Running head: ATTITUDES TOWARD INTERRACIAL DATING

Interracial Dating: An Investigation of the Inconsistencies in Personal and General

Attitudes

Michela Jones and Karla Roberts

Hanover College

PSYCH 462: Research Seminar

Winter 2007

Abstract

This study was designed to examine the relationship between attitudes towards interracial dating and racism. Participants ($N = 144$, 75% female, 91% White and 9% Black) completed a forty item online questionnaire designed to measure their personal attitudes toward Black-White dating, their general attitudes toward Black-White dating, and their degree of symbolic and aversive racism. There was a significant ($p < .05$) negative partial correlation between personal attitudes and measures of both symbolic and aversive racism, controlling for general attitudes. These results indicate that differences in people's personal attitudes toward interracial dating may be due in part to their levels of symbolic and aversive racism.

Interracial Dating: An Investigation of the Inconsistencies in Personal and General

Attitudes

Previous research has shown that only half of the United States' population would say they were willing to interracially date (Yancey, 2002). Over the past few decades, there has been an increase in interracial relationships. In 1970, only .1% of marriages were interracial marriages (Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006). Nearly thirty years later, in 1998, the percentage of interracial marriages in the United States jumped to 5% (Knox, Zusman, Buffington, and Hemphill, 2000). Despite the increase in interracial marriages, many people still have negative attitudes towards interracial relationships (Knox, Zusman, Buffington, and Hemphill, 2000).

The increase in the proportion of marriages that are interracial reflects a general decrease in overt racism in the United States over the last several decades. Although overt racism has declined, many researchers believe that individuals express their negative attitude toward other races through "aversive racism," personally avoiding members of other races while publicly supporting racial equality (Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1993). Aversive racism might include a public acceptance of interracial dating in general, but a personal preference for only dating within one's own race. This led us to our research question, which is, "Why are there differences between personal attitudes and general attitudes on interracial dating?" Personal attitudes would be whether people would date interracially themselves, and general attitudes would be whether the person thinks it is ok for other people to date interracially. Before discussing reasons for this difference, we first review research on the factors contributing to attitudes toward interracial dating.

Factors Influencing Interracial Dating

One reason for current negative attitudes toward interracial dating might be that interracial marriages were illegal for many years in most states (Rosenblatt, 1995). Even though the United States Congress did not outlaw interracial marriages, thirty-seven states did at some point in history. In 1967, Congress decreed that all laws stating that interracial marriages were illegal were invalid (Gaines & Leaver, 2002). Though the laws will not affect the younger generations directly, they still have an indirect effect on them because the older generation was taught that interracial marriages were wrong. Therefore, the older generation may still hold these beliefs and pass these beliefs onto the younger generation. The passing of beliefs from generation to generation continues the tradition of racism.

Laws against interracial marriages were only directed towards Blacks and Whites marrying each other (Gaines & Leaver, 2002). However, today, negative attitudes towards interracial dating are not just directed towards Blacks and Whites because now there is a growing population of Hispanics in the United States, thus, increasing interracial relationships with Hispanics (Randall & Delbridge, 2005). A study conducted by Randall and Delbridge (2005) found that, in the context of romantic relationships, African Americans were less accepting of Mexicans than they were of Whites and that Mexicans were less accepting of African Americans than they were of Whites. Blacks and Whites have had more interaction with each other because Blacks have historically made up a larger percentage of the population than Hispanics. Therefore, Blacks and Whites are more accepting of each other, but since Mexicans have not had as much interaction with Blacks, there is still low acceptance between the races. Even though

there has been an increase in Mexican immigration to the United States over the last several decades, the social networks of Whites and Mexicans are still generally exclusive of one another (Randall & Delbridge, 2005).

According to Yancey (2002), the degree to which one's social network includes members of other races is the number one predictor of whether a person will interracially date (Yancey, 2002). If people have a racially homogeneous social network, they are going to be less likely to interracially date than people with a racially heterogeneous social network (Yancey, 2002). This does not mean that a person's attitudes toward interracial dating are always determined by the environment because attitudes may still influence people's choices to live in a racially homogeneous environment. Some of the factors influencing the racial exclusivity of one's social network include a person's school or workplace. In addition, whether or not a person's social group is homogeneous depends in part on the church they attend.

