the father to both of her twins, she dances, turns to the audience, bowing, and then turns back to Terry, and, playing it up to the audience makes him kiss her feet at their insistent cheers ("I Will Prove That Your Teen Son Got My Daughter Pregnant"). No one truly wants to leave the stage as 'the bad guy,' especially if they are correct in their beliefs that they are/are not the father. So, like the circus acts that predate them, they play to the audience, entertaining them, knowing how important the audience's reaction is to how they will be perceived on television.

Touched upon briefly in other examples, but relevant to the argument on the whole, is the in-studio audience and their reactions. Since the guests and the host have no real indicator of what people watching at home will think of certain stories and guests, they must use the reactions of the in-studio audience as a barometer of how the story will be perceived, and as a model for the at home audience's reactions as well. So the guests play it up to those in the studio by dancing, doing the spits, flips and other carnivalesque tricks (as seen above), trying to get the audience on their side. Since the audience must be maintained as recipients of the stories being told, the host and the guests must often jointly produce a public discourse to uphold the audience's attention and support (Thornborrow 137). Their reactions are meant to be indicators, in the sense that they represent mainstream America, or at least the mainstream viewers of the show. The audience here acts out a particular role that the show has laid out for them—that of the morality stick (Brunvatne and Tolson 154). Producers find ways to ensure that the

audience boos certain people/statements (as well as cheers for others) so that certain values, such as Kathy and Tammy's need for their children find their biological father, seem accepted, while others, such as Derrick being unable to name all of his children, do not. The in-studio audience does not just deal out who will get acceptance but also supports the show's rhetoric of moral rectitude and moral deviance.

During my own attendance of at two days worth of tapings (four episodes in all) of *Maury*, the producer's investment in audience response to the show was obvious. Before the show even starts, the in-studio audience is told by the producers that cameras will be constantly focused on the audience, and that because the studio audience is visible during the show, you want to have a big reaction to everything: the better your reaction, the more likely you will appear when the show is televised. This caters to not only to the audience's exhibitionist side (to show what they are really thinking of those they watch), but also to the inherent narcissism in most audience members, who want their reaction to be shown on screen, even for only a tenth of a second. As an audience member, you are asked to comment and intervene, to show your displeasure with people by booing and waving your hands around (Tolson 3). As an in-studio member, you are as much a part of the show becoming a success as those on stage. Especially as the in-studio audience reactions is supposed to help guide at home viewers about what is/is not considered 'okay.' Your reaction, then, while genuine, must also be as entertaining as everything else on the stage.

To truly see how much of an impact *Maury* has on its viewers you only have to look at where the guests on the show come from. Watching any episode of *Maury*, you are constantly bombarded during commercial breaks, with pleas to call in: "Does the

father of your baby deny that he is indeed the father of your child, and you want him to take a paternity test to prove the truth? Call...,” or “Did you cheat on your wife or girlfriend and the ‘other woman’ claims that you are the father of her baby? If you need a paternity test call...” Derrick, from the case with which I began this chapter, did a video follow up for *Maury*, and says that he was shocked to find out that Tristan was his, but that he takes care of his own. He pauses and then smiles as he says, “So if anyone else out there thinks I might be the father of their children, call Maury, so we can do a paternity test!” The show draws most of its guests from those who watch, and those who watch often watch because they relate to in some small (or large) part to those that are on the show, thanks in part to being manipulated by watching *Maury*. The procurement process works itself in a loop: “The producers work to come up with topics and secure guests willing to discuss them, while many viewers, like moths, throw themselves at the flickering glare of the TV screen, trying to get in” (Priest 13). To cast their shows the producers rely upon their viewers to continue to write in and show interest. These shows depend upon viewer’s personal wars against their own demons, as well as the wars they rage against relatives, friends, neighbors, and possible babies’ fathers (Abt 52).

In the next examples, I present cases where we can clearly see how the show found guests through its procurement process loop. When Debbie comes to *Maury* she comes with her husband, Terry, who is testing both of their twins for paternity after seeing another *Maury* paternity episode where it came out that twins were fathered by different men. Terry’s tape has him boldly proclaiming, “Not too many guys can say this, but Maury changed my life!” He truly believes he only fathered one of the twins Debbie gave birth to, and when he comes on stage, he shakes Maury’s hand, thanking him for

teaching him that twins can have two different fathers, “I didn’t know that! Thanks for telling me about it Maury! I called right after the episode to test Debbie’s kids.” Terry’s thinking of his wife and children, his very family, was influenced by watching *Maury*. *Maury* told him it is possible to father only one twin, and that it is all right (even recommended) to doubt his wife’s fidelity—and so Terry did, and called *Maury* (“I Will Prove That Your Teen Son Got My Daughter Pregnant”). In another example of where we can see the guests on the show being shaped by having watched *Maury*, we are introduced to Fred. Fred is forcing his niece Candice to take a paternity test for her son, Cyrus, and who Candice says is the father, Fred’s friend Shawon, because, as Fred puts it, “I watch the *Maury* show everyday, and I see too many innocent men who are raising kids that aren’t theirs! The last thing I want is for my niece Candice to get away with tricking Shawon” (“5 Men Tested, Are Any of Them My Baby’s Dad?”). Fred and Terry find their disbelief of the paternity claims of their wives and family members par for the course, as they see the same thing almost daily on *Maury*, and so they see nothing wrong with dragging these woman onto *Maury*. It is because of this procurement process loop and the way that show’s mold their viewers’ opinions, as well as the cultural reach *Maury* has had, that men find it completely normal to doubt a woman’s claims on paternity, an idea I will further explore in the next chapter on the *Maury* sponsored American family.

People watch these daytime television shows for a number of different reasons. The appeal of the host himself, the sensationalistic way the guests display themselves, and the in-studio audiences’ extreme reactions, all play a role drawing viewers in. *Maury*’s paternity testing shows are important because they provide a soapbox to non-celebrities, giving them a voice where they might otherwise be ignored. Trash television,

as some daytime television critics unfairly call it, should never be ignored as simply trash. These shows are never simply showcases for freaks or something shallow for people to watch. Understanding the work behind the show and the reasons people watch them or want to go on them all lead to a deeper understanding of the influence these shows have on those who watch them. Audiences watch these shows, absorbing lives different from, yet similar to their own, and their reactions provide “invaluable information and analysis for understanding the transitional terrain of the reality genre, [that] can enhance critical understanding of contemporary television audiences” (Hill 2). When people are watching *Maury*, what is their reaction to certain things and why? These reactions of the audience that we can measure (the in-studio audience v. the at home one) can help academics understand what modern television audiences are thinking beyond the realm of reality television. But they must be explored more, not scoffed at. Critics who write daytime and reality TV off as froth, ignore how social and cultural trends inevitably shape the production and audience’s reactions to these very shows (Taddeo 1). How people react to the freakshow in front of them should be studied, used to understand the audiences deeper thinking on issues not being presented on the show explicitly. As I will explore in the next two chapters, by actively watching these shows, scholars can gain insight into how ideals of the American family are shaped and presented, especially when it comes to interracial couples who come to *Maury*, seeking paternity testing.

