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Racial Prioritization in Black-White Relationships

By Nia Tariq

Abstract

The utilization of race as a proxy for evaluating different characteristics of others contains risk because it results in stereotyping and potential alienation of individuals from negatively judged groups. This concept motivated me to uncover the extent to which race affects intimate relationships amongst the historically opposed groups of blacks and whites in the United States. I am studying the historic racially-driven marginalization of blacks and the resulting relationship to recent dating and marriage patterns between black-white interracial pairs. I want to find out why the socioeconomic advantage held by whites is transmutated into dating culture, in order to understand the continued prioritization of race as a factor in forming romantic relationships. I engaged scholarly articles with analyses on the foundations of interracial relationships between black and white people and studies exploring online dating site behavior and the racial preferences of members. Main contributors to interracial marriages include higher educational achievement and cultural similarity. Factors that decrease black-stereotypical congruence tend to increase the chances of black individuals having relationships with white individuals. Race prioritization in relationships acts as a preliminary screening of resources deemed important to the longevity of a marriage and can therefore result in the discrimination of stereotypically disadvantaged blacks. I aim to emphasize the importance of accepting diversity and embracing individual characteristics, instead of the prejudices and stigmas against individuals simply due to appearance. I suggest that future research utilize the evidence provided here to speculate methods to improve implicit biases and attitudes toward interracial interactions.

Keywords: intermarriage, interracial relationships, online dating, miscegenation, social desirability bias, stereotype congruence

Racial Prioritization Between Blacks and Whites in Online Dating and Interracial Marriage Patterns

Introduction

The majority of Americans are now more accepting of interracial relationships between blacks and whites, a shift in attitudes compared to just fifty years ago when the Supreme Court delivered the *Loving v. Virginia* decision. The decision solidified that anti-miscegenation laws in the United States were unacceptable, after years of inconsistencies between states. The increased use of computer technology has introduced a revolutionary disintegrator of social and physical barriers between people: the Internet. In our interconnected and electronically socialized culture, it is common for adults of all ages to be active users of online dating platforms. Research reveals that online dating behavior suggests user preferences for potential partners. This is analogous to the prevalence of fake accounts—thanks to media depictions such as the television show *Catfish*, users fear meeting people online who misrepresent themselves. The data from preferences on dating platforms, including race, can be interpreted as representing the preferences of most Americans since a large percentage have at some point utilized a dating platform. The growing rates of intermarriage between blacks and whites could be indicative of better race relations between the groups relative to their contentious history. However, evidence shows that many people who date interracially choose not to marry outside of their own race. In my research, I explore the reasons behind success and longevity in interracial relationships.

I am studying the historic, racially driven marginalization of blacks in the United States and its relationship to recent online dating and marriage patterns between black-white interracial pairs because I want to find out why whites main-

tain their socioeconomic advantage within contemporary dating culture in order to understand the prioritization of race as a factor in forming romantic relationships. As a measure of social distance, intimate relationships can serve as quantifiers of attitudes surrounding race relations and online dating platforms have large enough membership bases to be representative of the American population as a whole. Based on my research, the racial preferences of dating site members reflect the higher social position of whites. While online dating platforms primarily indicate what happens at the inception of a relationship, marriage is more reflective of the longevity of relationships. Therefore, exploring online dating and intermarriage patterns between whites and blacks is crucial to understanding the prioritization of race in relationships because it thoroughly examines the power of race in the most intimate of social settings.

When White is Pure and Black is Obscure

The perceptions surrounding blacks as potential romantic partners has been shaped by the historic oppression of blacks in the United States and the residual power structure that left whites at a cultural and socioeconomic advantage over blacks.

Roots of miscegenation laws in slavery.