Yancey (2002) found that Catholics were not as likely to interracially date as non-Catholics. This does not mean that Catholics are racist when it comes to interracial dating, but rather that Catholics tend to date within their own religious communities (Yancey, 2002). Because Catholic communities tend to be racially homogeneous, members limit their opportunity to date other races. This same tendency for interracial dating patterns to be influenced by religion may pertain to other religions besides Catholicism that are characterized by ethnically homogeneous communities such as Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam.

Other predictors of whether a person will interracially date are gender and race. Men are more likely to interracially date than women are (Yancey, 2002). One reason for

this is that men do not have to worry about the stereotype of being promiscuous that women would have to deal with if they were to interracially date (Yancey, 2002). In addition to gender, a person's own race is a predictor of attitudes toward interracial dating. Knox and his colleagues (2000) conducted a study of six hundred and twenty unmarried undergraduate students and found that Black students were almost two times more likely than White students to date interracially (83% vs. 43%). One explanation for this is that minorities are more exposed to the majority's culture than vice-versa. This makes it harder for the majority to be informed about minority culture, let alone to be incorporated into the minorities' culture (Knox, Zusman, Buffington, & Hemphill, 2000).

Racism

There are multiple forms of racism, but the types most relevant to this discussion are aversive and symbolic racism. Aversive racism is expressed in indirect or subtle ways. People who exhibit aversive racism have an internal conflict between not wanting to be prejudiced and having a feeling of discomfort and anxiety when in the presence of other races (Nail, Harton, & Decker, 2003). Their emotional reactions toward other races do not rise to the level of hatred but are generally negative and include discomfort, disgust, and fear (Sears & Henry, 2003). According to Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn (1993), an aversive racist holds many beliefs shared by nonracists, such as the belief that differences in ability are learned and that there are no "superior races." However, aversive racists will try to avoid contact with other races, and thus want to increase their social distance with other races.

Social distance is a term developed by Emory Bogardus in 1925 to capture the greatest acceptable level of integration between one's own group and another group

defined by nationality, ethnicity, etc. (Weinfurt & Moghaddam, 2001). The Bogardus Social Distance Scale presents participants with social distances ranging from "close kin by marriage" to "bar from my country" and asks them to indicate the closest relationship they would find acceptable with a particular group. This scale has been used in several studies. Bogardus used his own scale in studies published in 1926, 1946, 1956, and 1966. He found that there was not much change in social distance between Blacks and Whites during these years except in 1956 and 1966 where there was a decrease in the amount of social distance (Payne, York, & Fagan, 1974).

Whereas aversive racism focuses on behaviors toward individual members of a racial group, symbolic racism focuses on beliefs toward the racial group as a whole. Sears and Henry (2003) describe symbolic racism as a political belief system consisting of four themes: that there is not discrimination or prejudice against Blacks; that it is the fault of Blacks that they do not progress economically because they do not work hard enough; that Blacks are too demanding in their efforts to secure equal rights; and that Blacks do not deserve as much as they have received.

The Current Study

Korolewicz (1985) states that, "It may be much easier for people to say that interracial dating does not bother them, but they may definitely avoid doing so themselves." Why would this be? We hypothesize that the discrepancies between people's general attitudes toward interracial dating and their personal attitudes towards interracial dating are due in part to aversive and symbolic racism. To test this hypothesis, we measured participants' levels of general and personal acceptance of interracial dating

and also measured their level of aversive racism (using the Bogardus Social Distance Scale) and their level of symbolic racism (using the Modern Racism Scale).

<p style="text-align:center">Method</p>

Participants

Participants consisted of 186 respondents, but only 144 were included in data analysis. Some respondents were eliminated because they were under the age of 18 and/or because they were not Black or White. Ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 61, with an average of 22.58 years old. There were 36 males and 108 females in this study, which included 131 Caucasians and 13 African Americans. All participants had to have access to the Internet to participate in this study because it was conducted using an online questionnaire.

Materials

In addition to capturing basic demographics, the online questionnaire was designed to measure an individual's attitudes toward personally interracially dating, their "ideal society's" attitudes toward interracial dating, their racism level according to the Modern Racism Scale, and the Social Distance Scale. Both the personal and general attitudes sections asked participants to rate statements on a one through seven Likert Scale. Our scales were based on the questionnaire constructed by Dr. Whatley for his own research (Whatley, n.d.).

