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I wouldn't, but you can: Attitudes toward interracial relationships

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ABSTRACT

Using the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), we study Whites' attitudes towards dating, cohabiting with, marrying, and having children with African Americans and Asian Americans. We find that 29% of White respondents reject all types of relationships with both groups whereas 31% endorse all types. Second, Whites are somewhat less willing to marry and bear children interracially than to date interracially. These attitudes and behaviors are related to warmth toward racial outgroups, political conservatism, age, gender, education, and region. Third, White women are likely to approve of interracial relationships for others but not themselves, while White men express more willingness to engage in such relationships personally, particularly with Asians. However, neither White men nor White women are very likely to actually engage in interracial relationships. Thus, positive *global attitudes* toward interracial relationships do not translate into high rates of *actual* interracial cohabitation or marriage.

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1. Introduction

Most literature on attitudes toward interracial relationships has not been able to separate *global* and *personal* attitudes. In fact, much of what we know about interracial dating, cohabitation and marriage is based on behavior (rather than expressed attitudes), which has the strength of being unaffected by the kinds of social desirability bias that we must consider when measuring attitudes, but has the weakness of being affected by more than just attitudes. For example, interracial relationships are also shaped by the availability of partners (Harris and Ono, 2005). Furthermore, there is a curious gender gap in the attitudes toward interracial marriage expressed by White men and women which flies in the face of many other public opinion gender gaps: White women are less likely to approve of interracial marriage than White men but they are more liberal in most other racial attitudes (Schuman et al., 1997). Why does this reverse gender gap exist with respect to interracial marriage? Do women and men have different standards for judging their own personal behavior than they do for judging the behaviors of others? And do White women and men have different attitudes toward different types of interracial relationships, based on the level of commitment in that type of relationship?

We know little about whether the gender differences in attitudes toward intermarriage might be explained by different attitudes towards *global* questions (about the behavior of others) and *personal* questions (about the respondent's own behavior). Our paper examines both of these types of questions, allowing us to distinguish personal from global attitudes across dating, cohabiting, marital and childbearing relationships. In so doing, we are able to test whether White men and women differ in their personal and global attitudes, and how these attitudes differ by relationship type and by demographic and attitudinal characteristics of the individual. We also consider both attitudes and behavior simultaneously across the four

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different types of interracial relationships, which allows us to separate those who profess positive attitudes toward interracial relationships from those who have actually engaged in such relationships. Finally, we examine a relationship form that has been too often neglected in the interracial relationship literature: childbearing. Childbearing falls everywhere along the continuum of interracial relationships, from dating to marriage, and attitudes toward it are shaped by a particular set of social norms about interracial relationships, so it is important to disentangle these attitudes.

We will discuss our finding that the majority of respondents either consistently opposed all forms of interracial relationships or were personally willing to consider all types of interracial relationships. We find weak evidence of a pattern of greater racial selectivity as relationship type increases in seriousness—some respondents are more willing to date than to marry interracially—but the majority fall into the most extreme categories: either opposed to all forms or willing to consider all forms of interracial relationship (although not necessarily having experienced any interracial relationships). Further, we expand upon previous research showing that White women are more likely to report that interracial relationships are acceptable for others but that they, themselves, would not engage in such relationships, while more White men report being personally willing to try interracial relationships. Armed with these findings, we will argue that the current increase in positive sentiment toward interracial dating and cohabitation will not necessarily result in an equal rise in more interracial relationship formation in future years because positive survey attitudes toward interracial relationships *in general* do not correspond to *personal* willingness to engage in interracial relationships.

1.1. Interracial relationships: dating, cohabitation, marriage and childbearing

For many years, surveys of racial attitudes have included measures of approval of intermarriage as an indicator of social distance and feelings about intimate interracial contact. The classic scale of social distance asks respondents what degree of intimacy they would accept with each ethnic group, using marriage as the highest level of intimacy possible. Research using this scale shows increasing global acceptance of a wide range of racial groups over time (i.e. decreasing social distance) (Knox et al., 2000; Todd et al., 1992). Studies of urban residential preferences have shown, however, that many White survey respondents espouse the *principle* of decreased social distance, for abstract others or for close family members (Krysan, 1998), while still expressing *personal* preferences that limit their own contact with racial minorities (e.g. Farley et al.'s (1978) classic study of racial preferences in neighborhood composition and Charles' (2006) study of Los Angeles).

There is less survey evidence about the attitudes of Whites towards dating, cohabiting, marrying and having children with members of specific racial groups. Although survey items about interracial marriage are fairly prevalent (Schuman et al., 1997), attitudinal items about the other relationship types are also not common. This is important because these attitudes may well differ, just as the rates of actual behavior differ. One explanation for the persistently low rates of intermarriage even in the face of rising interracial friendships and dating is that “the criteria for selection into dating and cohabiting relationships may be considerably different – and perhaps less stringent – than for marriage” (Blackwell and Lichter, 2000). As Yancey described it:

“... dating is a less serious relationship. Dating couples are not expected to plan for children, combine household budgets or engage in other activities married couples must handle. One who dates across his/her race can be seen as ‘sowing wild oats’ rather than making a permanent relationship with family and racial identity ramifications” (2007, p. 915).

A convenience sample of California college students supported the idea that at least some racial and gender groups may be more willing to date individuals outside their racial group than marry or have children with them (Fiebert et al., 2004).

Still, interracial dating, cohabitation, marriage and childbearing are all connected in important ways. For example, King and Bratter (2007) show that selecting a cross-race partner for the first sexual relationship is an important predictor of selecting a cross-race spouse when getting married. Because we generally select our more committed relationships (such as marriages) from the pool of our less committed ones (such as dates), they are all interconnected in significant ways, since each relationship can transition into another type of relationship. Dating, cohabiting and marital relationships all have similar patterns of racial homogamy, although levels of homogamy increase somewhat for more serious relationships (Blackwell and Lichter, 2004). We will discuss each relationship type in turn, but it is important to remember that they influence each other.

1.2. Interracial dating: behavior and attitudes

Interracial dating has become more common in the most recent cohorts of young adults (Joyner and Kao, 2005; Wang et al., 2006), and these rates are significantly influenced by propinquity. Using nationally representative data, Carver et al. (2003) found that 7th–12th graders who attend more racially diverse schools report higher rates of interracial dating. For example, in schools that are less than 20% White, 46% of Whites' relationships were interracial, but in schools with more than 80% Whites, only 6% of Whites' relationships were interracial. Latino and Asian American adolescents were most likely to have dated interracially (with 69% and 62%, respectively, of their relationships interracial in schools with the fewest same-race peers). Black adolescents were least likely to have dated interracially, with 30% of such relationships in schools that were less than 20% Black. (Using a nationwide sample of *adults*, however, Yancey (2002) finds that Whites were the least likely to have dated interracially, suggesting that there may be significant cohort differences in the racial gaps in interracial dating rates.)

Interracial dating remains associated with growing up in a more diverse community or attending more diverse schools (Fujino, 1997; Yancey, 2002), even in comparisons of individuals who live in a diverse community. This suggests, as Fujino (1997) notes, that the effect of propinquity at a young age goes beyond a simple question of the availability of cross-race partners, affecting individuals' later preferences for romantic partners as well. Males are also more likely to have dated interracially, as are non-Catholics, people who are more politically liberal, better educated, and younger (Yancey, 2002).

There are important racial patterns in who is perceived as an appropriate interracial dating partner. Several surveys of undergraduates have shown a clear hierarchy in dating patterns that corresponds to the history of racism in the United States. For example, White students who dated interracially were most likely to choose Latinos, followed by Asians and Blacks, while Latinos were most likely to have chosen Whites, followed by Blacks and Asians (Fiebert et al., 2000). Fujino (1997) found that White, Chinese and Japanese American undergraduates were mostly likely to form significant, long-term dating relationships with members of their own group, but those who dated outside their group were least likely to date Blacks and most likely to date Whites or other Asians, followed by Latinos.