**Maury-Brand Science and the American Family**

“Everyone, this is Autumn, welcome Autumn to the show [cheers]. Now, unfortunately, there are two words that describe Autumn, right now and its [sic] emotional wreck. You see, she and her husband Darcy have three beautiful children together, three—but you know, suspicions are painful, accusations are tearing their family apart. Darcy believes that Autumn cheated on him around the time she got pregnant with each of their three kids, four-year-old Jordan, two-year-old Brooklyn, and five month old Joslyn. That’s right, he denies all these kids...”

--*Maury*, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011 “Test Him Today! Is my Fiancé Having Secret Sex Orgies?”

Autumn, a white woman, and Darcy, a black man, are a married couple that are on *Maury* because, as Maury so aptly puts it, “accusations are tearing their family apart.” Not only do Autumn and Darcy’s three children all have to undergo paternity testing to satisfy Darcy’s curiosity about whether or not he is in fact the father, but Autumn’s name will not be cleared for him unless she can ‘pass’ a lie detector test about her cheating as well. Darcy’s mistrust of Autumn is commonplace on *Maury*, where husbands and wives drag each other on national television so that they can prove to America on the whole, using Maury-brand science, that they are vindicated in their beliefs in their spouse’s infidelity, or their baby’s illegitimacy. Autumn and Darcy’s story, which has such an auspicious beginning, ends happily for both parties (Darcy is the father! Autumn did not lie!)—but only after the married couple submits itself to careful scrutiny. For Darcy and Autumn it is up to Maury, and science, to give them the truth, so they too can have a happy TV ending and become a “true” family.

At its heart, the paternity cases I focus on in *Maury* are about proving blood connections between men and their possible progeny. Men are either dragged onto the show, or force their wives/partners onto the show, to prove whether or not there is any

‘blood’ connection between these men and the children they are testing. As I showed in the last chapter, this need to come on *Maury* stems from the manipulation of viewers who watch *Maury*, because the show tells them it is right to doubt their spouse/ partner’s claims of paternity. When Maury asks men if they are going to be in these children’s lives, the answer is usually something along the line of one of Maury’s paternity testing guests, Kenny: “I’ll take care of all of MINE kids—ALL OF MINE—not someone else’s” (“I’ll Prove Your 17 Year Old Son is My Baby’s Dad!”). Bad English aside, Kenny’s point is an oft-repeated one. Men on the show are there to see whether or not a ‘scientific’ reason to call this child family exists. The men and women use these specifically to the show Maury-brand scientific tests, such as lie detector and paternity ones, to govern how they are supposed to feel and act around children that they believe are not theirs. These tests are both neutral as a scientific practice, but the context in which they are placed, the way in which they are used, is influenced by *Maury*. For instance, when it comes to married couple Terry and Debbie (who I spoke about above) who have three other children together, Terry admits to treating their youngest, Isaiah, differently, simply because Terry is unsure whether or not he really is the father: “I do treat Isaiah differently, but I just want to make sure he is mine before I can tear down the wall already!” Terry claims he is just afraid of getting ‘tricked’ into raising kids that are not his, as he has seen “too many other men get tricked,” on *Maury*, and he does not want to be one of them. When Terry is proven to be Isaiah’s father, the very first thing Terry does is ask for his son, tears in his eyes, seeming to forget that only moments ago he was disavowing the very same child (“I Will Prove That Your Teen Son Got my Daughter Pregnant!”).

Kenny and Terry's need to know if they have a genetic connection to a child, along with Darcy's reasons for bringing his wife Autumn to the show, all revolve around Maury-brand science, and the importance of blood relations to the American family. In the last chapter, when I spoke of the messages that *Maury*'s producer's gear towards its audience, underneath all of the crazy dramatics, I was largely referring to messages of the good old American family the show focuses on. Utilizing this Maury-brand science, *Maury* is able to manipulate messages of what is a good family and bad family, and just who can call rightly call themselves family, even as it plays host to a variety of options to what a family can be. Using recent scholarship on paternity and blood, and what these terms mean to the modern American family, I will show how one of *Maury*'s most dominant themes is upholding the traditional American family.

Before I go any further, I want to give a quick definition of what I mean when I say "blood." Blood, in its most basic definition, is meant as a biogenetic substance that runs through people's bodies. But I look at blood through the lens of popular discourse, meaning a genetic substance that ties people who are related together, as well as that which holds the key to a person's DNA. While this definition of blood is not incorrect technically, it does highlight the difference between blood as it is scientifically defined and blood as it is defined in popular discourse. In popular discourse, the notion of blood produces obligations, both legal and extra legal, that are seen as more important than responsibilities to those with whom you are not biologically related. Blood is considered the life force, but is also paramount in the American ideas of family and race. Indeed the idea that blood equals race is one of the notions that defines this country at some of its most racist times, as I shall explore later. On *Maury* the implication is that you must

know who you are blood-related to or you are being cheated out of knowing yourself.

Husbands and long-term boyfriends are unwilling to help their partner raise a child if it does not share their blood, and are ready to abandon a child they have been helping raise if the paternity tests come back negative. When it comes to the American family, as represented on *Maury*, blood connections are seen as more important than any other link.

The family by definition in America depends heavily, socially and legally, upon blood. In his book *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* anthropologist David Schneider describes true relatives as “related first by common biogenetic heredity, a *natural substance*, and second, by a *relationship*, a pattern for behavior or a code for conduct” (Schneider 26). Later, when distinguishing between feelings for non-natural relatives, and feelings for blood-relatives, Schneider points out that there are no natural substance links between the former, and “voluntarily undertaken, [they] can be voluntarily broken” (Schneider 92). While this book was written in 1968, Schneider’s definition of what a true relative is, and his thesis of nature and blood weighing more than nurture and actions, is still seen in modern ideas of kinship and family. The Western idiom of kinship is reliant upon biology, even now, in the twenty-first century, to establish relations unique to European American (or Western) traditions, whereas non-Anglo definitions of family tend to be more flexible about defining relatedness (Carsten 2000<sup>3</sup>). This is hard to ignore in modern American families, considering the amount of money people are willing to spend on surrogacy, in vitro fertilization and other costly family sciences so that their offspring will have *their* blood.