Personal Preference Section. The personal preference section presented participants with a series of attributes of a potential date, some of which related to race (e.g., "is African American") and some of which did not (e.g. "has tattoos") and asked them to rate how attractive a person with that characteristic would be.

General Attitudes Section. The general attitudes section was designed to measure how a person would like to have their ideal society respond to certain situations. Their ideal society should represent the attitudes and behaviors they would like to see in society. Therefore, this part of the questionnaire would reflect the person's generalized attitudes toward interracial dating. Participants were asked the degree to which they thought their ideal society would strongly approve or disapprove of twelve events such as, "A White woman dates a Black man" using a seven point Likert scale.

Modern Racism Scale. The Modern Racism Scale (McConahay, 1986) is designed to capture the four themes of symbolic racism described earlier specifically for Blacks. For example, an item capturing the beliefs that Blacks have gotten more than they deserve is "Blacks have more influence upon school desegregation plans than they ought to have" (McConahay, 1986).   Past research from Sabnani and Ponterotto (1992) has shown that the Modern Racism Scale has moderate to high test-retest reliability. It has also been shown to have construct validity and moderate to moderately high internal consistency (Sabnani & Ponterotto, 1992).

Social Distance Scale. On the Social Distance Scale (Bogardus, 1925), participants were asked to rate how accepting they would be of a certain group in different situations, such as having them as family members or living in the same country. Participants used a seven-point Likert scale to show how much social distance they are comfortable with between themselves and other races. The lowest rating would indicate higher acceptance of different groups (Payne, York, & Fagan, 1974). As in Bogardus' study in 1933, we asked participants to rate their social distance toward four groups: African Americans, Caucasians, Hispanics, and Asian Americans. We decided to

focus on these four groups because they appear to be the four predominant races in the United States.

Procedure

Participants filled out an informed consent form before filling out the online questionnaire. The participants responded to forty questions, in addition to the demographic section. The order within the first two sections (personal and general attitudes toward interracial dating) and the last two sections (social distance and symbolic racism) was counterbalanced. We asked for demographics after the participant completed all four sections. Before the Modern Racism Scale, the Social Distance Scale, and the demographics, there was an open-ended question: "Do you think you would ever date a person of another race? Why or why not?" The entire questionnaire did not take participants more than 10-20 minutes to complete. When they were finished with the questionnaire, participants pressed a "submit" button and were taken to a debriefing webpage.

<div align="center">Results</div>

Our measure of personal attitude toward interracial dating consisted of a single item: the degree to which participants found "is African American" to be an attractive trait. General attitude toward interracial dating was the average of two items with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95: "A Black man dates a White woman" and "A White man dates a Black woman." For both of those items, participants indicated the degree to which they thought an ideal society should approve or disapprove. Social distance was measured by participants' reported social distance toward African Americans. Symbolic racism was

measured by the average of participants' responses to the items of the Modern Racism

Scale, which had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.839 (after reverse-scoring where appropriate).

To analyze our data, two partial correlations were conducted. Partial correlation

allows us to measure the correlation between personal attitudes toward interracial dating

and either social distance or symbolic racism while holding general attitudes toward

interracial dating constant. Imagine two people who had the same level of general

acceptance of Black-White dating but different levels of personal acceptance. What

accounts for the difference between these two people? We were interested in testing

whether negative attitudes toward Blacks could explain the difference between these two

people. Although it is rare for two participants to have exactly the same general attitude

toward interracial dating, partial correlation offers an alternative by subtracting any linear

effects of general attitudes, functionally setting all participants to the same average level

of general attitudes.

The first partial correlation was between personal attitudes and social distance

keeping general attitudes constant. We found that this partial correlation was $r = -0.34$

which was significant at $p < .001$. This negative correlation shows that as personal

attitudes toward interracial dating become more favorable, social distance tends decrease.

Therefore, it does appear that negative attitudes toward Blacks may partially explain the

difference between people who hold the same level of general attitudes but different

levels of personal attitudes toward interracial dating.

The second partial correlation was between personal attitudes and the Modern

Racism Scale keeping general attitudes constant. This partial correlation was significant

at $p = .001$ with $r = -0.27$. This negative correlation shows that as personal attitudes

toward interracial dating become more favorable, negative attitudes toward Blacks decrease. Again, the difference between people who hold the same general attitude but different personal attitudes may be partially explained by their negative attitudes toward Blacks.