Research on interracial dating has investigated another important indicator of behavior and attitudes: the stated preferences of individuals seeking dates through online personal advertisements. This is a creative way to measure behavior in a real-world setting that is unconstrained by the availability of partners, unlike observations of mate selection patterns, but also less affected by social desirability issues than survey questions about attitudes because preferences stated in this context have real consequences for who will contact the respondent as a potential date. These authors measure the patterns of selecting or rejecting racial groups as potential partners when placing personal ads. The conclusions from these studies are limited to the population of individuals who use online personal advertisements, but Yancey (2007) argues that this population is very similar to the larger population of internet users. White women are more likely to restrict their dating to same-race partners than White men (Feliciano et al., 2009; Yancey, 2007), although the patterns differ, with White men more likely to exclude Blacks and White women more likely to exclude Asians from their pool of potential dates (Feliciano et al., 2009). Those who are younger, live in large cities, and live in the West are less likely to restrict their dating to same-race partners, while those who are more politically conservative and attend church frequently are more likely to do so (Yancey, 2007).

Interracial relationships are also still accompanied by stigma, even for young people. Adolescents who are dating interracially, for example, are less likely to tell their families and friends about their relationships than adolescents who are dating a same-race partner (Wang et al., 2006) and less likely to be publicly affectionate (Vaquera and Kao, 2005). Whites who engage in interracial relationships are often treated in racist ways that undermine their established understandings of fairness and equal treatment (Dalmage, 2000).

1.3. Interracial cohabitation: behavior and attitudes

Cohabitation is rapidly growing and is increasingly important for understanding both transitions to marriage and contexts for childrearing. Blacks and Latinos are especially likely to be raising children in cohabiting households (Smock and Manning, 2004), and are less likely to make the transition from cohabitation to marriage (Smock and Manning, 2002). Generally, cohabiting relationships are more racially heterogamous (13%) than marital relationships (2%) in the US (Blackwell and Lichter, 2000, 2004; Fujino, 1997; Sassler and McNally, 2003), but Whites are an exception to this overall pattern: racial homogamy among Whites is actually higher for cohabiting relationships than for dating or marriage (Blackwell and Lichter, 2004). Furthermore, interracial couples are overrepresented among cohabiters (Qian and Lichter, 2011). Cross-sectional data on cohabiting and marital relationships suggest, however, that although cohabiting relationships are more heterogamous than marital relationships (Simmons and O'Connell, 2003), selection processes are not as different across cohabitation and marriage as the behavioral differences might suggest (Blackwell and Lichter, 2004).

Among cohabiting couples with children, relationship quality is lower for interracial couples than same-race ones. This difference may be explained by lower levels of support from the couple's families, more complex relationship histories for each member of the couple, and fewer shared values between members of the couple (Hohmann-Marriott and Amato, 2008). Likelihood of childbearing among interracial cohabiters varies by racial mix: Black–White, Mexican–White, and Puerto Rican–White intermarried couples are as likely to bear children as same-race couples, but Chinese–White and Asian Indian–White couples have reduced fertility compared to same-race couples (Fu, 2008).

1.4. Interracial marriage: behavior and attitudes

Interracial marriage has been studied more than any other type of interracial relationship. Surveys have also repeatedly asked respondents how they feel about laws against intermarriage, even after the (1967) *Loving v. Virginia* US Supreme Court decision struck down all laws forbidding intermarriage. Support for such laws has decreased steadily since the 1960s; indeed, some argue that soon the question will be useless, as virtually everyone will agree that intermarriage should be legal (Schuman et al., 1997).

However, a much lower percentage responds positively to a question asking whether they “approve” of intermarriage, though that percentage has consistently increased: less than 10% of Whites approved in 1958 while more than 76% approved in 2004 (Krysan, 2008; Schuman et al., 1997). Still, 16% of Whites “strongly disapprove” of racial intermarriage and dating (Bobo, 2004). Although actual intermarriage rates are far lower than approval rates, they too have been steadily increasing since the 1960s (Qian, 1997); the Census Bureau estimated that 8% of currently married women in their first marriage in

2009 were interracially married¹ (Kreider and Ellis, 2011). These numbers still demonstrate significant resistance to intermarriage, however, and that resistance is even greater when respondents *know* that their anonymity is protected, such as when they vote. In 1998, South Carolina voted to remove the (unenforceable and therefore solely symbolic) ban on racial intermarriage from the state constitution, but 38% of voters opposed the resolution (Yancey and Emerson, 2001). Among White voters, opposition rates in South Carolina were an estimated 40%, and a similar Alabama vote in 2000 received opposition votes from an estimated 49% of White voters (and 8% of other voters) (Altman and Klinkner, 2006).

Of course, willingness to intermarry varies by group – both the racial group of the respondent and the racial group of the potential marriage partner. For example, Whites are far more likely to support laws that ban intermarriage than Blacks or Latinos are (Herring and Amissah, 1997; Schuman et al., 1997), and Whites are more opposed to a close family member marrying a Black person than marrying an Asian person (Golebiowska, 2007). In general, Whites express more positive stereotypes of Asians than Blacks (or Latinos), and both Whites and Asians reported feeling relatively little social distance between their groups (and much greater social distance from Blacks and Latinos) (Charles, 2006). Marriage patterns confirm the same racial hierarchy we see in these measures of social distance: the marriage market between Whites and Blacks or Mexican Americans has status differences that strongly suggest a racial stratification hierarchy, while marriages between Whites and Japanese Americans do not, suggesting that racial boundaries are less salient for Asian/White pairings (Fu, 2001). Intermarriage is also more accepted among survey respondents with higher education levels, higher income, and those who live outside the South (Schuman et al., 1997) and in the West (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan, 1990; Yancey and Emerson, 2001). In general, marriages are more homogamous than cohabitations, with an especially large difference for Asian and Black women (Blackwell and Lichter, 2000, 2004). Finally, the level of homogamy varies significantly by race: controlling for group size, Blacks are much more likely than Whites to marry a same-race spouse (Blackwell and Lichter, 2004).

1.5. Interracial childbearing: behavior and attitudes

The least is known about attitudes toward interracial childbearing, though a few studies have examined assortative mating *behavior* for parents. Garfinkel et al. (2002) found that unmarried White parents were less racially homogamous than married White parents, consistent with the literature on the greater amount of heterogamy in dating and cohabiting relationships than in marriages. Goldstein and Harknett (2006) examined the relationship patterns of new parents soon after a birth, and found that interracial couples were not significantly different in their relationships at the time of the birth nor were they more or less likely to change relationship type (get married, separate, etc.) after a birth than same-race couples. Rather, the patterns of relationship formation were best predicted by the racial group of the child's father: couples were less likely to marry after the birth of a child if the father was Black (Goldstein and Harknett, 2006).

Regarding attitudes toward interracial childbearing, interview studies show that extended family members often express concerns about the offspring of interracial couples, especially fears that the children will not be socially accepted (e.g. Childs, 2005; Dalmage, 2000; Korgen, 1998). The struggle of melding parenting styles common to different cultures and ethnic groups is also well studied (Baumrind, 1972; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Longest et al., 2007; Pinderhughes et al., 2000). Generally, however, studies of attitudes toward interracial relationships do not include questions about interracial childbearing, limiting the amount of information we have about attitudes toward this family form.