For the people on *Maury*, this blood connection is extremely important for

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<sup>3</sup> Cited from Karla Hackstaff article "Who Are We? Genealogists Negotiating Ethno-Racial Identities" from page 187.

parents, as it is usually the only thing holding them together as a ‘family.’ For instance, in the episode “Pregnant after Vegas...Is One of You My Baby’s Dad?” we are introduced to Jessica. Jessica got drunk at a nightclub while in Las Vegas, and had sex on the same night with two different men, J.T. and Carl. After she got pregnant with her son, Jonathan, she tracked down both men, both of whom admit to having sex with her but deny paternity of her child. While on stage J.T. and Jessica fight the majority of the time, calling each other names, J.T. unafraid to insult Jonathan, who might be his son. Even Maury’s usual natural calming presence has little to no effect, and as a viewer one can only assume these two people are not fit to be in the same room, let alone to raise the same child. And yet, after learning he is the father, J.T. seems resigned, answering Maury’s usual question of “will you be there for this child?” with a shrug and, “I guess (sigh). Yeah. Yes. I will be there for Jonathan.” J.T.’s submissive attitude on national television might seem repentant, but it is hard to believe a man who had said such mean things about Jessica and Jonathon, will actually be there for them, creating a traditional family with them. How much parental help Jessica will really get from a man she had to hunt down and do a paternity test on, dragging him on national television, even if he is the ‘blood’ father of her child? Especially as, Jessica pointed out, “He changed his number and I had to find him on Facebook!” What sort of connection can she expect from a man who would knowingly cut off contact with a woman he might have procreated with? Can Jessica really expect anything from J.T., even now, knowing that he is Jonathan’s father? Does the blood relation really triumph all other emotions here, as the show would like us to believe—or are there some deeper issues being ignored for the sake of having the couple have a ‘happy’ ending for good television’s sake? J.T. and

Jessica might not like each other, but, for better or for worse, when it comes to Jonathan, they are stuck together for life.

J.T. can be seen as being punished with having to help raise a child he did not want, a not uncommon theme on *Maury*. Fool around outside of wedlock, end up with a child by a woman you might detest—it is a modern Aesop’s fable. It has become more common for unwanted children to be seen as a form of punishment to the fathers who thought to abandon them, and not just on daytime talk shows. This can be seen in Mary Anderlik’s essay “DNA-Based Identity Testing and the Future of the Family” when she discusses the large change being wrought in/on child support laws in the mid-1970s in America:

The burden on the public welfare system precipitated a new legal regime under which the mother and putative father could be ordered to support the child. Since the shift was made through criminal rather than civil law, the message was as much about punishment for violations of natural law and social order, and deterrence of future violations, as the importance of biology or blood in family formation (Anderlik 223)

According to Anderlik the federalization of family law, changing it from civil/state law, to criminal/federal law emphasizes the point that people who abandon their blood relations, like J.T., are committing a crime against the American ideal of the family—and that they need to be punished for breaking with accepted social order. Like the unwed mothers and fathers on *Maury* who are constantly belittled by the audience and each other (as we saw in the last chapter), people who do not follow the American ideal of the family must be punished for having children out of wedlock. This is done by forcing

them to have to pay for these children for at least eighteen years (as I will look at shortly), but also by making them interact with the person they created said children with for the rest of their lives. The only problem with this pushing of a man into being a father to a child he most likely does not want is that while genetic testing and other non-voluntary methods of paternity establishment might result in higher incidents of child support, they also “promote a lower incidence of father-child contact than children whose fathers’ names appeared on the birth certificate or who otherwise voluntarily acknowledge paternity” (Bishai 850). Will J.T. actually be a good father to Jonathan, simply because they have a blood link? Only time will tell, but we are not given much faith in a smooth father/son relationship from what we have seen, no matter how *Maury* tries to spin it. Blood, while legally binding as paternity and a creation of family, does not signify that the father and child will have a link beyond that of genetics or finance, especially when the child can be seen as a punishment for less stringent moral attitudes.

On *Maury* we often see moments where the traditional family is shown as being the ‘best’ kind of family. Blood relation matters more than anything to the guests, even when they try to pretend otherwise. When we are introduced to Angela and her husband, Neil, Neil is denying Angela’s five-month-old daughter, Serenity, saying it is impossible for him to be the father as he had a vasectomy nine years ago. Neil’s tape makes it clear he believes he has no blood connection to this child: “I got a vasectomy to not have any more little Neil’s running around. I work nights, I don’t know what [Angela] does, and *my doctor said if I got anyone else pregnant to call Maury, so here I am*” (emphasis added). Whether or not his doctor was joking when he said such a thing, Neil doubts the veracity of his wife’s claim that Serenity is his, because a man of science has told him to

doubt the paternity of any future children he fathers. Neil might seem like any other man who is on the show, unsure whether the child is his or not, but he shows moments of clarity when it comes to ideas about having a necessary blood connection to be family. When Maury begins questioning Neil about how he treats his wife's daughter, since he believes she is not his, Neil quickly changes his attitude, stating, "Oh that's my angel. That's my shadow, regardless of what happens." This begs the question of why Neil needs to know whether or not he is blood related to this child, since he admits that he will be there for Serenity, despite what the test will prove. While this might make it seem that Neil is bucking the conventional role of family displayed on *Maury*, that of needing to be blood-related, he still insists on using the paternity test to know if the child is 'his or not.' Can we truly trust Neil's assertion that Serenity will continue to be his "angel" if it is proven she is not his blood relation? Especially since he feels the need to know, regardless of what happens? Happily for Neil and Angela (and for producers looking for a happy ending) Serenity is Neil's child, and they leave the show kissing and laughing ("Who's My Baby's Father...My Husband or His Son?"). What they leave behind with their segment is that words can only count for so much, when actions prove that blood relation is a necessity.

*Maury's* focus on the family during its paternity testing segments (specifically the crumbling, and degradation of the family) illuminates how the current definition of the family is up for grabs. The Western definition of family and kinship is based on social contexts and historical formations that still shape modern society (Edwards 140). This is, in turn, dependent upon the American idiom of kinship reliant upon biology and culture to establish relations unique to American traditions. Because there has been such an

importance put on blood, the science behind paternity testing is seen not only as a man's right—but his due. I believe it is largely due to *Maury*, which has paternity testing done almost daily, that people have begun to see paternity testing as a natural and acceptable step for any man who has a hint of suspicion about whether or not they are the father of their partner's child or whether or not their partner has been faithful (Anderlik 221). The science behind blood, then, has become as important as the blood itself in determining who and who cannot become a family. Blood is not just important to the men on these shows, but to American family law, as well as ideas of what makes a man a father.