Race-based slavery promoted the historic labeling of blacks as inferior by whites. This label was the primary justification for the legal prevention of marriage between blacks and whites—beginning in some states as early as the 1660s and ending with the *Loving v. Virginia* decision 300 years later. Yancey (2009) maintained that the current social distance between whites and blacks stemmed from American race-based slavery. Kalmijn (1998) highlighted state laws—namely anti miscegenation laws—as a type of "group sanction" (p. 400) with the most influence on interracial marriage, an example of a relationship with little to no social distance between two races. Foeman and Nance (1999) pointed out that the purpose of these historic anti-miscegenation laws was to silence the rights of mixed children; the rape of black women by slave owners would have led to the legitimization of mixed children due to their partial whiteness, and

therefore could potentially allow black access to white money through familial ties. Therefore, anti-miscegenation laws not only inhibited the marriage of blacks and whites, but also created an economic power structure to the disadvantage of blacks. Furthermore, Bratter and King (2008) noted that anti-miscegenation laws made intermarriage between whites and blacks more taboo, and the increased effort required to maintain these relationships could have discouraged potential partners from romantic engagement. According to Qian (1997), intermarriage between whites and non-whites is still a rare occurrence, which he attributed to the continuing effects of anti-miscegenation laws. According to Mendelsohn, Taylor, Fiore, and Cheshire (2014), tensions between the two groups can be seen in online dating settings through trends indicating that whites are less interested in making initial contact with blacks.

Hierarchies lead to white social dominance.

The stratification of different races into colorist hierarchies disadvantaged blacks culturally and socioeconomically because blacks have historically had more difficulties than other minorities assimilating. Due to what Yancey (2009) referred to as "racialized societies" (p. 122) naturally leading to stratification, inferior groups—namely black people—would find it to be more difficult to assimilate with groups who exist higher up on the social ladder—especially whites. Lewis (2016) asserted that patterns of racial differentiation in relationships were indicative of how often individuals of different races view one another as equals. Therefore, disparities between the treatment of races of different statuses create tensions within the hierarchy.

Lin and Lundquist (2013) noted that white people were more likely to intermarry with Latino, Native American, and Asian people than with blacks; this pattern was reminiscent of Bonilla-Silva's "triracial hierarchy" (p. 185), which illustrated the preferential treatment of people with fairer skin tones over people of darker skin. Lin and Lundquist (2013) also observed that historically marginalized groups were more likely to respond to an online message from a person of a more dominant race than the other way around. Furthermore, Lin and Lundquist

(2013) uncovered a tendency for minority women to contact white men, regardless of the men's level of education—demonstrating a privilege and prestige given to white men that no other race possesses. These findings solidify the status of white people as the dominant race in the interracial romance hierarchy.

Assimilation has also not allowed black people to climb the social ladder. For example, Lin and Lundquist (2013) noted that Eastern European immigrants were deemed "nonwhite," until intermarriage between those people and other whites allowed for the former's integration and assimilation. However, Kalmijn (1998)'s point that an ethnic group's time spent in the "host society" (p. 410) was positively associated with the rate of intermarriage did not apply to black people. Lin and Lundquist (2013) claimed that, in order to reach a higher rung on the social ladder, historically marginalized racial groups could purposely seek out people from the non-minority group. However, black people have historically been marginalized and ostracized by whites in particular due to phenomena like the Jim Crow.

Yancey (2009) attributes the lower hierarchical position of blacks compared with other minorities to "social dominance orientation" (SDO; p. 121), which is the social distance felt by black people as being similar in kind to other racial minorities, but differing in degree. Yancey (2009) asserted that, according to SDO, lower status racial groups would be more likely to try to interact with higher status racial groups; however, the social barriers faced by black people could be inhibiting SDO. Yancey (2009) determined that despite being at the bottom of the SDO model, blacks still had the highest endogamy rate—which can be partially attributed to the history of blacks not being allowed to marry people of any other race. Because racial hierarchies make whites less likely to have a relationship with someone of a lower status and blacks less likely to pursue intermarriage, both groups continue to be socially removed from one another.

Notions of attractiveness.

Eurocentric beauty standards influence the perception of blacks as romantic partners because of the historic portrayal of blacks by whites as being biologically different from other humans and the association of blackness with lesser socioeconomic success. According to Yancey (2009), white people painted black people as falling short evolutionarily from whites and being less mentally developed, allowing fairer skin to be associated with greater success, associations that extend to the present day. Foeman and Nance (1999) identified the physical disparity between the seemingly superior physiques of blacks and the inferior physiques of whites as a partial cause for the lack of black-white marriages; they argue that perceptions like these led to the creation of the stereotype that black men are mentally inferior to white men in order to compensate for the physical power imbalance. Therefore, despite the black man's supposed superior physical stature, black people as a whole have been treated as uglier and less intelligent than their white counterparts, which makes black people less appealing as romantic partners.