1.6. Gender and attitudes toward interracial family formation

White women are more liberal than White men on most types of racial attitude questions (Schuman et al., 1997). They are more likely than White men to believe that racial inequality is caused by structural factors like discrimination rather than agentic factors like ability and motivation, and they are more likely to support affirmative action and other government interventions on behalf of minorities. Although these gender differences in racial attitudes are small (or nonexistent) once controls for demographic and ideological variables are introduced, the overall pattern favors the interpretation that White women are slightly more supportive of policies that are designed to help racial minorities than men are (Hughes and Tuch, 2003). But several studies have pointed to an important exception to this generalization: White women are less willing than White men to have close social relationships with members of other racial groups. For example, Schuman et al. (1997) find that White women are less willing to send their children to schools where a majority of the students are Black and are less likely to approve of intermarriage than White men (although there is no gender difference in disapproval of *laws* against intermarriage) (Hughes and Tuch, 2003). Social distance studies have found this pattern as well (Bogardus, 1959; Owen et al., 1977). Schuman and colleagues argue that “in these more intimate areas of racial contact, being female hinders rather than promotes racial integration” (1997).

There are a few studies that contradict this gendered pattern. Using a national sample of high school seniors, Johnson and Marini (1998) found that White and Black women were *more* positive about close interracial contact than men. The main difference between this study and those that found the opposite pattern is that Johnson and Marini used a measure of social distance that was more abstract than the measures described above. Thus, rather than asking about their attitudes toward a school where a majority of the children are Black, the survey asked about their attitudes towards a school where “some of

¹ “Interracially married” here includes couples who are married across racial lines, as defined by the Census, as well as Hispanic/non-Hispanic couples.

the children are of other races.” (Unfortunately for our purposes, Johnson and Marini’s survey did not ask respondents about marrying someone of another race.) These abstract questions are more likely to tap abstract positive racial attitudes than the concrete examples given above. Krysan (1998) also found that White women in the 1994 Detroit Area Study were less likely than White men to circle “African Americans” when asked to “circle each of the groups you would definitely *not* want a close relative or family member to marry” (p. 537). This question asks the respondent to opine about the marriage choices of *others*, not one’s own marriage choices. We will return to these points in our discussion, showing how our results clarify why these studies had different results than other studies on the topic of gender gaps in social distance.

In addition, there is a well-established gender imbalance in Black/White and Asian/White marriages, with more of the Black/White marriages made up of White women and Black men, and more of the Asian/White marriages made up of White men and Asian women (e.g. (Qian and Lichter, 2007)). Interestingly, the gender imbalance has recently become less dramatic for Black/White intermarriages; in 1980 the ratio of Black husband/White wife marriages to White husband/Black wife marriages was 2.7:1, in 2000 it was 2.8:1, and in 2009 it was 1.8:1² (Table 60 of the Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2011). The patterns in attitude surveys and behavior surveys both suggest that the intersection of racialized and sexualized images have important implications for the study of these interracial relationships (Census Bureau, 2011). Feliciano et al. (2009) point out that stereotypes of Black men and Black women are hyper-masculinized, and stereotypes of Asian men and Asian women are hyper-feminized, influencing the perception of the groups by Whites and resulting in the pattern they find of White women rejecting Asian men more and White men rejecting Black women more. Overall, internet daters are significantly more likely to exclude Asian men and Black women from their dating pool than their same-race counterparts (Robnett and Feliciano, 2011).

Another important influence on the gender difference in Whites’ attitudes toward interracial relationships is the gender difference in the perception of consequences for an interracial relationship. College-age White women anticipate more family disapproval from prejudiced parents than White men do, and minority males dating White females indicated greater family disapproval from their partner’s White family than other interracial pairings did (Miller et al., 2004).

This paper compares Whites’ attitudes and behavior across these four relationship types, using questions that separate global attitudes toward the interracial relationships of others from personal attitudes toward engaging in an interracial relationship. We also explore the gendered nature of these patterns, considering whether White men and women have different attitudes toward engaging in interracial relationships with African Americans and Asian Americans. We focus on these two groups because these two groups were historically the focus of anti-miscegenation legislation, and because the gendered patterns of intermarriage with Whites are most pronounced with these two groups (Feliciano et al., 2009).

2. Method

2.1. Data

The nationally representative 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES) was a cooperative survey with over 30 colleges and universities involved in survey question design. Half of the survey consisted of “core” questions, asked of the entire 30,000 person sample, and the other half included questions designed by research teams at each university and administered to a subset of respondents. Thus, a subset of the 30,000 respondents was asked the questions we designed to understand attitudes toward interracial relationships.

The sample was selected using a matched random sampling technique developed by Polimetrix, the survey firm which gathered the data on our behalf. See Vavrek and Rivers (2008) for extensive details. Polimetrix began with a list of people who had agreed to take internet surveys and had provided Polimetrix with demographic information. This list was not necessarily representative of the adult American population, but individuals were chosen from it who *matched* a random sample of the adult American population drawn from the 2004 American Community Survey (ACS), conducted by the US Bureau of the Census, which is a probability sample of 1,194,354 American adults with a response rate of 93.1%. Thus, “for each respondent in the Polimetrix-drawn ACS sample, the closest matching active Polimetrix panelist was selected using a weighted absolute distance measure on four Census variables – age, race, gender, and education, plus on imputed values of partisanship and ideology” (Vavrek and Rivers, 2008, p. 361). The sample Polimetrix drew for CCES was a stratified national sample of registered and unregistered voters. Thus Polimetrix was able to create a matched, nationally representative sample of US adults using appropriate sample weights.³

² It is important to note that in 2003 the CPS began allowing respondents to choose more than one racial identification, so the 2009 data exclude persons who chose more than one racial background. The total number of couples identified as Black/White still increased from 363,000 in 2000 to 550,000 in 2009 despite this restriction on the sample.

³ Some scholars have worried that the CCES sampling technique is not representative, because it is based on “matching” individuals with a random sample based on a set of observed characteristics rather than actually interviewing a random sample of respondents. Vavrek and Rivers (2008) have shown that estimates using this sampling method outperform conventional estimates based on random digit dial phone surveys. Others also report that internet data collection from a probability sample (such as the CCES data) yields higher sample composition accuracy and self-report accuracy than do telephone interviewing or internet data collection from nonprobability samples (Chang and Krosnick, 2009). Hill et al. (2007) support this finding as well. The results of other studies using similar internet sampling techniques show that the opinions gathered in these surveys match more closely with actual elections than traditional sampling techniques (Humphrey et al., 2001; Twyman, 2008). Furthermore, social desirability bias is lower in individually administered computer surveys relative to phone or intercom surveys with an interviewer (Chang and Krosnick, 2010), particularly a minority interviewer with a White respondent.

Some people would consider a romance with someone from a different race. Others would prefer to “stick to their own kind.”

What do YOU think? Please check the statement that you agree with for each behavior:

	<i>It's not a good idea</i>	<i>I would not, but it's okay for others</i>	<i>I would do this</i>	<i>I have done this</i>
Date an [African American/Asian American]				
Live with an [African American/Asian American]				
Marry an [African American/Asian American]				
Have a child with an [African American/Asian American]				

Fig. 1. Survey item on attitudes towards interracial relationships.