When Maury gets between arguing guests he points to the paternity tests as absolute truth. "Let's get to what's really important. The DNA test. This baby needs a mother and father" ("6 Mothers...8 Babies...We'll Prove He's the Dad!")! Maury reinforces the same ideas over and over, stating that finding out who the blood father is, is "More important than anything else"—even more important than the couples bickering, even more important than whether or not an emotional bond is there. The only thing that matters is that the child and father are blood related—and that the father will financially support the child the United States government no longer wants to support. Paternity tests seem almost commonplace now to the average American, though this was not always the case. Historically, understanding how a man could father a child was a bit of a mystery until spermatozoa was discovered in 1677 by Johan Hamm. Even then it was not until the 1950s, when modern DNA techniques were perfected, that one could investigate paternity cases (Albrecht 35). Current law emphasizes that for men, genetic contribution to the creation of a child, through sexual intercourse, is a sufficient basis for legal

fatherhood, and that man must provide financial support for eighteen years for said child. Even if that man has no other ties to the child or mother, in the eyes of the law, supplying genetic substance is enough to label one as a father. Because of this, as Anderlik points, “with genetic essentialism part of the cultural atmosphere, it is easy to slide into the view that the genetic contribution is the essence of fatherhood” (Anderlik 218). This thinking, once again, puts a high importance on the need for paternity testing. This is mirrored on *Maury*, in such cases, like in the segment featuring Kym and Bryan. Kym is now engaged to another man, but she knows Bryan is the father to her three-year-old daughter Chloe, even though Kym’s fiancée treats Chloe like his daughter. When she is proven correct by Maury-brand science paternity testing, though, Kym and her mother, Sue, both say that just because Bryan is the father, they do not want him in Chloe’s life. Kym even goes to far as to say that Chloe already has a father—Kym’s new fiancée (“My Fiancé is Not the Father of Your 4 Kids!”). Then, the audience must ask, why it was so important to prove Bryan the father of her child if she wanted nothing from him? It is because of the overlying implication, implicit in every paternity test, that nature means more than nurture as well as the idea that you must know who you are blood related to in order to truly know yourself.

Paternity testing as a matter of state law began to grow only in the latter half of the twentieth century. Family law has long been a matter of state law, as it is up to state legislatures to define what constitutes a family and to enact the laws that regulate marriage, parentage, adoption, child welfare, divorce, family support obligations, and property rights (Elrod 2009). It has only been recently that the Supreme Court has contributed to the constitutionalizing of family law using the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to extend

constitutional privacy to certain persons, invalidating certain state legislation, while also changing paternity testing from civil to criminal law (Elrod 2009). This changed the essence of family law, from each state having individual laws based on that states' need, to being the same all over the country—all with the goal of helping to financially support the high rise in the number of children born to unmarried parents in the past 25 to 30 years. Because of this, there has been a large retooling of laws that relate to paternity, custody and child support rights and obligations to illegitimate children (Ann Mason 866). Paternity tests have therefore taken a larger role in helping illegitimate children 'find' their father's, even if he has never contributed to the child's welfare before that moment. Law places importance not on how people act, but whether or not they are blood-related. This limits the definition of what a father is in the eyes of the American government as to being the man who's semen was used in making said child. No emotional connections are necessary, and they can call themselves a father as long as they pay for the child. When Maury tells Kym, "[Bryan] is the father, he has rights," there is the implication that with these rights there are certain obligations (mainly financial) that Bryan is expected to have towards Chloe that cannot be ignored.

Child support is an often unspoken, but prevalent theme in most episodes that feature Maury-brand science. When women come in asking for 'support' from the men they say have fathered their children, we are to understand they do not only mean familial care and love, but financial obligations as well. The most obvious case of a woman testing a man solely for financial support, is that of Megan and Kayton. Megan refuses to listen to anything Kayton says about denying their child, shouting loud enough to stop the audience's usual chatter, when she proclaims, "PLEASE READ ME THE RESULTS

MAURY—BECAUSE ONCE YOU DO, ITS CALLED CHILD SUPPORT!” This is met with raucous applause from the audience, and also with the understanding that Megan knows what proving blood relations really means for her and her son, Omari (“I’m Only 16...I’ll Prove Your Boyfriends my Baby’s Dad!”). Under the pretext of helping a child find its true father, the U. S. government uses paternity tests, like Megan’s, to get money for things it can no longer fund—namely, children. Whether or not that father has a real relationship with that child is not any of the government’s concern—though the government will gladly push this familial idea if it lessens their financial obligation. By defining the family in such black and white terms (blood relation or no relation) law’s ignore those families that lay outside this strict definition and sets up an ideal that can hardly be met by people who have children that are not biologically ‘theirs,’ leaving a very narrow definition of family that cannot be met by most.

Stricter family laws are used to not only ease the burden for the government to support illegitimate children, but to try and promote the American ideal of the family. Due to the way the government defines laws in regards to the family, it is easy to see that the ideal family for the American government (and people) is a married couple procreating and supporting their own children, together. Since this is not always the case, especially in regards to illegitimate children, the government promotes paternity testing, not only to find someone else to pay for the rearing of these children, but also to try and promote paternal involvement in child-rearing. Single parent families in America are constantly told that their families are somehow incomplete, and that by raising a child illegitimately (without both a male and female presence as ‘mother’ and ‘father’), they are depriving these children of a true family (Rashley 85). The government wants the

fathers to get involved, because they believe that this is the only way a child will grow up successfully, while also contributing to the government's control over who can be defined as a family.

It becomes clear, then, why the government wants paternity tests to find 'blood' fathers, and why women go on the shows for these paternity tests. It comes down to money, and trying to live up to the ideal family the United States government promotes. We cannot forget, though, that these paternity tests are not necessarily understood by the people demanding them, which also has dangerous implications for the guests on *Maury*. When the viewer is introduced to Ciera and Dion, and her son Dion Jr., Ciera is sure Dion is the father, so much so that she proclaims, "I am 135 percent positive he is the father!" When Ciera is proven wrong, though, she runs backstage, crying, while Maury comforts her. Amidst his reassurances, Ciera turns to Maury, pleading, "Where are the real tests? Lets do this again—I know he is the father! He is the father! He is the father!" While this is heartbreaking for Ciera, it opens up a whole host of ideas about paternity testing as it is used as a science, and paternity testing as it is used in pop culture ("You Cheated With My Teen Nephew...Is He Your Baby's Dad?"). Do the people on the show actually understand what is being tested, or do they just put that much faith into the science, blindly believing whatever it will tell them? We see time and time again—couples like Darcy and Autumn, who go on not only for paternity testing, but lie detector tests as well. The second the paternity test is read, or the moment the lie detector proves something, the people on the show blindly believe what it being told to them. This becomes dangerous when we understand that these people do not understand the margin of error in these tests, and that these tests are far from perfect. For example, Ciera

believes that the test is wrong, but at the same time she still believes in the science enough to request another test, rather than just rejecting the Maury-brand science on the whole.