According to Lin and Lundquist, in present day, gender differences in interracial marriage preference exist because of "societal notions of desirability," and the resulting ideals of masculinity and femininity in regards to appearance: black men are seen as "hyper-masculine" and black women are seen as less feminine than white women (p. 185). Therefore, Lewis (2016)'s claim that white men's aversion to dating black women could be explained by black women's lack of conformity to "idealized notions of femininity" (p. 296). Despite his primary claim of deeply rooted Eurocentric beauty preferences, Yancey (2009) conceded that blacks' high intramarriage rate may simply be the result of a greater attraction to people of their same race. Nevertheless, the upholding of white beauty as the standard by default marginalizes black people, especially women, and therefore makes them appear to be less desirable romantically.

Alhabash, Hales, Baek, and Oh (2014) determined that evaluating someone else's attractiveness is beyond the jurisdiction of conscious regulation.

However, the outward expression of attraction can be inhibited due to institutional standards of white beauty. Since the acknowledgment of beauty be influenced, Eurocentric standards are strengthened and have the capability of being pushed upon black people. Despite automatically determining someone else's level of attractiveness, people still choose to promote white features, which disenfranchises black people seeking intimate partners.

Education implies achievement potential.

The educational achievement of black people has a positive effect on the racial preferences of whites because education augments exposure to diversity and indicates socioeconomic success. While Qian (1997) claimed that racial homogamy, is more important than higher education in a romantic partner, Bratter and King (2008) asserted that the racial aspect was less important than educational level when it came to interracial relationships *failing*. This highlights the importance of educational status in interracial pairings, which supports Kalmijn's claim that educational homogamy demonstrates a lessened priority of race and an emphasized priority of compatibility in marriages.

Bratter and King (2008) claimed that socioeconomically advantaged black men and *disadvantaged* white women tended to have better chances with successful interracial relationships. According to Lewis, this could be due to women's tendency to date more highly educated men regardless of the women's own educational achievement; this parallels the male tendency to prefer women with bachelor's degrees. Therefore, education serves as a bridge between whites and blacks because even the least sought after black men could still have a chance with white women if the men have more experience in school than the women do.

Kalmijn (1998) described education as a highly revealing "proxy" (p. 412) for cultural competency and class; this association could result in the dissolving of racial barriers in exchange for a partner with a higher socioeconomic status without much regard to their race. Kalmijn (1998) and Yancey (2009) also attributed this to be the reason why people of higher educational backgrounds

tend to marry out more often than less-educated others. Therefore, educational achievement is advantageous to blacks' successes in relationships, even though education's sole function in this regard is to distract from an individual's blackness.

Unequal exposure to diversity.

The low level of interaction between blacks and whites can be attributed to the historic alienation of blacks and the resulting lack of exposure between the two groups. According to Jacobson and Johnson (2006), positive and sustained contact with people of other races, and resulting acquaintances and friendships are facilitators for interracial relations. Lewis (2016) explained that romantic relationships between similar people occur due to their tendency to live in the same environments, so they will therefore interact with one another more. Kalmijn (1998) contended that neighborhoods tend to be more similar in ethnicity and race and that "residential segregation" (p. 401) in large cities could be an inhibitory factor to interracial marriages because unity and loyalty amongst similar people could be more solidified in neighborhoods in large cities.

Lewis acknowledged that although a critical gap existed between white people and non-white people, "local scarcity" of people of different races could contribute to an increase in interracial dating due to the "exoticism" brought about by a low population of a particular racial group in an area (p. 296). Furthermore, Kalmijn explained that random interactions between people of different races in small populations were more likely to result in intermarriage than in larger populations due to a negative correlation between population size and intermarriage, especially amongst blacks. Therefore, if there are fewer racial alternatives to choose from, people are more inclined to marry who they are near, and the races of those involved in the relationships become less important than the relationships themselves. In that regard, the viability of black people as romantic partners increases, but only because there are less people to choose from otherwise.

Anderson, Goel, Huber, Malhotra, and Watts (2014) asserted that more opportunities for diverse people to interact did not necessarily mitigate the social distance between races; as a visual representation, online dating platforms inhibit geographical and social barriers, thus providing more opportunities for interracial interaction. Despite this, people still tend to prefer romantic partners of the same race. Therefore, race can be seen as a stronger driving force for the success of a relationship than physical distance.