The internet survey results were gathered in three stages: (1) participants were screened for eligibility using a series of profile questions, (2) they completed a demographic survey, and (3) a random subset of 1000 respondents answered each university team's survey questions before and after the 2008 national election. Our research team's subset of $N = 1000$ respondents included $N = 246$ racial/ethnic minorities and $N = 754$ White respondents. Our analyses are weighted to approximate the national adult population using weights created from the 2006 American Community Survey.⁴

2.2. Variables

Fig. 1 shows the survey format for the eight questions about interracial relationships, our dependent variables. The question about relationships with Blacks was asked of all non-Black respondents, and the question about relationships with Asians was asked of all non-Asian respondents. In the analyses below, we limited the responses to ($N = 754$) White respondents, because the sample sizes for people of color were small,⁵ making results from racial minority groups inconclusive. We had $N = 634$ White respondents with valid data for the question about dating Blacks, and $N = 629$ White respondents for the question about dating Asian Americans. Cases that were dropped due to missing data on the dependent variables ($N = 120$ missing for questions about Blacks and $N = 125$ missing for questions about Asians) were largely similar to included cases.⁶

We created these questions to measure two things not commonly measured in studies of attitudes toward interracial relationships: first, the distinction that respondents make between their own actions and what they find acceptable for others, and second, their attitudes toward a range of different relationship types. Previous survey items have not included “I would not, but it's okay for others” as a possible response. Just as Farley et al. (1978) showed that measuring the *personal* preferences of Whites was key to understanding the lack of residential integration in neighborhood patterns, we will show below that this personal preference category is crucial to understanding the low rate of interracial relationships because it allows us to separate a general acceptance of interracial relationships from a personal willingness to engage in such relationships.⁷

Furthermore, social desirability bias may overstate positive attitudes toward interracial relationships and so we tested this possibility using a “list experiment” (Kuklinski et al., 1997) but found little evidence of social desirability bias in our sample. (Details are in a separate manuscript, available upon request; see also Krysan's (1998) finding that mode of survey administration did not affect a question about intermarriage).

⁴ See http://web.mit.edu/polisci/portl/cces/material/sample_matching.pdf for more details.

⁵ $N = 105$ for Blacks, $N = 90$ for Latinos, $N = 51$ Asian, Native American, multiracial, and “other race” respondents.

⁶ The dropped cases were, on average, slightly younger (45.3 compared to 48.6), more religious (.11 on the religiosity scale compared to $-.14$), more conservative (.21 compared to $-.04$), and more likely to be single (.28 compared to .18) than those included in the analyses. Comparison of these differences with the standard deviations of the variables (in Appendix Table A1) shows that these differences are smaller than a single standard deviation. This suggests that the respondents most likely to skip the question—either because of discomfort or survey fatigue—are those (slightly) more likely not to have experienced interracial relationships. In order to test whether or not this self-selection was biasing our parameter estimates, we estimated Heckman selection models for a probit analysis of willingness to engage in each type of relationship. The likelihood ratio test of independent equations ($\rho = 0$) showed that the probit model was not biased for attitudes toward relationships with both Blacks and Asians and across all four relationship types. Models are available from the authors on request.

⁷ We were also concerned that gay respondents might appear to object to interracial marriage when in fact they were simply indicating that they were not allowed to legally marry in many states, and so “would not” personally engage in the behavior. Descriptive analyses of pilot data using a similar question showed, however, that while no gay respondents reported that they had interracially married, a larger percent of gay respondents than straight respondents reported that they were willing to interracially marry, suggesting that this was not a problem and that respondents interpreted the question as an attitudinal item rather than a question about what was legally possible.

In our analyses, we controlled for demographic characteristics of the respondent that were related to racial attitudes, such as *gender* and *age*, which ranged from 18 to 87.⁸ We also included two measures of social class: one was *annual family income in thousands of dollars* recoded to the midpoints of each of 15 income categories (the lowest was under \$10,000 and the highest was over \$150,000). The second was *education*, measured as a dummy variable indicating whether or not the respondent has at least a college degree. We chose this cutoff because there is evidence that racial attitudes are influenced by college attendance (Schuman et al., 1997). We also included dummy variables to control for several marital statuses: *single* (never married), *currently married or in a domestic partnership*, and the reference category, those who were married but are not currently married (divorced, separated, or widowed).⁹ Small amounts of missing data on the independent variables were multiply imputed.¹⁰

We expected attitudes toward interracial relationships to be strongly related to warmth toward Blacks and Asians. We used “feeling thermometer” data to construct these measures. Feeling thermometers have long been used as a measure of a respondent’s affect toward particular racial groups (Bruneau and Saxe, 2010; Judd et al., 1995; Livingston, 2002) and they are reasonably correlated with other measures of implicit and explicit racial attitudes (Payne et al., 2008). They also predict attitudes toward issues such as integration policy, bussing policy, or intention to vote for a particular candidate (Granberg and Brown, 1989; Schuman et al., 1997; Sears, 1988). The text of the thermometer question read:

“We’d like to get your honest feelings about some groups in American society. Please rate each group with what we call a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorably toward the group; ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean that you don’t feel favorably towards the group. If you don’t have any particular feelings toward a group you would rate them at 50 degrees.”

The data included thermometers for five racial and ethnic groups: Whites, Blacks, Asians, multiracial Black–Whites and Asian–Whites. For White respondents, the weighted means ranged from 71 for Blacks to 82 for Whites. To calculate the affect variables, we subtracted the score that each White respondent assigned to her/his own racial group (Whites) from the scores that s/he assigned to Blacks and Asians, creating a measure of *relative warmth toward Blacks* and *relative warmth toward Asians*. Thus positive scores represent feeling greater warmth toward the other group than one’s own racial group, and negative scores represent feeling less warmth toward the other group than one’s own racial group.¹¹ We used these relative measures, rather than simply using the raw number that the respondent assigned to Blacks or Asians, so that our measures would not be biased by the tendency of some individual respondents to rate all groups very high on the feeling scale, and others to rate all groups very low.

Because conservative political beliefs are associated with “traditional” attitudes toward cohabitation and negative racial attitudes (Lye and Waldron, 1997), we included a measure of *political conservatism*, using the respondent’s party identification (a 7-point scale that ranged from “strongly Republican” to “strongly Democrat”). We coded this item such that larger positive numbers indicate stronger Republican party affiliations, while more negative numbers indicate strong Democratic party affiliations. We also included a measure of religiosity, because other work has found an inverse relationship between religiosity and willingness to date interracially (Yancey, 2007). This scale was constructed from three items: “how important is religion to you,” “how frequently do you attend religious services,” and “how frequently do you pray.” These items were all standardized to have a mean of 0 and a variance of 1, and then summed into a single *religiosity* index with a reliability of $\alpha = 0.88$. We also tested an indicator of foreign birth in the models, but excluded it from the models shown here because of the very small number of foreign-born Whites in the sample ($N = 73$) and the lack of any significant relationships with the dependent variables we are considering. Finally, we included a dummy variable for *South*, given the importance of regional differences in studies of racial attitudes (Schuman et al., 1997) and historical differences in the sanctioning of interracial relationships.¹² Descriptive statistics for all of the independent variables used in the analyses can be found in Appendix Table A1.

⁸ There are multiple ways that age and cohort might affect this analysis, and those different effects cannot be separated in this cross-sectional study. For example, most studies of racial attitudes show that the effect of age on attitudes is actually the effect of cohort (i.e. older people are more racially conservative not because they are older but because they were born in an earlier cohort) (Schuman et al., 1997). In addition, older individuals are more likely to have experienced each of the different relationship types we are investigating, meaning older people have greater opportunities to say “I have” experienced an interracial cohabitation or marriage than younger people. Thus we might have countervailing forces at work, if older people are more likely to be racially conservative (causing them to be less likely to intermarry, for example) and more likely to have been married one or more times (causing them to be more likely to have intermarried than someone who has not yet married or only married once).

⁹ Although we would like to separate these categories further, sample sizes were insufficient to, for example, separate divorced people in the estimation sample ($N = 71$) from those who are separated ($N = 10$).

¹⁰ We used the multiple imputation by chained equations procedure in Stata to create five multiply imputed datasets, and combined the results from these datasets using the *mi combine* procedure, which creates unbiased estimates of the parameters and adjusts the standard errors upward to account for the greater uncertainty introduced by imputation of missing values. There were 48 cases missing income data, 22 missing information on warmth toward racial outgroups, and 11 missing information on political conservatism. We included the cases missing on the dependent variables in the multiple imputation procedure, and then after multiple imputation, discarded cases with missing Y values. This technique increases the efficiency of the estimates while ensuring that problems with the imputation model, such as the reasonable suspicion that the missing dependent variable values in these cases are *not* missing at random, do not affect the estimates (von Hippel, 2007).