While it might seem harmless that people on daytime talk shows have a hard time distinguishing from scientific fact and science as a popular culture tool, we should never ignore the deeper meanings behind this misunderstanding. “In every historical era and among every culture, a continuum between bioscientific and popular beliefs always has a strong mutually reinforcing impact on scientific and popular discourses and practices alike” (Polsky 177), effecting how both are viewed and what gets misunderstood. While Maury might tell Ciara that the test is one hundred percent positive (when anyone who knows science knows that NOTHING is one hundred percent positive), and that the chance of being wrong is nonexistent, the DNA Diagnostic Center (DDC) that does the scientific testing for *Maury* have reported that thirty percent of men tested in their lab prove to be misidentified, usually due to human error (Anderlik 222). DDC is a huge paternity testing laboratory. There are around 280,000 DNA based paternity tests performed in America annually (Bishai 849) and if DDC’s error rate is consistent across the testing industry then roughly 84,000 cases a year give either a false positive or false negative a year. That is to say, a lot of faith is put into this science, as proven by the women who hold onto their results as if it were a priceless artifact, no matter how unreliable it really is. Even though men are labeled (and punished?) as fathers because of the amount of confidence the American public has thrown into paternity tests (thanks in part to their common occurrence on daytime television), people ignore the large margin of error to help preserve ideas of family. This misattribution of the import of science not

only leads to unnecessary consequences for the people being wrongly identified as fathers or cheaters (in the case of the lie detector), but to dangerous consequences for those who believe that science and blood can never be wrong—as we shall see in the next chapter.

What is perhaps most damaging about the American ideas of family, blood, and relationship, is the way it affects the children. Though children are never on stage during *Maury*, their presence can never be forgotten: they appear on background screens, laughing and smiling, while their alleged parents are fighting onstage. It is heartbreaking, then, not only for the mother of a child when she finds out she fingered the wrong man for paternity, but for the child as well. For instance, we are introduced to Karissa who is seeking the paternity of her son Daylan. When Terry, Karissa's boyfriend, is proven to not be the father of her Daylan, her reaction is a horrified, "Oh my God, what do we tell my son now—he's called [Terry] daddy since day one!" Here it does not matter that Terry has acted in the role of father to Daylan, or whether or not he will continue to do so, only that he is proven not to be blood-related to her son, and is therefore no longer eligible in her view (at least in this moment) to be called Daylan's father ("6 Mothers...8 Babies...We'll Prove He's the Dad!"). In another segment Tiffany and her boyfriend of eight years, Vincent, are testing the paternity of Tiffany's nine-month old Vincent Jr., because she admitted to cheating on her boyfriend with his friend Jimmy. Vincent says that he will always be Vincent Jr.'s father, even if they are not biologically related. When Jimmy is proven to be the father, both Vincent Sr. and Tiffany claim that it does not matter, that Vincent Sr. is the 'real' father. Jimmy gets in the last word, though, when he is able to shout, "See who he calls daddy now!" It does not matter that Vincent Sr. and

Tiffany are in a relationship, and are raising Vincent Jr. along with their two other children—what does matter is that Jimmy, a man who has had no contact with Vincent Jr., is the biological father (“I Slept With Your Fiancé, I’ll Prove My 2 Kids Are His!”). Blood is seen as trumping social ties here, and after seeing the way these people treat each other on stage, the viewer is left to wonder if these people really are doing the right thing for the child. It is by pushing the idea that families need to be blood related to be a real family, that *Maury* loses wiggle room for unusual cases such as Vincent and Tiffany’s. Families who might try to define themselves outside of these bonds find themselves at odds with society and popular culture, especially on shows like *Maury*. *Maury*’s paternity testing shows center around the idea of when an American family should be—using its own guests as moral tales to warn others off of having sex (and children) with anyone besides your husband in the bonds of marriage. Pre-marital sex, extra-marital affairs and long term, unmarried relationships can all lead you to *Maury*. *Beware!* These shows seem to be telling their mainly female audience, *or you might be the crying woman brought on stage for all to see, little better than a freak show act since you could not wait until you were married to have sex!*

**The Science of Skin-Color and the Modern Acceptance of Interracial Couples**

“Molly says there is only one other possibility for Maya’s dad—it is this man, Aaron. You see, Molly says Aaron is much darker complected than baby Maya, which is why she didn’t bring him here in the first place. But today, Molly is sure that Aaron is the father, and says the DNA test is going to prove it! [Turns to Molly] You know I can’t remember another time in the history of this show, where we brought a white guy on, and now you bring an African American guy on” (Audience laughs)  
 --*Maury*, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011 “Pregnant at 15...I’ll prove you’re my baby’s father!”

Molly and Aaron’s paternity case is fraught with tension. This is not necessarily unusual on *Maury*—but what is unusual is that the case is full of racial tension. Unlike paternity cases where couples are of the same race, whenever an interracial couple appears on *Maury*, a special amount of attention is paid to what race they are. Molly’s case is unique in that it is the first time in *Maury* history that a white woman has tested first a white man, and then a man with African-American ancestry to see if he is the child’s father. While introducing Molly’s case, Maury seems more incredulous of her than he is of most of his guests, and questions why she does not know if her baby is white or black. This implies that race is more than a social construct and that it should be easily read on the child’s skin and in her features. Molly herself buys into race as a biological construct, as she is forced to admit, “His mom’s white, Maury.” As this is Molly’s second time on the show, a normal viewer of *Maury* would assume that Maury would be even kinder to her than he was on her first time, as he is with his usual ‘repeat’ guests. Instead, he openly questions her knowing who the father of her baby is, skeptical of her assurances that though Maya is light skinned her father might be black. When it is in fact proven that Aaron, a black man, is Maya’s father, a photograph of the baby is flashed on screen. This is to ensure that the audience at home, and in the studio, can get another

view of the baby whom the mom previously thought was white—but does, in fact, have African American ancestry.

The idea of race as a biological construct is problematized daily by the reality of interracial couples with children, and Molly and Aaron's case is a prime example of this. When Molly and Aaron are fighting on stage over Maya's paternity, the focus is whether or not the baby looks 'black' enough to be Aaron's daughter. Race here is seen both as skin color, but also at the same time as the blood that runs through Maya's veins. She might not look 'black' enough to be Aaron's daughter, but she is in fact his child. With a case like Maya, the viewers at home, those observant enough to read through the lines of daytime television, can understand the problem of using race and skin color to classify a child as either a white or black baby. Maya's case on *Maury* then is a prime example of why skin color and blood have nothing do with each other. Unfortunately, one of the very ideas that *Maury* promotes is that skin color and blood are clearly related, and that this relates to how we should define a family. The ideal family should be monochromatic, keeping like race with like race (so people can look at them and clearly know what race they are). Both blood and skin color seem to be used as 'proof' of race in our society. Neither of these, though, can be used to prove racial identity because race is nothing more than an artificial concept to begin with, one used in American history to keep a separate line between people of different races mixing, creating interracial<sup>4</sup> children. The only reason race is seen as a social fact is because we as American's treat it as such, and therefore it does become real. Before we can even explore ideas of race though, we must understand the history of interracial couples in American society. By looking back, we

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<sup>4</sup> Since the couples that I have focused on in my study of *Maury* are African-American and white, I use the term multi-racial/interracial to refer to couples and children of this mixed ethnicity

are able to understand the prejudices that still exist today.