Qian (1997) noted that minorities with higher education tended to live in areas of higher diversity, and therefore were more likely to meet people of other races in their community and form interracial bonds. Additionally, Kalmijn (1998) claimed that people with higher education had lower endogamous marriage rates because college tended to remove people from their home towns and expose them to more diverse people and settings. Simply being in a higher educational setting facilitates interracial relationships due to the increased exposure to people of different backgrounds. Therefore, as Yancey (2009) concluded, highly educated people may be more open to interracial marriage because of their opportunities to meet more diverse people while in school, and not necessarily because higher educated people may be more open-minded than others.

Black implying lower status

When being evaluated romantically by whites, blacks are disadvantaged because of the cognitive dissonance created by the negative cultural and socioeconomic implicit biases and stereotypes against them. According to Lewis (2016), race is one of the most visibly apparent things about a person, and with this visibility comes immediate assumptions about the person's socioeconomic background—despite skin color being an aspect of a person that is unchangeable—unlike the associated stereotypes about people of a particular race that may change over time. Alhabash et al. (2014) also explained that the process of "social categorization" (p. 22) affects interracial dating because of the cognitive dissonance associated with dating a person of another race. Due to the resulting disregard of black people as observed in dating patterns, it can be concluded

that there are negative stereotypes associated with blackness that deter individuals of other races from wanting relationships with blacks.

However, Alhabash et al. (2014) stated that, while stereotypical evaluations of others are automatic, biases should also be self-detected and then regulated to prevent conscious expression. Anderson et al. (2014) speculated that the tendency for people to contact others of the same race on online dating sites—despite refraining from providing a stated preference—could have been attributed to implicit biases, which contribute to the expression of negative stereotypes. However, Alhabash et al. (2014) also found that, when stereotypical expectations are countered, areas of the brain related to negative emotion were more active. Therefore, there is not only the experience of mental stress when individuals evaluate someone of another race, but there are also physiological signs of stress when evaluating another person who acts similar but looks dissimilar from the individual. Hence, from the white perspective, the combination of negative affect toward blacks due to implicit stereotyping and the apparent skin tone difference are strong reasons not to engage in interracial relationships. This tendency decreases the perception of black people as worthy intimate partners.

Liking and Right Swiping on a Screen and
on People You Have Actually See

Because of their large membership bases, online dating platforms can be considered representative of the racially-based considerations and preferences that affect the selection of a romantic partner in real life.

Online accessibility and efficiency

The accessibility facilitated by online dating platforms weakens social barriers between races. These sites are a more hassle-free form of in-person dating in terms of time and emotional commitment. The widespread access to online dating platforms has effectively normalized their usage— according to Lin and Lundquist (2013), 74% of singles with internet access who were looking for a relationship had at some point used an online dating source (p. 188). This usage has increased significantly in recent years, doubling between 2007 and

2012—according to Alhabash, Hales, and Baek, one in ten Americans and four in ten single Americans have used online dating at some point (p. 22). Due to these large sample sizes, trends observed in the users' online and subsequent in-person dating patterns can be compared to the patterns of the American population as a whole.

Alhabash et al. (2014) claimed that online dating platforms provided users with a much larger selection of people than traditional dating could, but lessened the complexity and stress of communication, which supports Mendelsohn et al. (2014)'s point that the cultural barriers that come with interracial dating can for the most part be avoided online. Alhabash, Hales, Baek, and Oh asserted that this minimization of time, effort, and emotional energy in comparison to in-person dating could lessen the aforementioned cognitive dissonance associated with interacting with individuals of other races. Therefore, online dating platforms both reduce the mental strain that comes with in-person dating, and improve the chances of being exposed to potential partners of other races. However, Lin and Lundquist argued that even though online dating weakened the physical and social barriers that in-person dating presents, race is still a well-maintained boundary. Despite the minimal effort required to pursue a relationship online, people still tend to opt out of pursuing romantic relationships with people of other races.

Facilitation of selective presentation and anonymity

The anonymity of a screen, and the ability to represent appearances differently from how they appear in reality are advantages to using online dating platforms. Alhabash et al. (2014) noted that online dating platform users could emphasize the positive aspects of their personalities and avoid the negative aspects that an in-person meeting could highlight; this is known as "selective self-presentation" (p. 22). Alhabash, Hales, Baek, and Oh also described the "social identity model of deindividuation effects," in other words, how in the face of racial compartmentalization, "visual anonymity" could be important to fostering interracial communications (p. 23). Due to negative stereotypes typically associated with blacks compared to whites, black people who opt to present them-

selves as more white stereotype-congruent appear more attractive as potential partner choices to white people.