¹¹ We also tested a composite *warmth toward outgroups* measure that combined warmth toward each outgroup (Blacks, Asians, Black–Whites and Asian–Whites) into a single scale. We then standardized and summed these out-group scores, creating a scale of general warmth toward racial outgroups, $\alpha = .90$. Using only this scale in the models as a global “racism” measure yielded results virtually identical to the results shown here with the separate Black and Asian warmth scales.

¹² We also tested a variable measuring the socioeconomic status of the area (the percent of the zip code with a bachelor’s degree or more), but that variable had no significant impact on interracial relationship attitudes or behavior.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive results

Table 1 shows the descriptive differences in the dependent variables by gender. This table shows that White men respond differently to questions about relationships with Blacks than about relationships with Asians. Less than 14% of White men report having had an interracial relationship of any type, but they are equally likely to reporting having had one with a Black person or an Asian person ($p > .05$, across all four relationship types). However, those respondents who have *not* personally had an interracial relationship express much less willingness to have a relationship with a Black person than with an Asian person ($p < .05$, across all four relationship types), and are more likely than those who have not had an interracial relationship to say that relationships with Blacks are “not a good idea” ($p < .05$, across all four relationship types). Almost three-quarters (73%) of White men report either having dated or being willing to date Asians, while 57% report having dated or being willing to date Blacks.

In contrast to White men, Table 1 shows that White women are more likely to have actually *had* an interracial relationship with a Black person. White women are also more likely than White men to say they would not personally have an interracial relationship (but it is okay for others). The details of White women’s attitudes are race-specific: White women are more likely to report having actually had an interracial relationship with Blacks than with Asians ($p < .05$ across all four relationship types), suggesting greater openness to relationships with Blacks, or the greater availability of those relationships. But they are also more likely to report that relationships with Blacks are “not a good idea” than relationships with Asians ($p < .05$, across all four relationship types). So, while White women appear to have similar reactions to interracial relationships with Blacks and Asians when we combined “not a good idea” with “I would not,” in fact their global rejection (“not a good idea”) of relationships with Blacks is a bit higher than their global rejection of relationships with Asians, just as we find for White men. This finding demonstrates that White women’s reactions to relationships with Blacks are more polarized than their reactions to relationships with Asians.

Another important pattern apparent in Table 1 concerns the two largest categories (“I wouldn’t but it’s okay for others” vs. “I would”). We find that White women are quite a bit more likely than White men to choose the category “I would not, but it’s okay for others,” and they are more likely to express overall higher levels of disapproval of either type of interracial relationships than White men. Both genders are more likely to say interracial relationships are fine for other people than to reject crossing racial boundaries universally. This finding signifies the importance of asking a set of questions that distinguish personal attitudes from attitudes about how others should behave. A question that does not separate the personal from the global in this way runs the risk of confounding answers (i.e. having individuals who would never interracially date say that they approve of interracial relationships). Because of the intimacy of these relationships, this distinction has important substantive meaning. Table 1 shows that White women are much more likely than White men to say they would not engage in interracial relationships but they approve of others engaging in them. This suggests a global vs. personal explanation for why White women express lower approval of intermarriage than White men on many surveys, since many surveys ask about personal willingness to intermarry or to have a close family member intermarry. Nonetheless, Table 1 also shows that White men and women are about equally likely to have actually *engaged in* interracial relationships with Blacks (although not with Asians) and they are equally likely to *condemn* all interracial relationships globally.

Table 1 also shows that attitudes regarding interracial relationships become slightly less positive as the relationship becomes more serious. Unsurprisingly, White men and women are much more likely to have experienced an interracial dating relationship than any of the other kinds of relationships, and more likely to have interracially cohabited than married, but attitudes toward marriage and childbearing are quite similar. More than half of respondents are consistent in their attitudes across all four relationship types. 38% of White respondents rejected all four relationship types with Blacks, and 32% were open to all four types, while 31% rejected and 40% endorsed all four relationship types with Asians. The dominant pattern, then, is consistency, rather than increasing rejection of interracial relationships as they grow more committed.

Further probing the relationship between dating behavior and attitudes toward interracial marriage, we found that of the 13% of White respondents who have actually dated Blacks, 90% say they would be open to marrying a Black person. Similarly, of the 9% of Whites who have actually dated Asians, 96% say they would be open to marrying an Asian person. Thus, even those who have interracially dated did not express complete openness to interracial marriage, but approval rates among this self-selected population are extremely high compared to approval rates overall.¹³

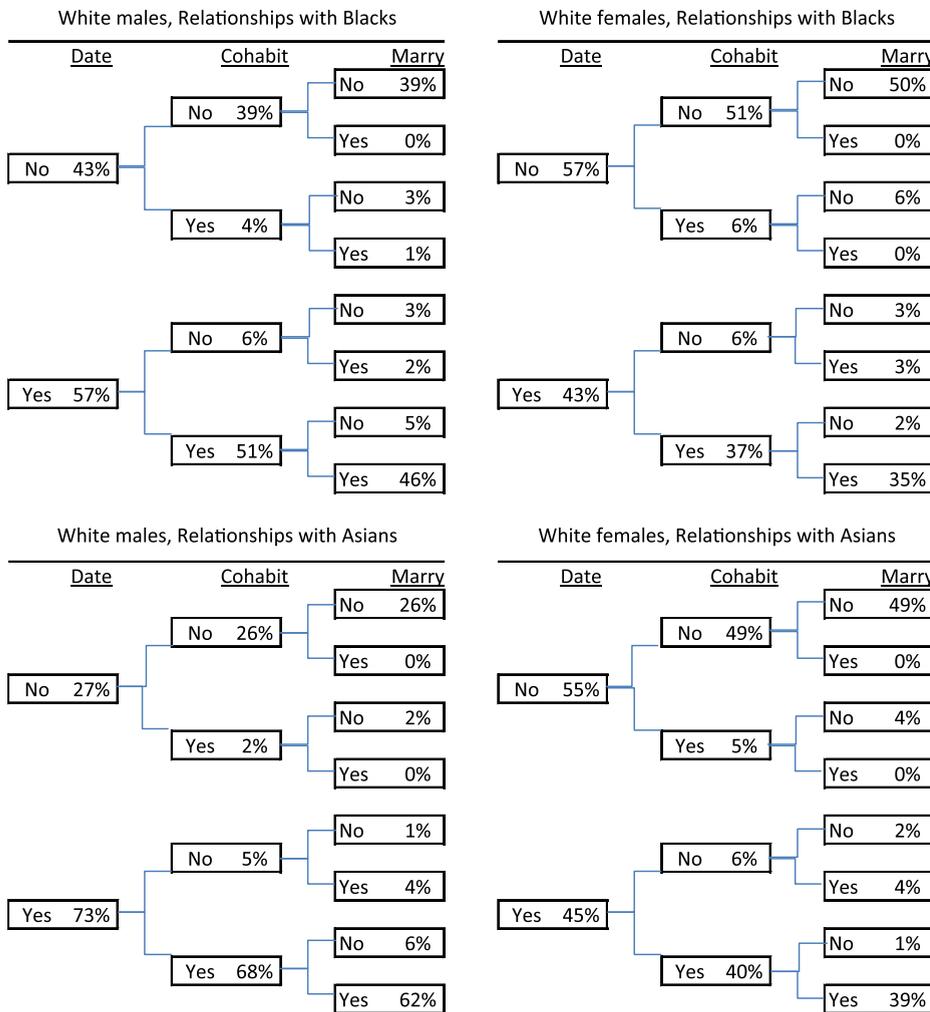
Table 2 further investigates the question of whether or not White respondents are consistent across different relationship types when they endorse or reject an interracial relationship with Blacks or Asians. (For the sake of simplicity, childbearing is excluded from this table, because the results are nearly identical to those for marriage.) The table is ordered in columns of increasing commitment, and it divides the responses into “Yes” (I would have or I have had this type of relationship) or “No” (I wouldn’t or it’s not a good idea) for each relationship. For example, 43% of White males say they would not date a Black individual. Breaking down that 43% by their responses to the cohabitation question shows that most (39% of all White males) also reject cohabitation, though a few of the non-daters say they would nonetheless cohabit with a Black individual (4% of

¹³ Knox et al. (2000) found that 92% of college students who reported having dated interracially also reported that they were open to dating interracially in the future. This shows that while behavior is, by definition, a perfect measure of having been willing to interracially date at one point in time, it is only a nearly perfect predictor of willingness to do it again in the future.