Before going any further, I just want to give a quick note about why the couples I am focusing on are almost without exception white women and black men. Though African-American and white are clearly not the only races (or even the only races prejudiced against) on *Maury*, the overwhelming majority of people who appear on this show are either black or white. In the episodes I have used for this thesis there are an almost even number of black couples and white couples, with at least one interracial couple an episode. I have seen Latinos represented a handful of times, but they are the only other minority that was apparent when I watched these episodes. I have chosen to focus on white women and black men, simply because they provide some of the most clear-cut evidence about race on *Maury*. Because of this, I will trace the history of interracial couples through white women and black men. But first I need to touch briefly upon the early history of slave relations between white men and black women. These will help us better understand where ideas of white womanhood and black manhood gained prominence in American society.

Historical records show that ever since the beginnings of the American slave trade in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there has been recorded evidence of sexual relationships across racial lines. “However, because slaves were legally classified as property rather than as citizens, they had no rights whatsoever and therefore no recourse for sexual abuse” (Polsky 178). Enslaved women could, and often did, occupy the role of mistress, concubine, forced breeder, and unwilling victim to their own slaveholders. Though miscegenation was frowned upon, it was often practiced in the case of slave women and white men. Any child born from such a union would be considered the race of its mother, with paternity

rarely recognized. In fact, as Naomi Zack points out in the introduction to her collection *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*:

After it became illegal to import new slaves, and the cotton gin led to an increased demand for slave labor, it was necessary to breed slaves in the American South. For the breeding of slaves to pay off, the children of slave women had to be born slaves, regardless of their biological racial origins. Because only Negroes could legally be enslaved, these children had to be *born* Negroes and so they were, regardless of how many white ancestors they had through the families of their white fathers, or through the families of their mixed-race mothers, if miscegenation had occurred in an earlier generation (Zack xvi)

Thus, black women found that their reproductive capacities were critical, and completely tied into the maintenance of the highly profitable U.S. slave system (Millward 23).

Because of this need for as many babies to be born to black mothers as possible slaveholders having intercourse with their slaves was ignored. In fact, some thought it was the right of the slaver holder to have intercourse with his property (Rockquemore 5). But this same blind eye was not turned to white women who had sex with black men, largely due to the racial questions that could not be avoided when offspring were produced from these couples.

Early in American history, a distinction was drawn between black women and white women. It was “through laws passed between 1643 and 1662 that African women’s bodies became increasingly associated with sexual availability, lust, and licentiousness; and white women’s bodies with sexual purity and chastity” (Kitch 74). These laws helped further establish racial hierarchy, while justifying race-based slavery. These laws also

helped alleviate guilt white slaveholders might have had for sleeping with/raping their black slaves (Foeman 543). On the other hand, white women were put on a moral pedestal, which made it all the more difficult for white people to accept white women and black men being together. Though the loudest reasons for these couples being unaccepted were moral ones, there were also economic considerations. Since a child's race was legally dependent upon the race of the mother, multi-racial babies with black mothers could be ignored, but those with white mothers could not (Polsky 178). If a white woman gave birth to an interracial child, it was seen as an erosion of the system of slavery, since the babies were given freedom, which was not conducive to the economic stronghold of slavery (Hodes 4). Most of the animosity towards any type of racial mixing, then, came down to the offspring such a pair would produce. In the case of white women giving birth to a mixed race child, there was no denying that baby's white heritage, which caused fear that these babies' 'colored' history could be hidden.

In the twentieth century, long standing racist attitudes about interracial couples became legalized as freedoms blossomed among African Americans. Aiming to disenfranchise, restrict economic independence, and marginalize, Jim Crow laws came into effect, segregating African Americans as much as (if not more so than) slavery ever did. The number of multiracial children and couples dropped with the repeated fortification of racial boundaries by white Americans. With the rise of Social Darwinism, people became more and more scared of what would happen when racial borders were crossed by interracial relationships (Hackstaff 188). Not only that, but the rise of Eugenics in the twentieth century, which promoted the idea that every person's experience and acquired personality traits would be passed on to children, encouraged a

deeper racial boundary between whites and blacks (Kitch 120). Not only that, but Eugenics attributed greatly to the ‘scientific fact’ that certain races were born with bad characteristics (such as being lazy, ill-mannered, etc, etc) while other’s were born superior to them. Ideas that still have mistaken roots by certain people today. Mixed-race children who had been born free because of their mother’s status as freed women, found themselves labeled black under the one-drop rule, so they could be discriminated against, the same as ‘pure’ blacks. “By including mulattoes under the category of black, it was clear (and has been ever since) that ‘black’ and its earlier synonyms no longer denoted a people who were ‘pure.’ Rather, it referred to a people who were not white and who had at least ‘one drop’ of black ‘blood’” (Spencer 1). Race was defined by sets of physical attributes. Skin color became more and more of a defining factor in who was black as Jim Crow laws gained favor. People who had heretofore been defined as mulatto were now under the racial umbrella of ‘black’ (Bratter 186), and whites found themselves again with the upper hand racially, and in terms of power.

Contrasting with the amount of power taken away from them in the earlier half of the twentieth century, the second half of the century saw African Americans gaining more power in America than they ever had before. This was due largely to the Civil Rights Movement. But laws can go only so far in changing deep-seated racism. Interracial couples may be more accepted, but they are still viewed as an oddity (and, sometimes, disturbingly, as an aberration). Eric Childs, in her article, “What’s Race Got to do with It?” makes this clear:

Whites often equate interracial relationships with the possibility of a decline, a loss of status, and problems. This view stems from beliefs about the inferiority of

blacks, the perceived lower socioeconomic status of black people, and the real or imagined opposition of others to such relationships. On the other hand, blacks discussed interracial dating as a symptom and sign of the racial and economic inequalities to which black communities are subjected. When a black man, or woman to a lesser degree, dated interracially, it was seen as the internalization of racism which privileges whiteness, a symbolic slap in the face, and an economic hit (Childs 27).

Americans of all colors have a hard time not believing interracial couples are together for reasons other than those of love and respect, even in modern times. Racism is dependent on skin color, as the fear of a mixed race 'black' child passing as a 'white' child is at the stem of most of the tensions we have seen in this quick history of interracial couples.