Furthermore, Lewis described another confounding variable in ascertaining preferences for potential partners: some dating profiles that openly stated a distaste for particular traits in potential partners make people matching those descriptions less likely to reach out in the first place. Therefore, if social desirability bias is absent and dating site users listed their actual racial preferences, then individuals of the users' non-preferred races would be automatically marginalized and ignored by those users. Since blacks are often the least sought-after group within online dating platforms, this level of selectivity could be representative of the perception to not be considered fit romantic partners by whites.

Social desirability bias skews observable racial preferences

People can be misled into pursuing a relationship that could fail because of the members' ability to mask racial preferences in order to appear more socially acceptable. According to Anderson et al. (2014) as well as Lin and Lundquist (2013), individuals tend to report having no racial preference due to "social desirability bias" because they fear being perceived as racists. In order to circumvent skewed data as a result of this phenomenon, Anderson et al. (2014) addressed the issue of social desirability bias by measuring the amount of times a dating site user viewed others' profiles, and what races the people being viewed were, rather than only measuring stated racial preferences. They then differentiated stated versus actual preferences in dating site users, and how the gap between the two can mislead not only fellow singles, but also further research on the foundations of interracial relationship.

Yancey (2009) asserted that dating platform users tended to represent themselves accurately online because discrepancies between an online profile and reality would present potential problems when two users met in person. However, Lin and Lundquist (2013) insisted on what they define as an immeasurable disparity between intimate relationship behavior and people's online statements about their preferences in intimate behavior. People may be inclined

to present themselves online as they would in real life, but the presentation of themselves may not always reflect their self-perception and implicitly-motivated behavior. As a result, stated versus actual racial preferences are important markers of social attitudes toward interracial relationships and how important race actually is at the inception of a relationship.

Anderson et al. (2014) discovered that while black men tended to be the least likely group to specify a racial preference, women and black people in general were more likely to state a specific racial preference than other groups. In contrast, Lin and Lundquist (2013) found that minority men were more likely to specify a racial preference for a potential partner online than white men, and that white women and white men tended to leave out Asian men and black women, respectively. These studies highlight how racial preference differences do exist, despite the fact that, for the most part, they lack explanation.

According to Anderson et al. (2014), the discrepancies between stated preferences and actual behaviors of online singles suggest social desirability bias because people of all races who explicitly stated that they did not have a racial preference were actually shown to have a significant preference toward others of the same race. Furthermore, the same study showed that the stated online daters non-preference for others of the same race had little effect on their actual behavior. These conclusions complement the research of Alhabash et al. (2014) about the implicit biases and cognitive dissonance associated with interracial dating because, despite additional efforts to express openness to people of other races, the automatic and unconscious preferential tendency toward others of the same race still prevails. Thus, the building blocks of online dating—the users' profiles—that state the basic information and preferences of individuals are not trustworthy sources of information for a person's intentions when it comes to race. There is no definitive explanation for why people would prefer dating people of other races because there is an underlying tendency for people to end up with others of their own race.

Intentions within the marriage market

The efforts of individuals to seek resources in marriage results in blacks being disadvantaged in the marriage market with socially dominant whites. Lewis (2016) hypothesized that people do not necessarily pursue others based on compatibility, but instead pursue one another on the basis of attaining a particular status; such statuses included attractiveness, cultural resources, and most importantly "socioeconomic resources." Kalmijn (1998) defined socioeconomic resources as resources that could contribute to financial prosperity—being able to share individual economic success with a partner and collectively raise each other's status (p. 398).

The quest for the best partner in terms of socioeconomic advantage leads to participation in the marriage market. Kalmijn (1998) argued that, based on the competition for resources in potential partners, homogenous behaviors occur. For example, higher education level is in high demand because it could indicate variables such as income, social status, and ethics. Kalmijn (1998) observed that low-status racial groups tended to marry upward socioeconomically by having relationships with higher-status racial groups. Black people, however, do not fit this trend due to their aforementioned inability to assimilate—and therefore be more widely accepted as a higher rung on the social ladder. Qian (1997) provided evidence for this upward climb because he found that marriage into the same social class or lower was the most prevalent among lesser educated black men. However, the disadvantage held by black men at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder could make those of higher status less inclined to consider black men as worthy romantic partners.