Table 1
White attitudes towards types of interracial relationships, weighted, by gender. *Source:* CCES 2008 survey data.

	White males, relationships with blacks (N = 330)				White females, relationships with blacks (N = 298)				Whites, relationships with blacks Consistent rejection or endorsement across ALL four relationship types	Whites, relationships with blacks and Asians Consistent rejection or endorsement across ALL four relationship types
	Date	Live with	Marry	Have children	Date	Live with	Marry	Have children		
Not a good idea	0.14	0.17	0.15	0.17	0.14	0.17	0.15	0.19		
I wouldn't, but okay for others	0.29	0.28	0.36	0.36	0.43	0.40	0.46	0.45		
Not a good idea + I wouldn't	0.43	0.45	0.51	0.53	0.57	0.57	0.61	0.64	0.38	0.29
I would	0.45	0.50	0.48	0.47	0.28	0.37	0.35	0.34		
I have	0.12	0.05	0.01	0.01	0.15	0.06	0.03	0.02		
I would + I have	0.57	0.55	0.49	0.48	0.43	0.43	0.38	0.36	0.32	0.31
	White Males, Relationships with Asians (N = 327)				White Females, Relationships with Asians (N = 296)				Whites, Relationships with Asians	
Not a good idea	0.08	0.12	0.10	0.11	0.08	0.12	0.10	0.12		
I wouldn't, but okay for others	0.19	0.18	0.25	0.25	0.46	0.44	0.46	0.47		
Not a good idea + I wouldn't	0.27	0.30	0.34	0.36	0.55	0.56	0.57	0.59	0.31	
I would	0.60	0.64	0.63	0.62	0.41	0.43	0.43	0.41		
I have	0.13	0.06	0.02	0.02	0.05	0.01	0.00	0.01		
I would + I have	0.73	0.70	0.66	0.64	0.46	0.44	0.43	0.42	0.40	

Table 2
Weighted descriptives of willingness to engage in interracial relationships, by relationship type.



Totals do not always add to 100% because of rounding.

White males).¹⁴ The next column shows the 39% of White men who say that they would not interracially date, cohabit or marry a Black person (shown in the first row) and the 46% who said yes to interracial dating, cohabiting and marriage with Blacks (the bottom number in the upper left quadrant).

Comparing consistency in the responses across the questions, we find that there is a core group of White men who express willingness to engage in any of the relationship types. Forty-six percent express willingness to engage in all three relationship types with a Black partner, and 62% express willingness to engage in all of the relationships with an Asian partner. The numbers are much lower for White women, 35% of whom express willingness to engage in all of the relationships with a Black partner, and 39% of whom would engage in all of the relationships with an Asian partner. Similarly, there is a consistent group who personally reject all relationships with a Black partner (39% of White men and 50% of White women) and personally reject all relationships with an Asian partner (26% of White males and 49% of White females). Note that these numbers are far greater than the number who simply “strongly disapprove” when asked global items about intermarriage and interracial dating – 16% of White respondents “strongly disapproved” of both types of relationships on several global questions (Bobo, 2004), but personal unwillingness to engage in such relationships is far higher. Combining White men and women together, we find that 29% of all Whites reject all interracial relationships with both Black partners and Asian partners,

¹⁴ These “few” represent 24 out of 632, 6 of whom have actually cohabited interracially and now reject all other interracial relationships globally. The remaining 18 (2%) we cannot explain but we suspect either cognitive or internet interface mistakes because we checked to see if those who rejected Black dating but approved of Black cohabitation were the same respondents as those who rejected Asian dating but approved of Asian cohabitation—they were not, suggesting this is not a group that for some reason favors cohabitation over dating.

Table 3

Multinomial logits of White attitudes toward relationships with African Americans. Source: CCES 2008 survey data.

	Dating		Cohabitation		Marriage		Child bearing	
	Not a good idea	I wouldn't	Not a good idea	I wouldn't	Not a good idea	I wouldn't	Not a good idea	I wouldn't
Male	-0.401 (0.310)	-0.687** (0.257)	-0.395 (0.310)	-0.686** (0.256)	-0.500 (0.335)	-0.498* (0.237)	-0.724* (0.321)	-0.544* (0.244)
Age	0.058** (0.011)	0.037** (0.009)	0.058** (0.011)	0.037** (0.009)	0.053** (0.012)	0.027** (0.008)	0.048** (0.014)	0.030** (0.008)
Family income, in thousands	-0.002 (0.004)	0.001 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.004)	0.001 (0.003)	-0.011* (0.005)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.007 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.003)
Bachelor's or more	-1.208** (0.357)	-0.460 (0.257)	-1.212** (0.357)	-0.461 (0.257)	-0.978* (0.390)	-0.173 (0.250)	-0.974** (0.366)	-0.103 (0.253)
Single	-0.397 (0.662)	-0.530 (0.516)	-0.399 (0.662)	-0.530 (0.516)	-0.163 (0.662)	-0.621 (0.471)	-0.741 (0.658)	-0.605 (0.463)
Married/domestic partnership	-0.184 (0.408)	-0.305 (0.340)	-0.179 (0.408)	-0.303 (0.340)	-0.084 (0.439)	-0.288 (0.327)	-0.072 (0.428)	-0.412 (0.335)
Relative warmth toward Blacks	-0.046** (0.013)	-0.026** (0.010)	-0.046** (0.013)	-0.026** (0.010)	-0.059** (0.014)	-0.027* (0.011)	-0.056** (0.014)	-0.025* (0.011)
Religiosity	0.784** (0.232)	0.043 (0.142)	0.785** (0.232)	0.043 (0.142)	0.329 (0.224)	0.004 (0.143)	0.219 (0.214)	-0.077 (0.144)
Political conservatism	0.805** (0.204)	0.516** (0.137)	0.807** (0.204)	0.517** (0.137)	0.778** (0.214)	0.382** (0.132)	0.609** (0.212)	0.472** (0.135)
South	0.924** (0.337)	0.441 (0.291)	0.919** (0.338)	0.439 (0.291)	0.658 (0.356)	0.311 (0.273)	0.792* (0.352)	0.388 (0.282)
Constant	-4.319** (0.857)	-1.753** (0.640)	-4.319** (0.856)	-1.754** (0.640)	-3.763** (0.866)	-0.797 (0.595)	-3.068** (0.948)	-0.788 (0.588)
Observations	634							

Standard errors in parentheses.

Reference group: "I would" or "I have" had this type of relationship.

* $p < .05$.** $p < .01$.

and 31% are willing to engage in all of the interracial relationships with both groups (see Table 1). Overall, then, one-third of the Whites in the sample universally reject interracial partnerships and one-third universally express willingness, leaving about one-third of the respondents whose responses vary depending on the type of relationship and the specific racial group being considered.