What this implies, and what most Americans still believe, is that race and stereotypical racial attributes can be inherited from the child's parents, and because of this race and skin color gain the status of social facts, because people believe them to be so.

But where does race come from and why is it so important to America throughout its history? The English word 'race,' comes from the European era of exploration, and has roots in the Spanish *raza*, meaning 'breed' or 'stock' (Olson 522). Originating from an era of racism disguised as colonialism, race began to take on a sinister meaning that helped create the social strata that placed the lighter, white Europeans ahead of all darker-skinned others they were colonizing. There have long been ideas about having specific criteria for best classifying and separating individuals, and that people can be placed into relatively discrete ancestral groups that have distinct physical and cultural characteristics (Hunt 350, Zack xvi). Every time a European culture would invade a new country that

was not 'European' they would claim they had the rights to make the country better (better meaning more European). Using race as a scientific term, rather than the social construction it is, people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries began to believe a set of 'folk beliefs' that linked inherited physical differences between groups to inherent traits such as intelligence, behavior, and even morality (Olson 522). Race then became a focus point for discriminatory attitudes, making it easier for certain people to hold on to power over others, simply because of one's 'blood.'

The idea of what blood is and what it represents has as convoluted of a history as the idea of race and racism. For example, the belief that the body is made of four humors (the most important being blood) was started in ancient Greece and was a prevailing medical philosophy well into the Renaissance. With the idea of the four humors came the ideas that blood letting, leeches, and other dangerous treatments could cure everything. While these ideas can be seen as relics from the past and most people believe that modern science has made it extremely clear on what just blood is and what it does for the body, people can be as misguided as their forbearers were when it comes to the amount of import placed on what blood is and what it means. Whether this importance is placed on the significance of blood to the family, as we saw last chapter, or more dangerously, the consequence of blood and race being linked, it causes problems that reach far beyond the scientific in this country.

Blood has been and is constantly being used to define race, which often leads to disastrous racial discrimination and prejudices that have long defined the ugly side of this country. The assumptions people have about race and ethnicity have "contributed to many of the great atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and [continue] to shape personal

interactions and social institutions” (Olson 519). Blood, and its definition, is extremely fluid in America, and is “considered a potentially life-saving substance and source of deadly pathogens, a symbol of human unity and justification for segregation” (Polsky 173). There tends to be a persistent tendency of American popular culture toward the blind acceptance of biologism as well as the routine conflation of blood and genes especially when it comes to ideas about race (Polsky 173). Because of this, even now, blood and race are inseparable in America.

With the discovery of genetics and DNA in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, people became extremely curious as to how science could answer questions of their roots. Like the women who bring different men to the paternity testing shows to find out who the father of their child is, these people believed that by using blood testing they could answer questions about who they were (Hackstaff 192). The problem with this testing is the amount of faith people put into it, and the results drawn from it. I showed in my last chapter how the idea of blood in family members is the most important factor in deciding who a child’s father is. This importance placed on blood only heightens when it comes to ideas about race. A belief that race is still the obvious way to divide people persists even today. “Thus, while race and ethnicity are widely recognized as highly fluid, social, and cultural categories whose biological basis is tenuous at best, they nonetheless are commonly presumed to provide a useful indication of continental ancestry” (Hunt 351). A common belief is that genetics would (and will still) prove that certain races have an inherited genealogical factor that makes them better than other races. The problem with the idea of race as a purely biological construct is that it rests upon certain mistaken assumptions such as: the belief that racial/ethnic groups are monolithic throughout time,

that we do not share common ancestry (which we do), that gene flow is continual, and that racial intermarriage is newer and more exceptional than it truly is (Hunt 354, Olson 521). These mistaken ideas of race lead to discrimination, cloaked in scientific terms, that falsely situates biology as the supreme locus of identity, which in turn leads to human eugenics (Polsky 185).<sup>5</sup>

Interracial couples and their children have long been under scrutiny in America, for their ‘mixing’ of the races. Part of the reason multi-racial Americans have found themselves under the microscope more in the latter half of the twentieth century<sup>6</sup> could be attributed to the “the dramatic rise in racial and ethnic intermarriage over the past thirty years” (Nicolaisen 118). Though sources disagree on the exact percentage that interracial marriage rates have risen in the past forty years (some say it has doubled, others say it has quadrupled), a general consensus that interracial marriage is and will continue to be on the rise in America cannot be ignored (Root 231, Spencer 4). But, as we have seen, nothing about interracial couples or their children is new to American. In fact, most African Americans, more than seventy-five percent actually, are estimated to have white ancestry. This has been ignored largely due to the long-standing belief that all Americans with at least one known black ancestor are automatically designated black, their white ethnicity ignored (Zack xvi). The problem with beliefs such as these is that they further

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<sup>5</sup> Blood disguised as science can be found behind some of the more monstrous racial discriminations in the American past. During World War II, for instance, there was a fear at the American Red Cross of African American blood donor’s blood accidentally being given to white soldiers, causing them to deteriorate, as if sharing blood with an African American could actually change a white person. People were led to believe that there was a “fundamental difference between the blood of different races, that it was possible to transmit the traits and characteristics of one race to a member of another race by means of a blood transfusion, and that it was possible for blood transfusions to implant potentialities in an individual of one race that would show up in succeeding generations” (Polsky 180).

<sup>6</sup> Since the ruling in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), which saw the end to antimiscegenation marriage laws

the American idea that white equals racial purity, and that whites are better than people of color since they are pure. In his article, “What are they?” Stephen Satris talks about the question he is most asked about his multi-racial children, pointing out that:

This [current] racial system is not a matter of classifying people according to their predominant ancestry but rather a matter of screening the population for those who will be admitted into an exclusive ‘white’ group. All other people—nonwhite people—are classified as belonging to the ‘colored’ racial category. On this view, everyone must fall into one of the two categories; in particular, there can be no racially mixed people (Satris 54).

Multi-racial children of an interracial union become feared and discriminated against, since they are both black and white.

There has been an oversimplification of racial categories in the United States that has led to social and legal conventions that are little better than flat out racism hidden behind science. For instance “efforts to track mixing between groups led to a proliferation of categories (such as ‘mulatto’ and ‘octoroon’) and ‘blood quantum’ distinctions that became increasingly untethered from self-reported ancestry” (Olson 523). Race is not an indicator of biological traits or the genetic differences between groups, yet there continues to be a large number of people who do not see how blood and genetics do not wholly define a person (Sanchez 1155). For many Americans, negotiating racial meanings and identities is about balancing ideas of power, history, ideology and performance (Bailey 85). Race is made up of many moving parts that bend and change in accordance with class hierarchies in the United States, and is constantly being redefined—like blood. The changing definition is in place so that the “higher class and

white racial identity have greater power and status than lower class and non-white racial identities” (Korgen 3).