Discussion

The hypothesis of this study was supported. The hypothesis stated that the difference between one person being personally receptive toward Black-White dating and another person not being receptive of Black-White dating is their attitudes towards African-Americans. Although previous research indicates that there are other factors such as one's social network that may contribute to whether or not a person is willing to interracially date, that research has not directly addressed racism itself. Our study indicates that racist attitudes - negative attitudes toward individuals because of their membership in a racial group – are also a factor explaining attitudes toward interracial dating.

Future researchers could develop a new measure of symbolic racism that is similar to the Modern Racism Scale but is applicable to other races besides Blacks. This would allow for data from more participants to be used who are not White or Black, which would enable researchers to analyze attitudes for interracial dating between other races and not just the Black-White combination.

Other future research should include obtaining a more balanced representation across the races of participants. In our study, 91% of our participants were White and only 9% were Black.

Over the last several decades, overt racism in the United States has decreased. However, racism is still a sensitive topic. Many people are reluctant to evaluate the reasons for their own beliefs about interracial dating because of the possibility that those reasons may include negative attitudes toward racial groups. Our research suggests that, as socially undesirable as these attitudes may be, they are a factor explaining personal attitudes toward interracial dating. This topic needs to be discussed more often to make people more aware of their own feelings and beliefs. Society cannot overcome negative feelings towards interracial dating if the topic is never discussed. Therefore, more research in this area needs to be conducted so society can overcome these negative feelings towards interracial dating.

References

Bogardus, E. (1925). Measuring social distances. *Journal of Applied Sociology, 9,* 299

308.

Bogardus, E. (1933). Racial distance changes in the United States during the past thirty

years. *Sociology and Social Research, 17,* 265-271.

Gaines, S. & Leaver, J. (2002). Interracial relationships. In R. Goodwin & D. Cramer

(Ed.), *Inappropriate relationships: The unconventional, the disapproved, and the*

forbidden (pp. 65-78). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.,

Publishers.

Kleinpenning, G. & Hagendoorn, L. (1993). Forms of racism and the cumulative

dimension of ethnic attitudes. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 56*(1), 21-36.

Knox, D., Zusman, M., Buffington, C., & Hemphill, G. (2000). Interracial dating

attitudes among college students. *College Student Journal, 34*(1), 69-71.

Korolewicz, M. & Korolewicz, A. (1985). Effects of sex and race on interracial dating

preferences. *Psychological Reports, 57*(3), 1291-1296.

McConohay, J. (1986). Modern racism, ambivalence, and the modern racism scale. In J.

Dovidio & S. Gaertner (Ed.), *Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism* (pp. 91

125). Orlando, FL: Academic Press, Inc.

Nail, P., Harton, H., & Decker, B. (2003). Political orientation and modern versus

aversive racism: Test of Dovidio and Gaertner's (1998) integrated model.

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84(4), 754-770.

Payne, M., York, C., & Fagan, J. (1974). Changes in measured social distance over

time. *Sociometry, 37*(1), 131-136.

Randall, N. & Delbridge, S. (2005). Perceptions of social distance in an ethnically fluid

community. *Sociological Spectrum, 25*, 103-122.

Rosenblatt, P., Karis, T., & Powell, R. (1995). *Multiracial couples: Black and white

voices.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Sabnani, H. & Ponterotto, J. (1992). Racial/ethnic minority-specific instrumentation in

counseling research: A review, critique, and recommendations. *Measurement

and   Evaluation in Counseling and Development, 24*(4), 161-187.

Sears, D. & Henry, P. (2003). The origins of symbolic racism. *Journal of Personality

and Social Psychology, 85*(2), 259-275.

Troy, A., & Lewis-Smith, J. (2006). Interracial and intraracial romantic relationships:

The search for differences in satisfaction, conflict, and attachment style. *Journal

of Social and Personal Relationships, 23*(1), 65-80.

Weinfurt, K. & Moghaddam, F. (2001). Culture and social distance: A case study of

methodological cautions. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 141*(1), 101-110.

Whatley, M. A. (n.d.). The development of the attitudes toward interracial dating scale.

Yancey, G. (2002). Who interracially dates: An examination of the characteristics of

those who have interracially dated. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 33*(2),

179-190.