Aside from explicit racial preferences, homogeneity in marriage has also been accounted for as accidents. For example, Kalmijn (1998) asserted that people of high socioeconomic status tended to prefer people in similar income brackets, thereby leaving people of lower status to choose amongst themselves and causing financially homogamous marriage patterns. Furthermore, Kalmijn (1998) distinguished people who fall in the middle of the socioeconomic hierarchy as

more opportunistic than those at the top or bottom: they can marry up the ladder or down the ladder, creating more diverse relationships. Therefore, race matters less than opportunity and availability in the middle class .

Defining the many considerations that form the basis of an interracial marriage ignores the unpredictable, illogical concept of love. Thus, the focus on the equitable, economical perspective of marriage may not always be an explanation for interracial relationships. For instance, Kalmijn argued that the decline in educational homogamy is symbolic of a shift in focus: singles seeking socioeconomic advantages in marriage moving toward simply seeking romantic satisfaction. If the institution of marriage shifts from being a symbol of class to a symbol of emotional need or love, then it would presumably lessen racial disparities in partner preferences.

On the contrary, Troy, Lewis-Smith, and Laurenceau (2006) hypothesized that the inferred opportunity cost of an interracial relationship compared to an intraracial relationship would result in lower satisfaction and increased hardship for the interracial pair. Kalmijn (1998) asserted that intermarriage could act as a symbol of perceived social equality between different groups. Kalmijn cited interracial marriage as a catalyst for weakening racial boundaries because it results in children of mixed races who do not neatly fit into a single racial group, therefore visibly blurring the significance of racial status and roles. There is no strictly economic, social, or racial explanation for the phenomenon of the marriage market, rather these three factors always play simultaneously into marriage decisions. Therefore, race has always mattered as a deciding factor for marriage partner selection.

Interracial Taboos Contribute to Social Distance Cues

Intermarriage patterns are indicative of race prioritization in intimate social settings because the marriage between blacks and whites, its approval, and its success or failure demonstrates changes in racially-driven social distance.

Measuring interracial marriage rates

The rising, yet disproportionate, amount of interracial marriages in the United States is a fallible measure of social distance between blacks and whites because it does not account for the circumstances leading up to a relationship. According to Qian (1997), the number of intermarried couples consisting of a white and non-white person more than doubled between the years 1970 and 1980, and almost doubled again between 1980 and 1992 (p. 263). Furthermore, according to Yancey (2009), interracial marriages are 5.4% of the married U.S. population as of 2009 (p. 125). According to Bratter and King (2008), the rise in interracial marriage in America does not detract from the perception of interracial marriage as a social abnormality. Anderson et al. (2014) argue that the dispro-portionally high amount of racial homogamy in marriage is evidence for this wide-spread perception. In fact, Anderson et al. (2014) stated that in 2008, only 9% of the white population and 16% of the black population married interracially (p. 28).

These low amounts of racial mixing oppose the trend of racial mixing in unmarried partnerships. This brings into question the effectiveness and rep-resentativeness of marriage as a measure of social distance. Grinberg (2016) asserted that the rate of interracial unmarried partnerships increased among heterosexuals couples to 18%, although Lin and Lundquist (2013) qualify that roughly only 50% of cohabitants are actually married (p. 186). It is therefore problematic to extrapolate from conclusions about married couples because this data ignores other important indicators of racial preference in other intimate relationships. Lin and Lundquist (2013) asserted that studying already married couples only demonstrates the outcome of dating, and not the factors leading up to the relationship. Furthermore, Yancey (2009) suggested that not all interracial daters would be resistant to interracial marriage, a conclusion emphasizing the importance of the early stages of interracial relationships. As a result, despite marriage being the most studied measure of social distance between races in the context of intimate relationships, there are still doubts about the validity of this measure. These doubts leave the question open of why race is such an

important factor in the development of a romantic partnership.