3.2. Multinomial regression results

We use multinomial logit models to estimate the impact of individual and contextual characteristics on respondents' willingness to cross racial boundaries in intimate relationships. Such models are appropriate when the dependent variable consists of nominal categories (as in our case, where the categories represent willingness to form interracial relationships as well as whether or not the respondent has formed interracial relationships). Multinomial logit models also have an important advantage for our type of research question: they do not require the assumption that a given independent variable has the same impact on all four possible response categories of the dependent variable. For example, we might hypothesize from our descriptive statistics that gender will have a stronger relationship with personal rejection of interracial relationships than with global rejection of interracial relationships, because men and women had similar rates of saying interracial relationships were "not a good idea" but quite different rates of saying that they would or would not personally engage in them. By simultaneously estimating multiple logit comparisons, the multinomial logit model allows us to estimate the probability that a respondent with a given set of characteristics will choose each response category. It would have been ideal to estimate probabilities for each of the four response categories but we had to combine the two positive responses ("I would" and "I have") because so few White respondents had engaged in interracial relationships. Thus the reference group for these tables is saying either "I would" or "I have," and each coefficient can be interpreted as a logit comparison between that positive response and the response labeled at the top of the column in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3 shows the relationship between these independent variables and Whites' attitudes toward relationships with African Americans. This table shows that males are less likely than females to choose the "I wouldn't" category over the "I would/I have" categories across all four relationship types. Thus, the models support that there is a significant gender difference, with females more likely to reject interracial relationships with Blacks for themselves, although not for others. However, there is also no significant gender difference between saying "not a good idea" and "I wouldn't" (i.e. additional models using "not a good idea" as the reference category show no gender difference in this comparison; models available from the authors on request). This second finding reveals that, controlling for other characteristics of the individuals, there is no gender difference in the choice of the *global* rejection categories for relationships with Blacks, despite apparent differences in the descriptive statistics, but there is a significant gender difference in *personal* willingness, with White males more willing to

Table 4

Multinomial logits of White attitudes toward relationships with Asian Americans. Source: CCES 2008 survey data.

	Dating		Cohabitation		Marriage		Child bearing	
	Not a good idea	I wouldn't						
Male	-0.551 (0.407)	-1.462** (0.264)	-0.727* (0.351)	-1.393** (0.257)	-0.352 (0.391)	-1.002** (0.245)	-0.508 (0.360)	-1.063** (0.247)
Age	0.032* (0.014)	0.033** (0.009)	0.038** (0.012)	0.030** (0.009)	0.040** (0.013)	0.031** (0.009)	0.042** (0.012)	0.032** (0.009)
Family income, in thousands	-0.011 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.005)	0.001 (0.003)	-0.010 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.003)
Bachelor's degree or more	-0.753 (0.458)	-0.222 (0.307)	-0.919* (0.373)	-0.464 (0.279)	-1.045* (0.447)	-0.358 (0.278)	-0.902* (0.418)	-0.367 (0.279)
Single	-0.435 (0.942)	-0.179 (0.579)	-0.910 (0.977)	-0.957 (0.591)	-0.626 (0.971)	-0.217 (0.493)	-0.848 (0.886)	-0.344 (0.476)
Married/domestic partnership	0.173 (0.452)	0.284 (0.310)	0.248 (0.441)	0.095 (0.310)	0.324 (0.451)	0.115 (0.293)	0.156 (0.466)	-0.077 (0.292)
Relative warmth toward Asians	-0.057** (0.013)	-0.036** (0.011)	-0.046** (0.013)	-0.033** (0.010)	-0.062** (0.013)	-0.034** (0.011)	-0.058** (0.013)	-0.031** (0.011)
Religiosity	0.588* (0.265)	0.376* (0.164)	1.180** (0.298)	0.354* (0.155)	0.629* (0.262)	0.178 (0.154)	0.508* (0.228)	0.110 (0.153)
Political conservatism	0.460 (0.256)	0.245 (0.155)	0.479* (0.224)	0.353* (0.150)	0.285 (0.229)	0.157 (0.142)	0.287 (0.205)	0.188 (0.143)
South	0.938* (0.382)	0.418 (0.275)	0.937** (0.345)	0.328 (0.280)	0.710 (0.371)	0.379 (0.262)	0.869* (0.352)	0.484 (0.264)
Constant	-3.777** (0.992)	-2.069** (0.618)	-3.947** (0.910)	-1.707** (0.579)	-4.079** (0.989)	-1.707** (0.582)	-3.898** (0.886)	-1.512** (0.580)
Observations	629							

Standard errors in parentheses.

Reference group: "I would" or "I have" had this type of relationship.

* $p < .05$.** $p < .01$.

form interracial relationships with Blacks. Older individuals are more likely to give both negative response categories ("not a good idea" and "I wouldn't") than younger people, across relationship types. Income has no significant relationship (except for a negative relationship with saying "not a good idea" for marriage), but Whites with a college education are more likely to support all relationships with Blacks than people without a college degree, similar to other findings about the importance of education for racial attitudes. It is important to note that this change affects the *global* rejection category ("not a good idea") in comparison to a positive response, not the *personal* rejection category ("I wouldn't"), suggesting that the most important change related to education is a change in global rather than personal attitudes. Models using global rejection as the comparison group show that education is positively related to greater likelihood of choosing both "I wouldn't" and "I would" over "not a good idea" for all four relationship types. Current relationship status is not significantly related to these attitudes.

The respondent's positive affective evaluation of Blacks is strongly related to all of the relationships, with those who feel more warmly about Blacks (relative to their feelings toward Whites) less likely to believe that others should not engage in interracial relationships with Blacks and less likely to reject personal engagement in relationships with Blacks. Political conservatism is positively and significantly associated with rejecting relationships with Blacks, and models (not shown) with global rejection as the comparison group show that conservatism is not significantly related to a shift between global and personal rejection. Thus conservatism is strongly related to lower likelihood of *personal* willingness to engage in relationships with Blacks. Religiosity is positively related to global condemnation of dating and cohabitation with Blacks. Finally, Southern residence has a significant positive relationship with globally and personally rejecting interracial dating, cohabitation and childbearing.

Table 4 shows the same models for Whites' attitudes toward relationships with Asian Americans, and the findings are largely similar to those for African Americans except for the factors of gender, political conservatism and Southern residence. This table shows that men are less likely than women to express negative global attitudes toward cohabitation with Asians, and less likely to express negative personal attitudes across all four relationship types ($p < .01$). For these models, using a reference group of "not a good idea" shows a significant gender difference between the global and personal rejection categories, with men also significantly less likely to say "I wouldn't" engage in dating and cohabitation relationships than "not a good idea" (and more likely to say "I would" for cohabitation). This very consistent and sizable relationship shows that there is an important across-the-board difference in how White men and White women view relationships with Asians, both for themselves and for others; White men are less likely to personally reject dating and cohabiting relationships with Asians, and more likely to endorse them personally. Age has a very similar relationship in this table as it did in Table 3, with older individuals more likely to reject all types of interracial relationships than younger ones. A college education decreases the likelihood of universally rejecting interracial cohabitation, marriage and childbearing. Current relationship status again has no significant relationship with attitudes toward these relationships.