The prevalent idea of blood and skin color as race is not going away anytime soon, and, as the participants of *Maury* illustrate, it will continue to shape ideas of who these multiracial guests think that they are. The paternity testing shows of interracial couples on *Maury* seem to rely as much upon skin color (defined as blood on the show) to prove a child’s paternity as it does upon the paternity test themselves. For instance, when Aaron comes out, fighting against Molly’s accusation of paternity, he focuses on race saying Molly’s slept with so many men, “she can’t tell what color Maya is! That baby looks white Maury!” Aaron, here, uses color in place of race, clearly believing that a child must be a certain color to belong to a certain race. Molly’s response is to yell at Aaron, “I’M WHITE! I’M WHITE! THAT BABY IS GOING TO COME OUT WHITE!” Molly and Aaron bicker more over Maya’s skin color than any other physical attribute, as if this in itself is enough to indicate Aaron is/is not the father.

Race as skin color is constantly reiterated during multi-racial couples segments, bringing a whole other dimension to these couples that is not present in their same-race counterparts. Though I have just traced the long and complicated history of both interracial couples, and ideas of race as both skin color and blood, the segments I have studied on *Maury* have only deepened my understanding of my sources. Interracial couples should not be thought of as different in post-modernity, and yet they still are highlighted on something as ‘innocuous’ as daytime television shows. This all comes down to the fact that, like alternative families from the last chapters, interracial families are discordant to what people believe a real nuclear family should be, as children from

these couplings often produce uncomfortable questions, like the one Stephan Sattris discusses. Multiracial babies are seen as inharmonious, and this will never be changed as long as people look for race in skin color as a physical attribute.

In an episode where Sarah, a white woman, brings her significant other, a black man, Nick, on to prove he is their daughter's father, we can again see the highlighting of skin color as the most important physical attribute. In "You Cheated With My Teen Nephew...Is He Your Baby's Dad?" Nick and Sarah's case is treated differently than the other four couples from the same episode (three white couples, and one black couple), in that Maury specifically asks what about Nakira's looks make her different than Nick. As it is not unusual on cases where a black father and a white mother are testing for the paternity of their child, Nick instantly goes for skin color, pointing out that Nakira is too 'dark' skinned to be his baby. "This child can't be mine! The mom's white—I'm brown—that baby is black!" Not only is skin color brought up, but hair as well, with Nick declaring that Nakira's hair is "Nappier than mine ever was! You're looking for a black man, not a brown man Maury." Once again, Nick mentions that he is a 'brown man' not a 'black man'—indicating that while he is African-American, he is clearly the wrong African-American to be Nakira's father based solely on hair and skin color. None of the other couples from this episode present race in this way. There is no insistence of a white baby being too white, or the 'wrong' white for the white Americans on the show, and the black couple does not even look at the baby's skin color for assurances of paternity. Race here is highlighted only in the interracial couple.

Every day on *Maury's* paternity testing shows, we are presented with cases of people using skin color to define race, like with Nick and Sarah. In almost every paternity

case either the mother, or supposed father, of the child goes up to the television screen available on stage, pointing to side-by-side photographs of the child and the alleged father: “Look at those ears! Look at that forehead!” Random facial attributes are picked out, in an effort to prove that the features of the father are clearly written on the face of the child. This takes on another twist though, when the couple is interracial. In these cases, skin color matters as much as the child’s facial features. For instance, in the episode “I Will Prove that Your Teen Son Got my Daughter Pregnant,” we are introduced to a black male Tavaris and a white female, Raychel. Raychel clearly thinks Tavaris is the father of her daughter Kayalee, but Tavaris refuses, saying the baby is too dark to be his and that Kayalee “looks like every black man in Oregon!” Tavaris is proven not to be Kayalee’s father, but he wonders, aloud, “what poor black man [Raychel] suckered into sleeping with her!” In another similar case, Andre, a black male, says that Brittani, a white female, is a slut, and that “any black man could be the father of her child” (“Are These 6 Babies Mine....Give Me the DNA Results.”)! For Tavaris and Andre, the mere fact that a child has darker skin than its mother makes it obvious that the father is at least partly black. But it can also be posited from what these men have said, that the fact that the baby has dark skin makes the mother a ‘slut’ since the father can be any black man! Even the black men on these shows seem to be buying into the stereotype about the promiscuity of white women who sleep with black men. Something interesting can be found when we see light skinned black men not wanting to believe that they could father a child darker than themselves—especially with a white woman. If we acknowledge that a deeper message of the paternity shows is to scare people to only have sex and children within the bonds of marriage, these interracial couples, and the amount of scorn thrown

on these white woman, can be seen as trying to repel white women away from black men.

Whenever couples featuring white women and black men come on *Maury* there is a concentrated focus paid to them, and they always present an interesting case for anyone who is trying to observe *Maury* as the social barometer it should be seen as. But why are these couples questioned more on whether or not they are sure they have the right 'baby daddy'? Why are these couples pointed to the onstage screen more often than monoracial couples, asked to show how their child looks like the person they think is their father? Why is their skin color seen as a determining factor? I believe this stems from the misguided beliefs about race and skin color being used just as much as knowing who a child's father is to define that child as a person. Racial history in the United States makes the segments that more fraught with tension (good for producers looking to draw viewers in). But even if these couples are presented as modern day freaks in a modern day freakshow, at least they are getting the chance to tell their side of the story.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have used *Maury* to explore ideas of daytime (and its primetime offspring reality) television, the American family, and ideas of interracial couples and their offspring in this country. It was easy for me, a long time viewer, to know that certain couples represent oft-repeated patterns on these shows, and it is something I hope I translated well. Though I have written negatively about the more old-fashioned ideas *Maury* has about family and race, I will continue to watch the show. This time though, I will look to the show with a more informed eye. I do not think the overall goal of *Maury* is meant to impel hatred to those who do not follow its overall ideals of family and race, though, and should not be treated as subversive or sneaky. It is 'safe' for others to watch as well, as the shows are not a diabolical means of pushing conservative mainstream values down anyone's throats. *Maury*, at its most basic level, is the art of letting ordinary people speak, on a public soapbox, getting their private stories into the public forum. Through this thesis I have learned how important it is for these modern day freak show's to have ordinary people speak on them, and just what that speaking means for America on the whole. It is interesting to see ideas that *Maury* tries to portray as 'shocking' or 'unusual' (a black man and a white woman making children?!), and how the audience is always as accepting of these people and their stories, as the 'usual' guests. I would have to say I position myself in opposition to critics who think these shows are at their very least damaging, and at their worst subliminally trying to manipulate people into hatred. These shows are entertainment, but I would hope that people watching these shows do keep their eyes and ears open for what the people on stage are really trying to say. If not, they might just miss out on some interesting ideas about family, blood and race.

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