Intermarriage approval

Attitudes about interracial marriage do not necessarily serve as a measure of social distance between blacks and whites because approval of intermarriage does not imply actual interracial marriage. Lin and Lundquist determined that 86% of Americans and 96% of blacks had positive attitudes toward intermarriage despite their significantly low rate of intermarriages (p. 186). Additionally, Alhabash, Hales, Baek, and Oh noted that the rate of interracial marriage acceptance increased by at least 30% between the years 1980 and 2012 (p. 22). In 1967, there was a positive shift for public appeal of intermarriage, after the Supreme Court's *Loving v. Virginia* decision struck down laws prohibiting interracial marriage. Mendelsohn et al. (2014) affirmed that the approval rating of interracial marriage had transformed between the years 1968 and 2007, with the majority now approving of intermarriage. The high rates of approval of interracial marriage may suggest that the social distance between races is no longer very significant.

However, much like intermarriage rates, approval ratings can be weak measures of social distance between the races because they do not account for the influence of private preference or familial approval. Yancey (2009) discovered that the 49.2% of whites willing to date black people is significantly lower than the percentage of whites willing to date other non-black minorities, and the 59.6% of blacks willing to date whites is significantly lower than the percentage of other non-black minorities willing to date whites (p. 130). This finding does not necessarily negate the overall approval of interracial relationships, however it does expose a weakness in approval as a measure of social distance because it accounts for specific racial preferences. Additionally, Yancey (2009) uncovered that 30% blacks are solely interested in dating intraracially, which is significantly more than other non-black minorities; this finding nearly mirrors the 33.1% of whites are only interested in dating other whites (p. 131). Therefore, despite the rising approval rating of interracial marriages, there is still a significant number of people who will not consider an intermarriage for themselves. This distorts the

close in social distance implied by the increased approval rate of intermarriage because this approval does not necessarily imply personal adoption or private acceptance of intermarriage.

Aside from the general public's approval of interracial marriage, approval can be a key factor in making a marriage happen within a specific social network. Sinclair, Felmlee, Sprecher, and Wright (2015) associated support from family and friends online with positive relationship qualities—namely love and commitment—and argued that such support could strengthen those qualities and improve overall relationship stability. Furthermore, Kalmijn (1998) contended that parents could greatly influence an individual's spousal choice by approving or disapproving of dates, giving suggestions, or offering or neglecting support. Bratter and King (2008) identified that interracial relationships tend to experience higher stress levels, which is attributed to less familial support compared to intraracial relationships. Sinclair et al. (2015) hypothesized that avoiding interracial relationships could be simpler and less costly than being defiant toward loved ones, which could cause these relationships to fail or to not even form. If a strong support system can result in a happier relationship, then it is necessary for individuals in interracial relationships to have similar consistent support by proxy of approval. Interracial couples in particular may need additional support to make the social distance between the two races less intimidating and detrimental to the relationship.

Cultural similarity

People tend not to date people of other races because of the greater ease of communication and intimacy provided by cultural similarity. Despite the collateral disadvantages associated with interracial dating, Grinberg (2016) and Troy et al. (2006) agreed that interracial couples report being more satisfied in their relationships than intraracial couples. Furthermore, Lewis (2016) argued that the social divisions that appear the most salient tend to actually be the easiest to cross or break. However, the majority of research points to the preference of racial and cultural similarities in intimate partner choice.

Lewis assessed that the preference for homogamy in relationships stemmed from simpler communication, mutual validation, and a shared understanding, and suggested that a non-homogamous relationship could therefore result in a fragile family due to too many incongruencies. Additionally, Kalmijn (1998) explained that shared ethics and interests could foster better relationships through mutual understanding and shared social activity; more specifically, Kalmijn (1998) assessed that due to the intimacy of marriage and the cooperation it requires—such as through raising children, making large purchases, and using free time—couples who are not similar are generally less capable of forming strong romantic bonds. Anderson, Goel, Huber, Malhotra, and Watts suggested that marriages between people of the same race could come from a religious preference, expectation held by their community, physical attraction to people of their same race, or desire for a unified identity—which, according to Kalmijn, can result in out-group biases and polarized group identification.

Thus, similarity in marriage has roots deeper than skin tone; the culture that is associated with different races can be a large factor behind an individual's personality, and therefore can affect an individual's evaluation of potential romantic partners. The often stark differences between black and white culture in America are a driving force behind the social distance between the two races. As a result, marriage potential between individuals of the two groups is compromised.