Feelings of warmth toward Asian Americans are consistently related to greater personal willingness to engage in all four types of relationships ($p < .01$) and lower rates of universal rejection of all four types of relationships ($p < .01$), as we also saw for relationships with Blacks. Religiosity is again significantly associated with universal rejection of interracial relationships ($p < .05$), but not with personal rejection of such relationships for marriage and childbearing. Political conservatism, on the other hand, has virtually no association with attitudes toward interracial relationships with Asians in this model, except for a greater rejection of cohabitation.¹⁵

4. Discussion

These results help clarify why many people say they are racially tolerant and open to interracial interaction but few actually marry a partner of another race. Many people express tolerance for racial boundary crossing even while saying that they would not personally engage in the behavior, and many of the respondents who say they are willing to have interracial relationships have not engaged in even the most basic interracial relationship (dating), which might be considered a prerequisite to the more serious forms of interracial intimacy. Whether this is because of perceived lack of opportunity, because of unstated (and perhaps unconscious) resistance to interracial dating, or because tolerance for interracial relationships may coexist with and be trumped by a preference for homogamous ones is not something we can answer with this survey. But it is important to keep in mind that forming a relationship involves *finding* and *choosing* a partner, as well as *being chosen*. Thus the implicit contradiction in “being willing” but not “choosing” to have an interracial relationship may indicate a willingness, but not a preference, for interracial relationships, or it may indicate a willingness and interest but lack of opportunity or lack of reciprocated opportunity. We tackle these three issues in turn:

The first issue in understanding the attitude-behavior gap is that of *finding* a partner. Lack of opportunity might explain why White women express more willingness to have relationships with Asian men but actually engage more frequently in relationships with Black men. There are more Black men than Asian men in the US. In a related point, and because Blacks are geographically distributed more widely than Asians, more White women across a broader range of contexts may have regular interracial contact with Black men, despite the greater integration between Whites and Asians in the specific local contexts with sizable Asian populations.

The second issue is *choosing* a partner. Expressing willingness to choose and actually choosing a partner of a different race are quite different things. Preference for homogamous relationships may trump willingness to try heterogamous ones. Furthermore, the factors that shape dating preferences may be different from those that shape more serious relationship choices. Healthy adolescent development includes trying on different styles, roles, and identities; willingness to try interracial dating relationships may change into preferences for homogamy as individuals age.

The third issue is that choosing a partner requires *being chosen*. One may have access to and preference for a partner of a different race but not be able to find a willing companion. For example, higher rates of Black male–white female pairings than Black female–white male pairings could be driven by higher proportions of Black males preferring and seeking out White women to date—or by lower proportions of Black women seeking to date White men. Indeed, Black men are significantly more likely than Black women to prefer heterogamous dating (Robnett and Feliciano, 2011). Furthermore, the higher rates of White male–Asian female pairings may be driven by Asian women’s greater preferences for White men than Asian men have for White women.

Overall, then, the puzzle is: if White women are more reluctant to intermarry than White men, why are there so many more Black male/White female unions than White male/Black female unions? As noted above, part of the explanation could include the interest of potential partners; for example, Passel et al. (2010) point out that 22% of Black male newlyweds in 2008 were interracially married, but only 9% of Black female newlyweds were. This could be a result of both “demand” and “supply” – if more Black males are willing to intermarry than Black females, this could also mean that the (fewer) White women who were willing to form interracial relationships with Black men would be more likely to successfully find a willing partner than the (more) White men who were willing to form a relationship with Black women. (Among Asians, this gender disparity is reversed.)

Another potential cause is the difference in how Black men are perceived. As Hill (2002) demonstrated, darker-skinned Black women are perceived by interviewers as less attractive than lighter-skinned Black women, but this relationship was weak and inconsistent for Black men. Hunter (1998, 2002, 2005) has also pointed to this interaction between colorism and gender, which creates a significant impediment for dark-skinned Black women in the dating and marriage market. This gender difference in the reaction to dark skin could create a significant gendered difference in the dating and marriage opportunities of Black women and men.

Our study demonstrates for the first time how the same set of respondents feels about interracial dating, cohabiting, marriage, and childbearing. Although there is only weak evidence of a decreased willingness to engage in more serious interracial relationships compared to less serious interracial relationships (since most respondents either approve of all or none of the forms of interracial relationships), the patterns that we observe suggest that some respondents do apply more restrictive

¹⁵ We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that we should test the relationship of these sociodemographic variables with the dependent variables without the inclusion of the “warmth toward racial outgroups” variables, because those variables primarily represent a mechanism by which the other variables might affect the dependent variable. Excluding the “warmth” variable has little impact on the results for the other variables, with the exception of the effect of conservatism on Whites’ attitudes toward relationships with Asians. Without the “warmth” variable, conservatism is a significant predictor positively related to both personal and global rejection of interracial relationships with Asians, just as it is in Table 3 for relationships with Blacks.

attitudinal criteria to marriage than to dating, and that the criteria they apply to childbearing are similar to the criteria for marriage. This is an important finding because the folk arguments against interracial marriage are often focused on the inadvisability of interracial childbearing (i.e. that the “children will suffer”) (Campbell and Eggerling-Boeck, 2006). Our findings show that respondents do not have different attitudes about childbearing than about marriage, suggesting that most individuals who are in favor of interracial marriage have rejected these arguments.

These results also clarify the gender difference in willingness to cross-racial boundaries in intimate relationships. Our data show that women are more likely than men to draw a distinction between what they are personally willing to do and what they condone for others. Thus it is not true that women are more conservative about interracial relationships in a global sense (applying more conservative criteria to these relationships for *everyone*), but instead that they apply a more racially conservative set of criteria to their own families and their own relationships. Thus, the paradoxical finding that White women (who are usually more racially liberal than White men) oppose interracial marriage more than White men can be explained by this divide between public attitudes (or attitudes that are applied to others), and private attitudes (those that apply to one’s own behavior). Women may have sound reasons for this disparity; recall that White women anticipate more family disapproval if they engage in interracial relationships than White men do and the double standard of acceptable romantic/sexual behavior means that women expect their relationship choices to receive more scrutiny (Miller et al., 2004). In contrast, the social dominance of White men raises fewer questions about their manhood or their life chances when they choose to ignore racial purity norms (Spickard, 1989).

To illustrate this gender difference, consider two different ways to interpret Table 1. If we compare White men and women who are *willing to interracially marry with Blacks* (those who say “I would” plus those who say “I have” intermarried), we find that 49% of White men are willing but only 38% of White women are willing. If instead, however, we compare those who *approve of interracial marriage in general*, even if they would not personally intermarry (in other words, adding in those who say “I would not, but it’s okay for others”), we find that 85% of White men and 85% of White women think that intermarriage is acceptable or “okay.” The patterns are similar for relationships with Asians (66% of men “willing” compared to 43% of women, but 90% of men and women approve). Many of the important findings in our studies of intermarriage, therefore, are best understood in a context where we ask respondents about multiple types of relationships with several different groups and where we allow a distinction between personal relationship attitudes and global attitudes toward other people’s behavior. It is essential to be clear about the reference group when asking about racial attitudes because respondents will answer differently if they believe the question is asking about whether they find the behavior personally desirable than if they believe the question is asking whether it is globally desirable for abstract others.

More globally, we suspect that the increasingly positive *attitudes* toward interracial relationships will not necessarily lead to a global shift in *personal engagement* in interracial relationships (Qian and Lichter, 2007; Rosenfeld, 2007; Wang et al., 2006) because even individuals who engage in interracial dating have very low rates of interracial marriage. Although attitudes can be an important precursor to social change, it is important to consider the intersection between attitudes and behavior in order to predict future social interaction. With interracial relationships, this intersection is especially important, because while tolerance for interracial unions has clearly increased over time, we still have strong evidence of preference for homogamous unions. Our study shows the gendered and racialized nature of these patterns for White men and women considering their attitudes toward relationships with African Americans and Asian Americans.

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Table A1

Weighted variable descriptive statistics, White respondents, $N = 634$. Source: CCES 2008 survey data.

	Mean/prop.	Std. dev.	Range
<i>Independent variables</i>			
Male	0.50		(0/1)
Age	48.5	15.3	(18–87)
Family income in thousands	60.8	40.6	(5–160)
Bachelor’s degree or more	0.28		(0/1)
Single	0.19		(0/1)
Married or partnered	0.63		(0/1)
Relative warmth toward Blacks	–10.8	20.3	(–99 to 45)
Relative warmth toward Asians	–8.5	18.3	(95–62)
Religiosity scale	–0.13	0.90	(–1.7 to 1.3)
Political conservatism	–0.03	0.94	(–3.0 to 3.0)
South	0.33		(0/1)

Appendix A

See Table A1.

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