Black pride

Blacks have a stronger preference for cultural similarity than whites and would therefore rather marry in-group because of their historic alienation and subsequent subversion of the dominant race's culture. Yancey (2009) suggested that blacks may be more prone to in-group bias in regard to intimate partners and therefore prefer those from their own race. Bratter and King (2008) assert that race is a difficult boundary to cross because race is something that people so heavily identify with. This supplements the less permeable social membrane existing between blacks and non-blacks. Yancey (2009) claimed that, due to such strong rejection from the mainstream, blacks have become more contrarian

in regard to white cultural dominance in America, and have grown to be more loyal to the black community. For example, Yancey (2009) suggested that many black people simply may not be romantically attracted to out-group members because they would rather have relationships with people with more cultural and physical similarities. This loyalty can be observed through the disproportionately high level of intraracial romantic relationships between blacks, especially among black women. Consequently, according to Kalmijn (1998), such in-group biases reinforce the uniformity and loyalty of the group as a whole, and discourages individual outliers such as people who intermarry. This is a conscious choice to widen the social distance between the races.Therefore, interracial marriage is negatively affected not just from the dominant racial group's perspective, but also from the minority's.

Conclusion

The operationalization of romantic relationships as indicators of social distance enables the measurement of dynamics between diverse groups of people. Therefore, observing interracially intimate partnerships can help with the evaluation of the residual effects of the historic marginalization of blacks by whites. The observed tendency of blacks to be socioeconomically disadvantaged when compared to whites elucidates why blacks would stereotypically perform worse in marriage than whites. This stereotype stems from the power structure left behind after the slaves' emancipation left whites as a whole in the position of socioeconomic dominance. A halo effect occurs when one group has an excess of one positive trait, resulting in positive feelings regarding that one characteristic bleeding into other characteristics—such as social dominance making a white individual seem richer or more attractive. Therefore, engaging in interracial relationships could be a conscious decision, or it could be fueled by automatic stereotyping. Regardless of conscious choice, race has an influence on an individual's decision to have an intimate relationship with another person.

As a result of online dating platforms' large and representative membership bases, one can further understand the role of race as a factor in

forming romantic bonds. Based on observed behavior of white and black members of these platforms, there is an obvious trend in individuals gravitating toward others of the same race. This can be attributed to the popular assumption that individuals of the same race will be more compatible. Additionally, there is less cognitive dissonance associated with individuals evaluating the quality of other in-group individuals, as opposed to someone of an out-group race. For blacks and whites, the alleviation of this mental strain can be a self-reinforcing motive for communicating with same-race individuals online. Despite whether or not a dating site user specifies a racial preference, the tendency remains to prefer members of one's own in-group. This tendency, based simply on similarity, by default marginalizes individuals who are genuinely interested in reaching across racial boundaries for romance. The only exception to this general rule is when an individual of a different race presents themselves as stereotypically incongruent (i.e. whites who act black or blacks who act white). This phenomenon however points back toward the socioeconomic advantage that whites have: blacks typically must exploit having stereotypically whiter traits (for example, a higher education or higher income), whereas whites having stereotypically black traits would have less of an appeal.

In contrast, intermarriage patterns are more telling of individuals' willingness to engage in long-term interracial interaction. Although commonly understood as an excellent indicator of social distance, intermarriage rates do not tell the entire story. Despite high approval of interracial marriages, there is a disproportionate amount of interracially married people. One can thus infer that most people are not willing to cross racial boundaries, or commit the rest of their lives to regularly interacting outside of their in-group. This attitude is most observable in blacks because of their exceptional alienation and discrimination from the socially dominant whites. In that regard, race matters because it acts as a symbol of steadfastness and unity, and not an unattractive label of disadvantage.

Overall, despite major tangible improvements in race relations in the United States (i.e. the *Loving v. Virginia* decision), interracial relationships re-

main a subject of interpersonal and cognitive contention. However, since there is no concrete answer to the question "Why does race matter so much?", future research can use the evidence provided here to speculate methods for eroding implicit biases and improving attitudes toward interracial interaction. Further research should be conducted to address whether or not the desire for cultural similarity stems from long-term exposure to people of other races, and if that translates into romantic preferences. Additionally, future research should be conducted regarding the salience of colorism and how that concept applies toward potential intimate partner choices for currently understudied multiracial individuals—especially those mixed with white and black.

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